

THE
LONELY ROAD

JEFFERY FARNOL

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THE LONELY ROAD

A ROMANCE

BY
JEFFERY FARNOL

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The Lonely Road

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCES TO THE KINDLY READER TWO OLD FRIENDS AND—HONORIA

It was at the cross-roads that Parson Tulliver, small and benign, pulled up his little shaggy steed to uncover his neatly-bewigged head and thus, hat in hand, await the tall, sober-clad gentleman who, astride a large, well-fed animal, was approaching at a stately trot.

“Mr. Brownlee, good-day,—God bless thee, Jeremy!”

“Mr. Tulliver, your servant, sir,—well met, Robin!”

The two gentlemen having thus saluted each other with due formality of bows, smiled and gripped each other’s hand like the old and tried friends they were. And when they had jogged on together awhile Mr. Brownlee, glancing askance at his small companion’s gentle, high-bred face, frowned and spoke harshly jubilant:

“So a black-hearted villain is dead at last, thank Heaven!”

Mr. Tulliver started and turned to glance at the speaker with eyes mildly reproachful.

“Nay, Jeremy dear friend,” he sighed, “Sir George Warrender being so truly evil and so lately dead we should pray God’s mercy on his poor soul.”

“Hum—ha!” exclaimed Mr. Brownlee fiercely. “Mercy and George Warrender sorted not together. Thou’rt a parson, Robin, and a notable good parson,—to pray and forgive showeth most natural in thee, but for my part being a lawyer and latterly Warrender’s man o’ business, I protest the world well rid of him, ay let him rot, say I, if it was only for his devilish usage of the Waynes, father and son. You’ve heard o’ the Waynes and their misfortunes, eh, Robin?”

“Ay indeed, I know they were deeply concerned in the late Jacobite Rebellion and paid for it with their lives, poor gentlemen, the father on the scaffold and the son, young Jason, in battle.”

“Well, Robman, now hear the stark truth on’t. Rupert Wayne was apprehended and died by the axe scarce a year since along with my lord Derwentwater and others, but—’twas Warrender schemed his betrayal and bloody end.”

“Art sure, quite sure o’ this, Jeremy?”

“Beyond doubting. Warrender, the beastly fellow, made boast of it until,—mark this, Robin,—until he learned for sure that young Wayne, this Jason, ’stead o’ being killed, as supposed, is very much alive and bent on bringing him to account. Whereat George Warrender sings quite other tune, and sets to plotting how he may destroy the son as he did the sire, and might ha’ so contrived but that death cut him off two weeks ago.”

“A dark, unregenerate soul!” sighed Mr. Tulliver. “And so vastly other than his brother Henry, that was my loved friend to the day of his death.”

“Ay truly,” nodded the lawyer, “Henry was of quite another kidney.”

“It is strange,” mused the little parson, “and passing strange how two brothers may be of natures so extreme opposite! George Warrender all evil and Henry such noble, lofty soul—”

“Ay faith,” snorted Mr. Brownlee, “so wags the world,—for whiles George waxed and flourished in his evil, Henry, in his virtue, grew poor as any church mouse.”

“Yet was he rich in the love of his wife and children, Jeremy.”

“Though his wife died young, Robin, and his two children are run wild, as I hear—”

“No no, Jeremy! His children, God bless them, were his joy and consolation, as they are now mine, in especial Honoria, the sweet-souled maid! And you’ll mind, Jeremy, you’ll mind how years ago she took us for her uncles?”

“Ay faith, Robin, so she did! Report saith she is grown a marvellous fine, handsome creature.”

“Then report speaketh truly. . . . She is indeed more beautiful—almost—than her beauteous mother,—ay indeed she is proudly virginal as the young Diana!”

“And there spake solitary old bachelor!” chuckled Mr. Brownlee.

The little parson was silent, and meeting the speaker’s quizzical glance, flushed painfully and drooped his head in such dejection that Mr.

Brownlee's smile vanished and he leaned near to touch his friend's bowed shoulder very gently:

"Why, Robinman," said he, "God love thee now, I would not hurt thee!"

"Dear friend, I know this very well," answered Mr. Tulliver, smiling very wistfully. "But I am and must ever be a solitary man and . . . in my loneliness . . . have sought to cherish these two . . . Henry's children, and in Honoria's growing beauty have glimpsed oft-times the . . . gentle loveliness of her long dead mother that being an angel in heaven yet liveth in my dreams as when I knew her long years since . . . a very woman that chose . . . my loved friend Henry Warrender."

After this, they rode some distance in a pensive silence until, aroused by the sound of rapidly approaching horse-hoofs, they glanced up and beheld such vision of loveliness as charmed these two sober, middle-aged bachelors to sudden stop; for towards them down a narrow by-lane galloped a somewhat bony and aged steed—but on his back rode one shaped (even as Mr. Tulliver had said), like any young goddess, an handsome creature, tall and slim, all vivid with life and pride of youth. Tall was she, and of a stately beauty far removed from prettiness.

"God . . . bless . . . my soul!" murmured Mr. Brownlee.

"God bless our Honoria!" said Mr. Tulliver; and off came their hats. Then she was up with them and had reached forth a hand to each.

"'Twas kind in thee to meet us, Honoria," said the little parson, kissing her right hand very tenderly.

"Ay, it was so!" quoth the saturnine lawyer, kissing her left hand very gallantly. "I protest thou'rt grown into prodigious fine madam since last I saw thee, Honoria."

"And you see me so seldom, sir!" she retorted, shaking lovely head at him reprovingly. "'Tis long and long since you came a visiting."

"Ay, true alas!" he sighed. "And you was wont to name me Uncle Jerry in those days. I was thine own adopted uncle."

"But you and I, oh and all things, be changed these days!" she exclaimed, turning to frown toward the gables of a house that peeped amid the green afar.

"Why truly," answered Mr. Brownlee. "Thou art become a fine woman and I a dry, old, frumpish man o' business, and yet—God love thee, Honoria

child . . . I'd fain hear thee call me Uncle Jerry again for old time's sake, since here am I at last."

"Yet even so," she answered, "you came not to see your Honoria, but merely in matter of Uncle George's will. And yet since you are here indeed and would be again my dear Uncle Jerry come you and be kissed."

So the tall lawyer, riding near, stooped to kiss her smooth cheek, her ruddy lips, again and yet again, until the small parson cried "fie" on them both, demanding plaintively:

"Nay, prithee sweeting, what of thine Uncle Robin?" So when she had kissed him in turn, on they rode together along the lane all three.

And presently, with his sharp gaze on the ancient weather-beaten house they were approaching, Mr. Brownlee spoke:

"The old place showeth much the same. And Charles?" enquired the lawyer. "What o' thy brother Charles, why is he not with thee?" Now at this she frowned again, then sighed, looking at her questioner with eyes very troubled.

"Charles is grown strange to me of late, Uncle Jerry," she answered. "He is for ever abroad with his new friend, Sir Wilfred Rokeby, that he met scarce a month since."

"Rokeby?" repeated Mr. Brownlee, rubbing his square chin. "The name is familiar, who is he and whence?"

"From London, I think. Charles met him scarce a month since at the 'White Hart,' in Lewes."

"What like is he, my dear?"

"Your eyes shall tell you this, Uncle Jerry, for he is in the house now with Charles and—"

"What, again?" enquired Mr. Tulliver, sharply.

"Yes, dear, he rode over this morning with a friend of his own, a Mr. Dartry, they brought wine, and Charles and they have sat at cards and drinking ever since."

"Now alas for poor Charles!" groaned Mr. Tulliver. "And after his many promises!"

"Charles?" she repeated bitterly. "Oh, my dears, Charles is grown so changed that to-day he did but laugh when his detestable friend would have

shamed me!”

“How . . . how so?” quavered Mr. Tulliver.

“When Sir Wilfred Rokeby, this vile wretch, snatched me in his arms and would have forced me to his kiss.”

“Ha, the beastly sot!” exclaimed the little parson with look and gesture very much at odds with his usual meekness. “And what . . . what then, child?”

“I drove him from me with this whip that chanced to hand, then they laughed at me, they toasted me in mockery, naming me shrew and termagant . . . and so I left them. But oh . . . had this whip been a sword, Sir Wilfred should have bled for it.”

“Nay, child, nay—God forbid!”

“Oh!” cried Honoria, with wild and passionate gesture. “Would to heaven I had been a man! I can ride well as any man, aim pistol as truly, and am far better with a sword than most, as well you know, Uncle Robin dear, for it was you that learned me.”

“Ay I did, I did!” sighed Mr. Tulliver distressfully. “Though ’twas but for healthful pastime and all innocently meant—and I so proud of thy skill, child.”

“I’ll warrant me!” chuckled Mr. Brownlee. “For thou lovest the art o’ fence, Robin, and wert a past master at the sharps in our student days, I mind —”

“Though with never a thought or least intent of maiming or bloodshed, Jeremy—”

“Never, Rob,” chuckled the lawyer, “oh never—except when driven by necessity to vindicate thy something un-Goliath-like stature. Wert not in Holy Orders then, nor anyways so meekly saint-like as now,—the which in a world compact o’ rogues and braggart villainy—”

Mr. Brownlee paused as his quick eye caught sight of a figure hastening towards them from the old Parsonage House beckoning them impatiently as he came.

“Aha!” said Mr. Brownlee, reining his slow-pacing animal to a halt. “Yonder should be Charles, I guess.”

“Ay, yonder comes Charles,” sighed Mr. Tulliver, “and by his looks, in anger—”

“And a French wig!” quoth the lawyer. “A peruke o’ the latest fashion, the lad is become an exquisite, very modish.”

“But only very lately!” murmured the parson.

“Since he grew intimate with the Rokeby beast!” said Honoria fiercely.

“See, he wafts and beckons us,” said the parson, “let us go meet him.”

“No!” said Honoria, frowning. “Let him come to us.”

So Charles Warrender came striding, slim and very young-seeming for all his modish finery, a shapely youth with the same rich colouring and regular features as his sister Honoria, showing indeed almost too handsome for a man, though just now the beauty of his face was marred by a frowning peevishness, his long-lashed eyes were too bright, his smooth cheek too flushed and his voice too strident when, being come near, he spoke, a little breathless with haste.

“Gentlemen . . . Mr. Brownlee wherefore will ye tarry here. . . . Honoria why must you stay ’em when I . . . as well you know . . . I’m all anxiety to hear my uncle George’s will. Let us to the house, sirs, let us in and to the business instantly.”

“Nay first,” answered Mr. Brownlee making no move, “hast no word for me, boy, no greeting for thine Uncle Jeremy, lad?”

“Indeed, sir, I . . . I rejoice to see you, but pray let us to the house, for I protest—”

“And faith, so do I, boy, so do I!” nodded the lawyer, “I protest thou’rt grown, lad, I protest and vow thou’rt become a pretty fellow though perchance something too Frenchified for thine uncle that, being a mere Englishman d’ye see, lad—”

“Sir!” cried young Charles more stridently than ever, smooth chin haughtily aloft, “I beg you’ll not address me as ‘lad’.”

“So be it, boy, so be it, only—”

“Nor ‘boy’ sir. Pray understand, Mr. Brownlee, that I’m of age, a man, sir, and to be esteemed as such.”

“And yonder I think cometh friend o’ yours!” and he nodded where strolled a tall gentleman of notable splendour who bore himself with an air of smiling self-assurance, a gentleman of stately presence and comely visage and one who seemed very well aware of it. This stately personage advanced with a leisurely grace, fanning himself tenderly with laced handkerchief, for

the sun was warm; and the little parson noticed that the glance of his heavy-lidded eyes roved up and down Honoria's shapeliness as she swayed easily to the movements of her ancient steed; wherefore Mr. Tulliver's lean cheek flushed and the eyes beneath his drawn brows shewed anything but meek.

"What, Charles," said this gentleman, speaking to the brother but gazing ever upon the sister, "be so good to introduce me."

"Gentlemen," said Charles a little sullenly, "you behold my friend, Sir Wilfred Rokeby,—Will, I present Mr. Tulliver, once my tutor, and Mr. Brownlee, of Lincoln's Inn."

"I am honoured, sirs," quoth Sir Wilfred and having bowed to each gentleman in turn, looked at Honoria again, who, meeting this steadfast gaze, instantly frowned, wheeled her horse and rode on before them to the house.

CHAPTER II

CONCERNING A WILL AND THE RESULT THEREOF

Mr. Brownlee, seated at the table, unfolded crackling parchment, and glancing round upon the faces of his hearers read aloud, as followeth:

“THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF SIR GEORGE WARRENDER:

“I George Warrender, of Shepstone in the County of Kent, baronet, do hereby will and bequeath whatso I die possessed of, both monies and land unto my nephew Charles Warrender providing he shall, either by craft of wit or skill of weapon, bring down upon my detested and inveterate enemy Jason Wayne (this notorious rogue and Jacobite) either the death he justly merits (and sharp as maybe) or contrive his dishonoured ruin. Let my nephew, the aforesaid Charles Warrender, succeed in thus executing justice upon a false and traitorous rogue and by this my will he shall attain from poverty to an exceeding rich heritage. But (*nota bene*) if he attempt not this, then the whole of my fortune, every stick, stock, stone and guinea soever I shall bestow elsewhere.

“And this is the last Will and Testament of me, to wit George Warrender baronet, now at point of death this fifteenth day of June in the year of Grace 1716. As witness my hand.

“GEORGE WARRENDER.”

For a long moment after Mr. Brownlee had finished reading, no one spoke, then up rose the little parson, clenched hand aloft.

“Oh vile!” he exclaimed. “Oh most abominable! Even in death George Warrender must still endeavour to sate his wicked vengeance! And being himself dead must bribe another to his devilish purposes—”

“One moment, Mr. Tulliver,” retorted Sir Wilfred Rokeby, rising grandly to smile down on the agitated little gentleman, “the object in question being a mere Jacobite and known traitor to his Majesty, whom God bless, is therefore a most excellent purpose. You, Mr. Tulliver, are a Churchman and I bow,” here Sir Wilfred did so, smiling still and with a gracious condescension, “but I am a man o’ the world, and as such, and esteeming myself besides as Charles’s true friend, do advise him to obey his uncle’s

behest and win to his heritage like a loyal gentleman, ay, and man o' spirit
—”

“Hold there, sir!” quoth Mr. Brownlee, smoothing the curls of his trim wig, “being a lawyer I, too, am man o’ the world, and as such I say this is a truly damnable purpose!”

“It is an iniquitous will!” cried Mr. Tulliver fervently. “It is a direct incitement to bloodshed. . . . Oh Charles my dear boy—”

“Ay suffer Charles to speak!” said Sir Wilfred imperiously. “You gentlemen have had your say and now, since Charles is chiefest concerned, let us hear him. What of it, Charles man, wilt up and smite the King’s enemies, in especial this Wayne fellow, and with myself to second thee, wilt win this rich heritage and live, or content thee with the rural joys of a poverty-smit rustical squire?”

Young Charles stared sullenly at the floor, looked defiantly from the anxious-faced cleric to keen-eyed lawyer, glanced a little apprehensively at the silent Honoria, and throwing back his head he laughed contemptuously, much as he judged his admired friend Sir Wilfred might have done in his place.

“Tush, gentlemen!” quoth he lolling back in his chair, and despite his air of lofty assurance, showing more boy than ever. “What prodigious pother is here. I protest you make mountain out o’ molehill. This condition in my uncle George’s will, that you so rail against, I look upon as a sacred obligation, and consequently shall do my utmost endeavour to fulfil it and win my heritage, or egad, sirs—perish in the attempt.”

“Spoken like a very man and gentleman o’ spirit!” exclaimed Sir Wilfred, glancing with something of triumph at Honoria’s quickly-averted face.

“Spoken like the veriest fool-lad!” growled Mr. Brownlee, folding up the will.

“Nay, like a heedless boy rather!” quoth Parson Tulliver. “For oh, Charles, dear boy, cannot you see how George Warrender, even in his grave, would but use your young strength to his own base purpose . . . he doth but hazard your life to devilish intent . . . to die in such cause were infamous. . . . Should you succeed and win your uncle’s wealth ’twould be the price of blood and a curse would be upon it . . . so, Charles, for your own sake and your sister’s . . . ah, boy, for God’s holy sake be not deluded.”

“Enough, sir, enough!” cried Charles passionately. “I am no longer a boy, to be schooled and lectured, I am a man, sir, a man to judge for myself, ay, and by heaven a devilish determined man! So enough, I say, my mind is made up as a loyal gentleman to obey my uncle’s behest and lay this damned rebel, this Wayne fellow, by the heels one way or other and soon as may be.”

“And I’m with thee, Charles!” quoth Sir Wilfred, full-throated, and laying his large, white hand upon his young friend’s shoulder with an air of gracious patronage, “be it steel or bullet, I’m with thee to the end,—ay and our good Dartry here, also. So now let us make our bows to these worthy folk, for I can show where ’tis like we may meet this Jason Wayne, and the sooner we start—ha, damnation!” exclaimed Sir Wilfred, and recoiled to cherish that same so patronising, hard-smitten hand while Honoria faced him, the whip quivering in her passionate grasp; but ere she could strike again the little Parson’s arms were fast about her, and in her ear his murmurous entreaties until, uttering a sound between laugh and sob, she cast the whip aside and turned back to frown on Sir Wilfred.

“Beast,” said she between white teeth; “this is twice I’ve used whip on you, and next time pray heaven for your own sake it be not a sword!”

Still cherishing his smitten hand, Sir Wilfred laughed gently:

“Bewitching termagant,” he began, but turning her back on him she addressed her sullen brother, forthwith.

“I will not ask or plead with you, Charles, because I know at this moment ’twould be in vain. You are twenty-one, Charles, and extreme young for your age; I am twenty-four and very very old, also I promised our dear father as he lay adying that I would care for you always and shield you from your worst enemy, that is yourself. And now, because I ever keep my promises, I warn you that whatso wanton hazards you run I will share, hide yourself never so well I shall find you, and rather than you shall foul your hand with the blood of this Jason Wayne that hath wrought no manner of wrong ’gainst us, you shall first kill me!”

Now at this, even as Sir Wilfred had recoiled at her whip, young Charles blenched before the fire of her wide, grey eyes.

“So then, Charles,” said the lawyer, tapping bony finger on the parchment before him, “I am to understand you are quite determined to attempt the condition of your Uncle George’s will?”

“Yes, sir,” answered the youth, turning his back on Honoria, “my mind is set on it nor am I anyways to be moved, so pray waste no more breath on

vain dissuasion.”

“And when,” enquired Mr. Brownlee, unfolding the will again, “when do you propose to start?”

“At once, sir, or . . . or so soon as I can acquire the necessary funds.”

“Your uncle’s Will provides for this.”

“How, sir,” cried Charles indignantly, “provides say you . . . and you did not read this—”

“Not until I knew your mind in the matter, my poor lad—now hearkee!” And forthwith Mr. Brownlee read aloud from the Will:

“Should my nephew Charles Warrender set about to serve the King’s Majesty and my humble self by the extermination (by any or every means) of this same proscribed rebel, to wit Jason Wayne, the sum of Five Hundred Guineas shall be allotted whenso he will, for his necessary expenses.

“GEORGE WARRENDER.”

“Five . . . hundred guineas!” repeated Charles a little breathlessly, then remembering his dignity, he drew himself up and glanced up round about with as much arrogant assurance (or very nearly) as Sir Wilfred Rokeby himself. “The sum should suffice for my present needs,” said he.

“One would venture to think so,” quoth the lawyer dryly. “And yet I have my doubts!” and speaking he glanced from Sir Wilfred’s imposing person to where the elegant Mr. Dartry lolled in his chair, this narrow-eyed, sleek and silent gentleman who now, meeting the sardonic keen glance, sat up and spoke for the first time, softly but with show of vicious-looking teeth.

“Mr. Brownlee, sir, I grope for your meaning.”

“Then, Mr. Dartry, sir,” retorted the lawyer, “grope your best.”

“And you wear no sword, sir,” answered Mr. Dartry, rising.

“No, sir, I do not,” answered Mr. Brownlee leaning back in his chair, “but in my saddle holsters I carry two pistols against footpads and the like predatory rascals.”

“Sit down, Dartry, be seated, man,” quoth Sir Wilfred imperiously. “Here’s naught to ruffle at.”

“And pray, sir,” enquired young Charles interposing between this suddenly grim Mr. Dartry and the sardonic man of law, “pray, Mr. Brownlee, when shall I receive this money?”

“Now, Charles, if you will!” and from the capacious side-pockets of his riding-coat Mr. Brownlee drew money bags that jingled pleasantly and which Charles proceeded to transfer to his own person.

“How, will ye not count it, lad?” enquired the lawyer.

“Nay, sir, ’twere merest waste of time, to-night I would be half the way to London—”

“Why then,” cried Sir Wilfred gaily, “it’s mount and away, my dear fellow, for the sooner we ride the better. Dartry, be so good to step out and order our horses.”

“Wait, Charles!” cried the little Parson starting forward. “Oh, Charles, my dear loved boy, pause and consider what you do. . . . I loved your noble father and blessed mother, and because of this I must needs love thee, and now, Charles, now for their gentle sakes, I plead—make not thyself a tool to thine uncle’s wicked vengeance against this poor fugitive gentleman—this Jason Wayne—”

“Ha, gentleman, sir!” cried Sir Wilfred with stamp and jingle of spurred boot, “gentleman, says you and ‘poor fugitive’? S’death, sir! will ye cry up and plead comfort on the King’s enemies? God’s my life, sir! will ye preach rebellion ’gainst the King’s gracious Majesty? I tell ye this Jason Wayne was out with Mar and Derwentwater, ay, and was first to charge his Majesty’s troops in their damned rebel ranks. Since when he hath turned highwayman and cut-throat, a notorious malefactor, and the sooner his rogue’s head is spiked above Temple Bar the better. I myself have crossed steel with him ere now, and know the fellow what black villain he is. And so, Mr. Parson, I tell you plain and roundly—”

“Enough, enough!” cried Charles with such look and gesture as silenced his tall companion. “Pray, Wilfred, suffer me a word.” Then turning he caught the little woeful Parson’s two hands, holding them fast.

“Uncle Robin,” said he, “I know you mean me well, as you have ever done, but I am a man and must go mine own way, leaving Honoria to thy safe and gentle care till I come back—”

“And suppose,” said Honoria, gentle of voice but fierce-eyed, “suppose you never return? Suppose you are . . . killed, and in such unworthy cause . . .?”

“Lord, girl!” exclaimed Charles striking an attitude, “a man must adventure himself and run some small hazard in this world, and I shall be resolute I’ll warrant me, come now, kiss me good-bye, ay and bid me God speed.”

“Nay,” she answered, averting her head, but sighing tearfully, “how shall I kiss or pray God’s blessing on you, Charles, and you leaving me to such wicked purpose—oh, my dear, my dear, how may I?”

“So be it!” quoth the youth, turning on his heel. “If I should indeed never come back you shall grieve bitterly for this, Honoria.”

“Ay, I shall,—most bitterly,” she answered, glancing at her brother through the smart of blinding tears. “And yet, though I grieve all my days, I cannot kiss or pray God’s blessing on thee, Charles.”

“Why, very well!” he answered, striding to the door. “Uncle Robin and Mr. Brownlee, fare well, sirs, think on me kindly as you can, and, when I’m gone—kiss Honoria for me!”

“Ah, Charles!” she sobbed; but even as she turned, with arms outstretched, the door slammed and from behind it came Sir Wilfred’s throaty laugh.

“Oh!” cried Honoria, clenching white fists, “some day I shall kill that vile wretch!”

“Not so, I pray God!” exclaimed Mr. Tulliver fervently. “Come, dear child, thou’rt all overwrought.”

“No, dear Uncle Robin,” she answered, kissing him and weeping, “I must up and away to my duty.”

“Duty?” quoth Mr. Brownlee, wiping her tears with large handkerchief and very tenderly. “What other duty is there for thee, Honoria, save duty to thyself and God?”

“My duty to my dead father and Charles—to save him from yon vile men and himself.”

“But how, child, how shall you do this?” questioned the lawyer anxiously, “you that is a maid so young and solitary?”

“No, I am a woman!” she answered, proud head aloft and smooth white chin set resolutely. “And therefore because I so love Charles and my father’s memory . . . love shall show me a way.”

CHAPTER III

INTRODUCES A GENTLEMAN IN VERY SORRY CASE

A tall man came leaping through a coppice, a man who gasped painfully and stumbled with weariness, pausing now and then to fetch his breath groaningly and glance behind him with dreadful eyes; a wild figure whose finery of garments showed torn, mired and bespattered with darker, grimmer stains, a man desperate and ferocious as any driven animal, for, like an animal, he was being hunted. Pausing in the shade of a tree he supported himself against the rugged bole with one hand, in the other he grasped a broken sword poised for murderous action as, plain to hear in the pervading stillness, rose a distant clamour, the dreadful sounds of the hue and cry, with a voice upraised in full-throated hunting yell, whereat the hard-pressed fugitive sped on again until, his strength failing, and cumbered by his broken weapon, he hurled the useless thing away with a breathless malediction and went staggering blindly on, a poor, driven wretch to slay or be slain while the hot morning waxed to hotter afternoon and the terror of the hue and cry drew near and ever nearer.

Thus it befell that, later in this sultry day, four profane troopers, sweating in their cumbersome accoutrements, were searching the lofty hay pile in Farmer Trescott's great barn while their corporal, lounging nearby, picked his teeth with a straw and cursed them and the unwonted heat of this July afternoon; and outstretched full length upon a massive beam above their heads, the desperate fugitive they were hunting watched them fierce-eyed.

Suddenly, in from the hot sun-glare, strode one whose rich velvets, laces and brocade proclaimed him of the quality; an arrogant and very warlike personage who flourished a glittering small sword in one gauntleted hand and a long-barrelled pistol in the other and spoke in a voice loud with authority.

"Dead or alive, my hearty lads, 'tis a cursed Jacobite rebel for the killing, so take him alive or dead. Rummage every nook and corner, for the rogue is here I'll be sworn! A guinea to the man that finds him."

Hereupon the corporal, dropping his straw, drew steel, and with his fellows began to thrust and stab at the great hay pile very energetically, yet none of them so viciously as did the personage with the narrow, glittering blade of his sword, until was jingle of spurs and upon the wide threshold

stood one in the gold braid of an officer, a slim, young elegant who eyed this imperious person's splendid exterior with an extreme disfavour and addressed him therefore with punctilious politeness:

"May I be permitted to enquire, sir, if you are anyone in particular,—in short, sir, and to put it plainly, be so good to inform me who the devil you may be to issue orders and proffer your damned bribes to His Majesty's troopers?"

The Personage snorted, turned, frowned in lofty disdain and spoke.

"Sir, you behold in me one of His Majesty's most loyal subjects—"

"His Majesty should be gratified to know it, but as for me I've but your word for't—"

"Sir, I am Sir Wilfred Rokeby, of Rokeby Maldon, and very zealous for the capture of this felon and notorious rebel, Jason Wayne."

"So, then you know this same Jacobite fugitive?"

"Too well, sir. I know he hath twice broke prison, to the robbing and maiming of divers of the King's subjects; a week since he wounded my friend, Mr. Francis Dartry, a gentleman of Kent, and this very day, my friend Charles Warrender was victim of his violence."

"But yourself, sir," quoth the officer, lifting supercilious eyebrow, "yourself would seem more fortunate than your two friends."

"And therefore the more determined on this same damned rascal's capture," retorted Sir Wilfred with a certain ferocity. "I ask no better than a fair chance at him myself, be it steel or bullet."

The officer took snuff with much apparent gusto, fobbed his box, flicked himself with dainty laced handkerchief and bowed.

"Then, sir," said he, "I wish you such measure of success in the matter as you may compass and—a very good-day!"

"How, sir, how," demanded Sir Wilfred angrily, "will you go, will you march when 'tis sure this rebel hath gone to earth hereabouts? Will you leave him to creep, to crawl——"

"No, sir, let us say that I leave him to—yourself. As for myself and my men, we have beaten the country all day for miles around, we have searched this and every other cursed barn from end to end."

“Yet I say he is hereabouts!” cried Sir Wilfred in hot fury, “he must be lying hid somewhere very near at hand, for when I glimpsed him in the wood yonder he was well nigh spent. . . . ’Sdeath, sir, if you call off your men thus soon and permit his escape, I protest such laxity shall be made known in a higher quarter, so be advised, sir; be advised or damme, take the consequences!” The young officer viewed Sir Wilfred’s swelling fury with a placid interest, then he took out his snuffbox, tapped it, and putting it away again, spoke:

“Sir Wilfred Rokeby, I like your person, your air and conversation so very indifferently that were I not on duty I should find extreme pleasure in going very fully into the whys and wherefores . . . let us hope the happiness is but deferred.”

“When you will, sir, when so you will!” retorted Sir Wilfred with stately bow and graceful flourish of his sword. “At the which time I shall take occasion to speak of a soldier’s duty to his King and the State.”

“And so God—bless your eyes, sir!” sighed the officer. “Let us hope we may so talk, and soon, sir—very soon!” Saying which, he gestured to the corporal and jingled away with his men jingling at his heels.

Thus presently in the sunny yard were gruff commands, a trampling of horse-hoofs, creak of leather and rattle of accoutrements until this party of dragoons had tramped, creaked and rattled itself away. As for Sir Wilfred, he stood awhile scowling fiercely upon the empty air, then he turned to scowl at the tumbled disorder of the great hay pile, took a slow pace towards it but, hearing a slight sound somewhere overhead, glanced up—to see Fate, all arms and legs, descending upon him; then a thunderbolt seemed to smite him headlong, and for some while Sir Wilfred Rokeby forgot the world and all else.

But after a space of time, that might have been eons or only minutes, he became conscious of pain, and, opening dazzled eyes, saw with no little astonishment that his own elegant riding-boots were kicking him; Sir Wilfred groaned, but looking higher, gasped in an ever-growing wonderment, for it seemed, to his still dazed senses, that he was himself committing this painful and undignified assault upon himself, since above these violent boots he now beheld his own elegant coat of blue and silver, his own brocaded waistcoat and richly laced cravat, all indeed seemed to be his very self—save only the lean, bronzed face that peered down at him fierce-eyed between the flowing curls of his own glossy peruke; and now as he blinked disbelieving the evidence of his eyes, the face spoke:

“What, Rokeby, d’ye know me, ha—d’ye know me in these modish fripperies o’ yours? I’m Jason Wayne! Ay, stare man, goggle and peer and know the merry truth on’t! I’m Jason Wayne in your finery, my man, and you in your shirt . . . your own clothes, ye dog, that shall haply prove my salvation! Ay, groan, but ye can’t cry alarm for you’re gagged with my stocking! Writhe, ye dog, writhe and twist, but ye can’t stir, for you’re trussed with a cart rope. I were wiser to kill ye out o’ hand and so be done, as I might ha’ done when I broke prison at Hexham, but once a fool and twice a fool—yet for the third time take heed, cross me again and I’ll end ye, though I die for it. . . . Now come hide, slug, hide and be damned to ye; into the hay yonder and lie there, till you’re found, or rot and so to the devil—so ho with a heave and cheerily!”

Thus saying, Jason Wayne seized and hauled his helpless captive to the hay pile, its darkest corner, and there, whistling beneath his breath, buried Sir Wilfred from sight; which done he crossed to the wide doorway, glanced heedfully to the flints and primings of his stolen pistols, eased the stolen sword in its scabbard, adjusted hat and shot his ruffles. Then this poor fugitive, thus marvellously transfigured, stepped out into the sunny farmyard, going with a swagger and ring of spurred heels and whistling louder and more cheerily than ever, until, behind the barn, he beheld a small, grassy paddock where a country fellow walked a spirited horse to and fro, at sight of which snorting animal Mr. Wayne halted and was dumb. It was indeed a splendid animal, all quivering might from sensitive nostrils to sweeping tail, a powerful creature that stamped eager hoofs and tossed proud head contemptuous of restraint.

Mr. Wayne strode forward whistling merrier than ever, and jingling his spurs, whereat the country fellow touched an eyebrow in salutation, saying:

“’E do be mortal fresh-like, sir, though I’ve kep’ a walkin’ of ’e like as your honour said,—eh but, so sure as my name be Tom . . . you beant his honour . . . you ain’t Sir Wilfred Rokeby—”

“Not I, thank God!”

“Why then, sir, if you ain’t him this ’oss, being ’is can’t nowise be yourn __”

“Not yet, my bright lad, but look—see yonder!” The countryman glanced behind him, but even as he did so, a powerful fist smote his jaw with such deft exactitude that he went down headlong and, staring up half-stunned, beheld his aggressor leap very nimbly astride the fretting horse and lean from the saddle to look down on him with grim yet kindly smile.

“Friend,” quoth Mr. Wayne, fumbling in pocket, “yon buffet was of a necessity that knoweth no law, so rub it off, lad, forgive and forget . . . and here’s one of his honour’s guineas to thy comfort.” So saying, Mr. Wayne tossed the coin, whirled his snorting animal and was off and away at furious gallop, while Tom sat to cherish his bruised jaw and stare at the guinea on his open palm, nor did he stir until all sound of those rapidly drumming hoofs had died away upon the afternoon’s drowsy stillness.

CHAPTER IV

TELLS OF A DESOLATE HOME-COMING

By leafy tracks and lonely ways, through shady rustling woods, and along broad forest glades, dappled with sunshine and deepening shadow where birds piped drowsily, rode Jason Wayne, seldom at a loss, but pushing on ever south-westerly, like one very well acquainted with this richly-wooded south country. Thus in the late afternoon he reached a certain tree-clad hill and here, reining up his horse, he sat, elbow on thigh and chin in gauntleted hand, gazing away over this right pleasant countryside of winding stream, darkling copse and dense, far-flung forest, of bowery hamlet and tree-shaded village set about by trim fields and lush meadowlands, with, beyond all this, a faint, far gleam that was the sea. Having viewed this fair prospect with a certain wistful intentness, his sombre gaze turned where, in the broad valley below and shaded about by stately trees, rose the gables and smokeless chimneys of a goodly house. He was yet intent on this when he was roused by the bleating of sheep, and up the Down towards him came a flock urged joyously by a shaggy, tailless dog and a shepherd whose gaitered legs bore him sturdily though his head showed something bowed and grey. Now, beholding this shaggy dog and plodding shepherd, Mr. Wayne's grim, unshaven visage showed wonderfully transfigured, his lips curved to slow smile, that somehow seemed reflected in his long-lashed eyes, and he whistled, shrill yet melodiously, the opening bars of that very pretty song 'Come lasses and lads'. And instantly the shepherd and dog stood strangely and utterly still, the man leaning upon his crook to peer under his hand, the dog with shaggy ears cocked; then the man cried out hoarsely, the dog barked joyously and came bounding up the steep slope to leap and leap to lick and butt shaggy head at Mr. Wayne's outstretched hand while the shepherd flourished his crook, tossed his weather-beaten hat high in air and plied gaitered legs so fast that Mr. Wayne was scarce out of the saddle than the old shepherd's arms were fast about him.

"Oh, Master Jason . . . oh lord love ee, Master Jason, here's j'y! And what'll my Martha say? Oh, God bless ee, sir; us heered as you was dead . . . killed in a battle . . . oh dear Mr. Jason—" The glad voice choked.

"Why, Ben," quoth Mr. Wayne hugging the old man to his wide breast and patting his grey head very tenderly, "oh, Ben, here's brave welcome to a

poor fugitive—”

“Ah, sir, it do be like as if you was come back out o’ grave, up from the dead!”

“Why so I am, Ben, and hardly! Death’s on my track e’en now, old lad, and none so far but ’twill come nearer yet.”

“Nay, God forbid, sir.”

“Amen!” quoth Jason. “Yet I must to earth, Ben, like any poor hunted fox. Damme! but I must hole up somewhere, old lad, and what place better than the cave in the old quarry; you’ll mind the cave, Ben, my robber’s cave where I was wont to play Robin Hood as a boy?”

“Ay, an’ shoot me wi’ your li’l bow and arrers, sir—ay I mind it well for sure. Ah, them was the good days, right proper times they was; th’ old house yonder were brisk wi’ life them days, your lady mother so gay and heartsome—sometimes on the Down yonder of an evening I almost fancies I can hear her singing that ol’ song as you whistled but now,—ay, that old song, sweet and high like she was used—and her dead so long, poor lady! And your father so bold and free—ah, he were a proper gentleman were squire, and now dead by the bloody axe! And the old house yonder, such comings and going o’ the quality, and fine folk from Lonnon and the court and now so desolate and going to rack an’ ruin—ah them was the days sure—ly!”

“Ay, those were the good days, Ben; the world was kinder then! Those were the happy days, and yet I little regarded them. To-day I must crawl and creep and hide me in holes i’ the ground lest I be taken and they treat me as they did my noble father. And yet why not, Ben, why not, damme? To what end do I live? Wherefore should I cherish such curst, useless life as this o’ mine—”

“Lord love ee, sir, for that ye may live and love and get ee a sweet wife, ay and children, plenty on ’em, Master Jason, to fill the old house again wi’ j’y and pretty clamour o’ little feet running to give ee welcome kind, and little voices to cry ee greeting—”

“Enough, Ben, ha damme you paint me such picture so impossible it doth but make my lot the harder!”

“Sir,” answered the old shepherd, lifting hand reverently heavenward, “up yonder be God Almighty lookin’ down on we, I rackon, and all things be possible to He. Likewise and moreover prayer can move mountains, and I be right powerful in prayer and so be my Martha. So us’ll pray a blessing on

ee, Mast' Jason and likewise the comfort of a sweet wife and j'y o' little children. Now come ee down-along to th' owd cottage wi' me, sir,—come ee to my Martha as nursed and loved ee like any mother, come ee, sir.”

“Not so, old lad, 'twere folly and worse, for to harbour the like o' me might put even ye in jeopardy; so greet your Martha for me, ay kiss the dear soul for me, Ben, right heartily, and so I'll to my cave to lurk and skulk till I can get me overseas.”

“Ay and food now, Master Jason.”

“Why to be sure, I must have food,—”

“Ay this minute, sir, my Martha shall—”

“No, no, Ben, bring me what you will to-night so soon as it be dark, and so my hearty thanks and farewell t'ye awhile, my faithful Ben.” Saying which Mr. Wayne turned from the old man, rather hastily, and swinging himself nimbly to the saddle, rode on into the wood with never a backward glance.

Slowly rode he by narrow woodland paths, sometimes forcing his way through dense boskage and riotous underbrush, until he came where a steep track led him down amid thick leafage into an old working cut deeply into the green face of the Down by the busy hands of a long-forgotten people, a very pleasant, shady place, all grown about by trees and thick underwoods, where a little brook made a soft bubbling murmur very pleasant to hear and beyond this, hard to see by reason of thick bushes, yawned the mouth of a cave beneath the grassy steep. Here he dismounted and loosing off saddle and bridle, tethered his horse and sat down upon a fallen tree to take stock of his stolen possessions, and found them to consist of the following:

In the pockets of his stolen garments.

Fifteen guineas in a net purse. A gold handled penknife. A gold-mounted tortoiseshell snuffbox well filled with excellent rapee which he proceeded to enjoy. A silver tooth-pick, which he tossed away, and a packet of letters which he merely glanced at.

In the two saddle bags.

Three pairs of silk stockings. A complete change of linen. A green velvet riding-coat, its gold lace somewhat tarnished. A watch by Tompion in stout gold case dented evidently by a bullet, and a gold-mounted case with razors, travelling mirror and other utensils for shaving.

Having examined these his new possessions, Mr. Wayne bundled them away and, seated again upon his log, took himself by the chin and stared at nothing in particular, like one in profound reverie, until roused by a blackbird which had perched on a bush hard by, like the bold fellow he was, to pipe at him very melodiously; whereupon Jason whistled, too, and almost as sweetly, and taking the shaving case beneath his arm came to the little brook, set his mirror in the fork of a tree, and, removing coat and wig, proceeded to lather and shave himself. This operation accomplished, he stood surveying his lean visage in the looking-glass with wistful disapproval of the too evident changes wrought by hardship and suffering, the streaks of silver in his thick, close-cropped dark hair, the harsh down-trending line of lip that made his chin seem so grimly aggressive—and it was now that his quick eye glimpsed another face in the mirror, a hat, a bewigged head that peered at him from the dimness of that very cave that was to be his haven and refuge and, turning instantly, he leapt like the fierce, hunted creature he was, had grappled this intruder and clapped pistol to head all in a moment.

“Ha, damned spy!” he snarled. “Come out and show yourself.”

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING A YOUNG GENTLEMAN

A young gentleman this who, having gasped and blanched before such swift and unprovoked attack, now stood looking at his fierce aggressor with wide grey eyes set in the smooth oval of a singularly handsome face; an audaciously bold young man who, staring thus serenely into his captor's fierce visage, spoke in voice richly soft and serene as his look.

"If you are the thief you seem, I regret to say you are too late."

"Eh, late?" demanded Jason. "How so?"

"Hours!" sighed the young gentleman. "Another like rogue was before you and robbed me of my horse and money, all save a crown piece—this!" And diving slender hand into pocket, the speaker took forth the silver coin in question and dropped it beside Mr. Wayne's (or rather Sir Wilfred's) elegant riding boot.

"My last coin!" sighed the young gentleman. "Behold it for your taking. And now be so good to remove the irk of your hand."

Mr. Wayne did so and, stepping back a pace, stood fingering his new-shaven chin and watching beneath drawn brows this self-possessed young gentleman who flicked with laced handkerchief at that part of his sleeve Jason's fierce hand had gripped, resettled his braided hat and shook forward the long, flowing curls of the great peruke he wore, and all with the utmost deliberation.

"Boy," quoth Jason, sullenly, "take up your damned money."

The young gentleman merely elevated a smooth, round chin and folded his arms.

"My lad," said Jason, pointing down to the coin in the grass between them, "I bade you take up your money."

"My man," answered the young gentleman pleasantly, "I dropped it there for your taking, so pocket it and stand from my path."

"Zounds!" exclaimed Jason, grim lips twitching. "Now who a plague may you be, and what?"

"'Tis no matter, sir!"

“Agreed!” nodded Jason. “But why must ye take me for thief, eh, boy?”

“’Sdeath, sir—what other?” retorted the young gentleman, voicing the great oath with a hiss. “Thievery is writ large upon you, ’tis in your bullet head, your sinister face—all of you.”

“Why then here’s insolence!” quoth Jason and, glancing furtively where lay his wig and coat, saw the young gentleman sweep off his hat with a flourish.

“And so,” said he, “I take my leave of you! Be so good to stand aside.”

“Not I!” answered Jason, shaking his head.

The young gentleman frowned slightly and laid one slim finger on the hilt of the wicked-looking duelling sword he bore.

“Be warned, sir,” said he gently, “and suffer me to depart.”

“Never think it!” answered Jason. “Being here, my lad, here you bide until I see fit to suffer—”

“For the last time I warn you,” said the young gentleman, and out flickered his sword.

“Aha!” quoth Jason, eyeing the delicate blade. “A *colichemarde*.”

“Am I to depart?”

“No!” said Jason, drawing his own sword as he spoke. “Come an you will, have at me and let’s see your play.”

Wink of steel, stamp of foot and the narrow, deadly blades clinked together, and so for a moment they stood motionless eye to eye and foot to foot, Jason smiling and a little scornful, the young gentleman pale, determined and very serious; then his blade flicked, whirled and darted and Jason leapt back, his fleeting smile quite gone and a small stain upon the sleeve of his stolen shirt.

“Will that suffice?” enquired the young gentleman, lowering his point.

“No whit, sir,” answered Jason, smiling again but nowise scornfully, “’tis merest scratch—a fortunate accident. I shall play more cautiously. Come again.” So to it they went once more, lithe, swaying figures with the ceaseless twinkle of steel between them.

“Ha, you play shrewdly, boy!” quoth Jason, parrying a lightning thrust only just in time. “Come, is it enough . . . or must I blood ye?”

“Will you suffer me . . . to depart?”

“No!” answered Jason. “Here you stay until—” The words ended in hissing gasp, and Jason was staring with eyes of disbelief from his empty hand to his sword that lay on the grass yards away.

“And I think . . . that should . . . settle it!” said the young gentleman, a little breathlessly.

“Well . . . damme!” gasped Jason.

“With all my heart! sir,” said the young gentleman fervently. “And so I’ll take my leave.”

“And my wounded arm!” sighed Jason, hanging his head. “My poor, maimed arm!” The young gentleman turned away, seemed to hesitate and next instant was struggling desperately in Jason’s powerful clutch, his sword was wrested from him, tossed away and he was borne back to a tree and pinned there by the hand of that same wounded arm.

“Oh base!” he gasped, trembling now in his assailant’s fierce gripe. “Oh, despicable to trick me so!”

“Howbeit,” quoth Jason between shut teeth, “you shall not go to be my death, damn ye!”

“How . . . how could I?”

“By speaking of me at the nearest inn, by bringing the cursed dragoons and red coats down on me—”

“The soldiers . . . oh!” gasped the young gentleman, ceasing to tremble and opening his large grey eyes wider than ever. “Was it you they hunted . . . you they shot at—you?”

“None other.”

“Then you are . . . you must be that terrible man . . . Jason Wayne!”

“That very same, my lad! A hunted man, to be killed on sight or dragged away to the quartering block and axe. Ay, I’m Jason Wayne and now you know why, being here—ha, damme, here you shall remain!”

CHAPTER VI

TELLS MORE CONCERNING THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN, ONE MR. WARREN

Jason had made a fire, for evening had fallen with a fugitive wind chill and salt from the sea, and now, seated in its cheery glow, with his back to a tree, he alternately scowled at this cheery flame and the slim form of his young companion who sat within reach.

“And how the plague didst find thy way hither, boy?” he demanded in tone kinder than his look.

“By merest chance, Mr. Wayne, and a plaguily evil one, it seems.”

“This is as may be!” muttered Jason, scowling on the fire again, while his companion, having viewed the lean, brooding face of him, feature by feature, spoke as if on sudden impulse.

“It must be terrible . . . to be hunted and chased like wild animal!”

“So terrible, boy,” answered Jason with dreadful distortion of a smile, “so very terrible that it turneth man verily into a beast, to kill and rend how he may.”

“And did they . . . hunt you . . . far?”

“From the Scots border to this, my last refuge, for I’m minded to be chased no further, nor shall they take me alive—no, by God! Twice they dragged me to prison, and twice I broke free. . . . I’ve hidden me in water up to my neck, I’ve skulked in barns and hayricks and once in a pigsty. . . . But they shall never take me living to die traitor’s death—no no! To be mutilated, my lad, to watch my own good flesh burned before my eyes, to be decapitated, hewn asunder, quartered, boy, and my poor members set up for spectacle in public places to be a terror and warning—rather than this, I’ll die in clean fight, or by my own hand.” After this, they were silent some while, each busied with his own thoughts, until at last, glancing askance again at his brooding companion’s saturnine face, the young gentleman spoke again:

“Mr. Wayne, pray tell me if in these latter dreadful days you heard or saw aught of one Sir Wilfred Rokeby?”

“Ay, I did, boy, I did! And what then? What is he to you, what d’ye know of him?”

“That he is a right beastly fellow, sir!”

“Zooks!” exclaimed Jason with sudden smile unexpectedly boyish, “I protest thou’rt in the right on’t, ‘beastly fellow’ is very apt, ’tis a two-legged pest should be dead that I suffered to live since I am betimes a sorry crass fool and my own amazement.”

“Did you chance on him hereabouts, sir?”

“No, lad, ’twas in Kent, a village called Smarden—”

“Had he a companion . . . two companions?”

“I saw none.”

“Then, Mr. Wayne, pray have you seen . . . or heard aught of a young gentleman, a Mr. Charles Warrender—?” The speaker flinched to the sudden grip of Jason’s hand, but met his furious scowl with eyes steady and all undismayed.

“Warrender? With a curse on him! Ha, boy, what know you of Warrender?”

“Nay rather, what know you, Mr. Wayne?”

“Evil, boy, evil and black treachery. Warrender, damn him, was a Tory and Jacobite while it served him, then turned his coat like so many other curst rascals, and knowing much o’ the Jacobite cause, used it to his own base purposes; ’twas George Warrender tricked and betrayed my noble father to his death . . . even he, this perjured liar, my father once named friend.”

“Well, sir, George Warrender is dead.”

“Ha, dead sayst thou, dead—ha, good lad, is this indeed so?”

“He died, sir, scarce three weeks ago. And, sir . . . Mr. Wayne, was he truly once your father’s familiar friend?”

“Ay, until they quarrelled. Well, let him rot say I, body and soul.” So was silence once more, save for the gentle rippling murmur of the brook hard by and cheery crackle of the fire, while all about them shadows crept as evening deepened into night.

“Looke now, boy,” said Jason at last, “since we must needs be bedfellows for this night at the least, I’d know the name of thee.”

Beyond the fire, eyes viewed him with look which was more than fear and, clasping his riding-cloak about himself, the young gentleman spoke in voice and tone anything but serene.

“Bed . . . fellows? Sir . . . sir . . . how, why . . . Mr. Wayne, why bedfellows?”

“When we sleep, boy, in the cave yonder, we sleep cheek by jowl, my lad, you within the cave and ’twixt me and the wall . . . close, my lad, hugger-mugger.”

“Never—oh never! I shall not sleep . . . I will not.”

“As you will, my fool younker, but sleep I shall and must, yet so very nigh to you, ay mark this, so straitly near that should ye stir or try to creep over me I shall wake! Damme, but I run no hazard o’ you stealing away to bring death on me in my sleep.”

“Oh shameful!” cried the young gentleman, leaping up the better to frown and stamp spurred foot at him. “Oh, Jason Wayne, thou crass, base fool to so misjudge me and mine honour! How can you . . . how dare you think so basely of me! Such doubt is vile affront . . . a . . . damned insult—”

“Gadso!” exclaimed Jason, sitting up. “Will ye draw on me then, must ye pink and blood me again, my bully boy, my swashbuckling lad?” For indeed the young gentleman’s ready hand was gripping again at his swordhilt, and he spoke softly, but with flash of white teeth:

“Mr. Wayne, sir, you affronted me very . . . very damnably!”

“Then my bold Achilles I cry you mercy, *peccavi* and a thousand apologies. So come, sit down, boy, sit down and tell me how I must name thee.”

For a moment the young gentleman hesitated, glancing up and about him as if meditating sudden flight, then, folding cloak about his slenderness, he seated himself with the utmost dignity and answered, head proudly averted.

“Since you will have me named, sir, you may call me . . . Tom.”

“Tom!” repeated Jason gravely. “Why, Tom is good name and so is Dick and so again is Harry, yet methinks, Tom, I’ll call thee Joe, or Will or Jack ___”

“Well you have wide choice, sir.”

“And your surname I guess will be Smith—or Brown, Jones or Robinson?”

“I suggest Warren, sir.”

“Warren will do,” nodded Jason. “Ay, Warren shall serve well as any other. Well now, Mr. Warren, here’s yourself, having thrust yourself into my affairs—”

“Though quite unwittingly, sir, as you must admit.”

“Nevertheless, Mr. Warren, since my fortunes are in such desperate case, you are like to find yourself in something evil plight, I fear.”

“And why, sir, why would you have me share your horrid perils?”

“My reason,” said Jason, stirring the fire to a blaze, “my reason, sir, is sufficiently obvious, I think.”

“Oh speak me plain, sir!” cried young Mr. Warren indignantly. “You fear I shall betray you to your enemies and death—and a death so vile!”

“Say rather,” said Jason, looking his grimmest, “that I refuse to run the least chance of such hazard.”

“Mr. Wayne, these unjust suspicions of me shame only yourself, and therefore I account you a—a fellow very perfectly contemptible, but—”

“You’ve a pestilent bold tongue, my lad.”

“But a ready sword to back it, my man!”

“What, thou’lt crow, my cockerel? Needs must I cut thy comb for thee.”

“You may try, sir, when you will. But now, Mr. Jason Wayne, hearkee and mark this! Since Fate hath seen fit thus to make us companions and though I heartily dislike your face, address, deportment and speech, and scorn your lack o’ faith in me, I tell you it is my fixed intent and unshakable determination to abide with you, come what may, until I can see you safely aboard some ship bound out of England.”

Now at this, Jason sat up to stare on the speaker in a very real astonishment, then, being the hunted wretch he was, wonder changed to fierce doubt, his wide eyes narrowed to gleaming slits, his mouth took on its sinister curl and he laughed in bitter derision.

“And this to lull my suspicions, eh, damn ye! To win me to lax confidence . . . and you away to fill your empty purse with the money for my capture, blood-money ha, boy!” Mr. Warren recoiled, at first in quick alarm, for Jason’s tone had been ferocious as his look, then the young gentleman leaned forward to stare in his accuser’s fierce eyes with look of

such unutterable contempt that Jason shifted his glance to the fire and, leaning back against the tree again, sat frowning and dumb. And after some while Mr. Warren, twining a lock of his long periwig upon slim finger, spoke soft and dispassionate:

“Alas, my poor man, my miserable wretch, your many hardships and dreadful affrights have besotted your faculties not to perceive Truth when you see it.”

“Is yourself then all truth?” sneered Jason.

“Never doubt it, sir.”

“I . . . wonder!” growled Jason.

“And the brook babbles!” quoth Mr. Warren, and leaning his back against the grassy bank, he folded his arms, crossed his legs and relapsed into contemptuous silence; whereat Mr. Wayne, taking out his stolen snuffbox, tapped it, inhaled a pinch with evident enjoyment and, the fire serving, sat regarding his haughty young companion with a fixed intensity and ever-growing interest, his delicate profile, long-lashed eyes, smooth, round chin and vivid, sensitive mouth, just now striving to make itself very grimly scornful; Mr. Wayne stirred the fire to brighter glow, and by this increased light, surveyed his companion’s shapely person, from the richly laced cravat at his throat to the toes of his elegant riding-boots, until at last, as if very aware of this persistent scrutiny, Mr. Warren stirred uneasily, glanced swiftly at him and as swiftly away again, and drawing the folds of his riding-cloak closer about him, finally spoke:

“Well, sir, and pray why must you stare so?”

“Because, Mr. Warren, I begin to think you a somewhat . . . strange . . . young man—”

“Why strange, sir, why and—how?”

“I’ faith, boy, ’tis this doth set me a-wondering. There is that about you —”

“Howbeit, sir,” said Mr. Warren somewhat breathlessly, “for yourself, I protest, there is no one alive, not even yourself, will be more heartily glad to know you safe away out of England than I.”

“Ha!” quoth Jason. “Now can this wish be bred of kindness for me, Mr. Warren? Nay alas, I fear not, since you mislike my poor visage and scorn all that I am, so ’tis I doubt if such fervency and passion for my welfare can spring from friendship or sudden love of me—”

“God forbid, Mr. Wayne!”

“Amen! Mr. Warren! Then may I enquire the wherefore and why on’t?”

“Why you may ask, sir, and ask, but ’twill prove vain labour—” Mr. Warren gasped and recoiled, for with movement incredibly quick Jason Wayne was afoot grasping a pistol levelled where, amid the deepening shadows, leaves rustled.

“Lie down, boy!” he whispered. “Lie down lest they fire, down with ye!”

Instantly and lightly Mr. Warren rose, and, coming beside Jason, stood poised for swift action, sword glittering in his hand. Then above this rustling leafage a voice spoke softly:

“Oh, Master Jason, it be only us—my Martha and me, sir!” Back into capacious pocket went pistol, and into scabbard sword, as presently into the fireglow stepped old Ben carrying a basket, with beside him, and bearing another, a comely, middle-aged woman, a buxom, bright-eyed motherly soul who plumped down her burden to reach out yearning arms, and so came hurrying to clasp this fugitive wanderer, to kiss, to laugh and sob over him while Jason, holding her fast, was giving her kiss for kiss.

“Martha!” said he, hoarsely. “God love thee now, Martha . . . come let’s look at thee!”

“And we’ m brought ee food, Master Jason, ar an’ plenty on it,” quoth Ben. “Lookee now, first and foremost be a pottle o’ right ale—”

“Noble, Ben, noble!” said Jason. “Kiss me, Martha, kiss and make me young again,—nay first this young gentleman! Mr. Warren, I have the honour to present my right well beloved Martha Dunkin and yonder her spouse, my trusty friend Ben. And now my Martha kiss me again!”

“Oh, young gentleman,” said Martha, bobbing Mr. Warren a curtsy and wiping her bright eyes at the same time, “I were Master Jason’s nurse, ay ’deed I tried to be his mother—like, after she took an’ died, poor sweet lady. . . . And oh but Master Jason thy poor face so thin, my dearie lad. . . .”

“And a prime cut o’ beef, Must’ Jason, likewise an’ am, sir!” quoth Ben, busied with the two baskets. “Likewise, cheese, sir, wi’ butter an’ a loaf.”

“And onions, dearie!” sighed Martha; “you was allus so fond o’ onions ay even as little lad—”

“Ay, I was,” quoth Jason, “and I am. Come, sit you here by this tree,—so. Now let us all sit down and sup together. Nay, I insist. You, Ben, here on my left, and you, Mr. Warren, beside Martha here, and now—let us eat.”

So eat they did, and with hearty appetites all four, though Martha, leaning to young Mr. Warren’s ready ear, found time to tell him much concerning her beloved Master Jason, his pretty babyhood, his motherless boyhood, the splendid promise of his bold young manhood,—and found in Mr. Warren a strangely interested and sympathetic listener.

So they ate and drank and talked together in such good fellowship that time passed all unheeded, until faint and sweetly mellow with distance a church clock chimed the hour of ten.

“So late!” sighed Martha. “Lord, I be generally-allus abed and sound asleep by nine. So come now down-along to the cottage wi’ us won’t ee, Mr. Jason, and you, my dear young gentleman. I’ve a fine big bed—feathers, sirs, shall hold the two o’ ee mighty cosy if ye only will.”

“Well now,” said Jason, glancing askance at Mr. Warren, “how say you, sir, shall we enjoy the luxury of such bed, naked thou and I and—feathers! How of it, sir? What d’ye say now?”

“No!” answered Mr. Warren, shortly.

“Martha, the young gentleman saith no, and he is perfectly right, a feather bed is no place for such as he and I. And besides, my dear faithful soul, should it ever be known you had sheltered such as we—or rather myself that am a proscribed rebel with price on my head, you and Ben, my dear innocents, might pay for it—ay and cruelly. So give me your hand, Ben, kiss me, Martha, and Good night and God bless you for brave, true-hearted friends. So now—off w’ ye . . . until this time to-morrow, an you will.”

“Nay, but dearie,” sighed Martha, “where shall ee rest your poor dear body this night?”

“In the cave yonder.”

“Then my Ben shall make ee a bed o’ leaves and fern. Look to it, Ben.” So, while Martha and Jason talked of bygone happier days, Ben fell to work, while Mr. Warren eyed his labours very much askance and in an ever-growing perturbation. At last, the same distant clock chiming the half-hour, Jason arose, and once again blessing them both for loyal and faithful friends, bade them begone to bed.

So saying, with one arm about Martha's comfortable waist and the other round Ben's shoulders, he urged them (and both unwilling) upon their way.

CHAPTER VII

CONCERNS ITSELF WITH TWO BEDFELLOWS AND ONE PENKNIFE

Mr. Wayne, having made up the fire, glanced thereby at the morose features of his youthful companion and yawned prodigiously.

“Come, sir,” said he, stretching his long arms, “I’m weary, let us to bed.”

“Why then, go you, as for me I shall do very well here by the fire.”

“Not so, Mr. Warren, you sleep with me in the cave yonder. So strip, boy, strip, off wi’ coat and boots—”

“I shall not!” cried Mr. Warren, a little stridently, and, speaking, leapt to his feet.

“Eh—not undress, sir? I mean at least your coat and boots.”

“I’ll sleep as I am or not at all.”

“But your boots shall irk ye damnably, boy—and to sleep in such pretty coat shall nowise improve its looks—”

“ ’Tis no matter, sir.”

“Will you not unbelt or unbutton, then?”

“No!”

“Zounds! Art a marvellous squeamish young gentleman, I think.”

“Think what you will, sir,” cried Mr. Warren a little wildly, “but know I’ll sleep as I am, and here by the fire.”

“Art not afraid o’ me, eh, boy?”

“No! No! Not I! Give me but cause sufficient and I’ll prove it on your hateful body.”

“Nay, lad, I’ll not fight with thee. But if thou’rt nowise afraid of me, come you into the cave, for damne but I’m weary and must sleep!” And rising heavily he took a slow pace towards his companion, who recoiled quickly, drawing cloak about himself with such gesture that Jason halted to shake his head and stare.

“Zooks!” he exclaimed. “Art a marvellous . . . virginal young gentleman, I think. Well I must to sleep—”

“Then sleep!” cried Mr. Warren in wild fury. “Get to your sleep, damn you, and leave me to mine.” And out came his ready sword.

“Why very well!” sighed Jason sleepily. “I’ll to the cave but—what Martha, art back again?” cried he cheerily; Mr. Warren glanced swiftly behind him and then was struggling desperately in arms that held him powerless; once again his sword was twisted from his hold, but he fought only the more furiously, then uttered a shrill, despairing cry as these arms lifted and bore him, not without difficulty, into the darkness of the cave and there dropped him upon a couch of leaf and bracken.

“Now, damn ye,” panted Jason, “for cross-grained, ill-conditioned, curst lad! Lie there or ’sdeath I’ll trounce the lattermost parts o’ ye till you weep like the . . . ladylike young gentleman you seem.”

Then Jason took out his pistols, very ostentatiously, set them handily beneath his folded cloak, and lying down with his wigless head upon this pillow, composed himself to slumber. But after some while:

“Mr. Warren,” said he.

No answer.

“What then,” he enquired, sitting up the better to peer at the vague shape outstretched beyond him in the dimness. “Art asleep so soon?”

“No!” answered a voice quivering with anger or another passion. “Nor shall I!”

“Now fie Mr. Warren! Is such bed too hard for your fine-ladylike tenderness, sir? You’re too soft o’ body, lad,—too plumply, prettily redundant—you’ve lived too soft and fed too daintily well, I guess—”

“Oh, be silent!” said the voice.

“Why so I will anon, but first I’d crave thy pardon. . . . I was perchance a little rough with thee—”

“You were very detestably brutal!” said the voice fiercely.

“Why, then, I hope I did no serious hurt to that so tender carcass o’ thine, Mr. Warren, sir?”

“Oh be dumb . . . and damned!” cried the voice. “You become ever the more odious and vile.”

“Then I humbly crave your forgiveness, sir, and here’s my hand—”

“Hold away from me!” cried the voice.

“Wilt not clasp my hand then?”

“No! And what’s more, take heed that I have—this!”

“Eh? Why, damme—a penknife!” exclaimed Jason, and smiled upon the darkness.

“And excellent sharp!” said the voice. “So—, be warned!”

“A penknife!” repeated Jason mournfully. “Now here’s curst ferocious bedfellow!”

“Then go sleep by the fire, or suffer me!”

“Nay, Mr. Warren, I’ll risk thy knife in hope to win of thee a better estimation of me.”

“Impossible!” said the voice with hissing fervour.

“Alas then!” sighed Jason. “And faith, in all my troublous life I ha’ never slept with a penknife before. Mr. Warren, a very respectful Good night to you, sir. I pray you sleep well, and so again—Good night.”

“Oh—Good night!” cried the voice fiercely.

So was silence while Jason watched the moon rise beyond the sheltering trees, climbing up as it were from branch to branch, and when it was high risen to flood the little dingle with pale radiance, Jason spoke:

“Mr. Warren, pray are you asleep?”

“Sir,” answered the voice grimly, “I was never more wide awake.”

“Now this is mighty kind in thee, for I am wakeful too! For such wakefulness I thank thee!”

Silence.

“See yonder where riseth shy Luna so inquisitive to peep down at us! And no wonder, for where in all the world may she behold again two poor gentlemen in such strange bed and with—a penknife!”

Here, a rustle of sudden, angry movement, whereat Jason smiled once more, and began to breathe slow and deep, with an occasional gentle snore, nor did he so much as move again until in the dimness beyond him a deep and regular respiration told that his young companion slumbered at last.

Then very slowly and cautiously Jason sat up, to lean and peer down at this shape the moon was now revealing outstretched in the innocent abandonment of sleep . . . these soft-sweet curves, this slim yet capable hand that still grasped the penknife; but it was not this small, bright blade that so drew and held Jason's narrowed eyes as, bending near, slowly and very stealthily, he set aside the lacy folds of the sleeper's cravat.

For a long moment and with breath in check, Jason gazed with eyes widening to a stare; then gently withdrawing the knife from these lax fingers, without a sound and more stealthily than ever, he recoiled and, lying down again, stared up at the moon with eyes that reflected none of her placid serenity.

CHAPTER VIII

TELLS HOW THEY CAME TO ONE THAT WAS OF ROYAL EGYPT

Waking to a vivid, fugitive sunbeam, Jason Wayne lay to blink dazzled eyes then, turning swiftly but with no sound, surveyed his bedfellow outstretched beyond him in the cave and still very fast asleep. Cloak and riding-coat lay wide-flung, and the keen gaze of Jason's narrowed eyes crept slowly up from slender high-arched feet and shapely legs to the flowing periwig which, deranged in slumber, revealed thus a tress of shining red-gold hair.

Stealthily Jason arose and donning his own boots went forth into the early sunshine; birds piped and carolled all around him, dew spangled every bush, every leaf and grass blade with glittering gems; and standing amid it all, Jason's eyes glanced askance towards that shadowy cave, and taking himself by the chin he fell to a profound meditation, wrinkling his brows like one greatly troubled and perplexed. At last, his shapely mouth curling to its grimmest smile, he turned away, opened one of the saddle bags and taking thence his case of razors, went along beside the merry, chattering brook till he came to a shady, well-remembered pool, and having bathed, shaved himself with a very particular care.

Thus presently, young Mr. Warren, waking at a touch, started up in some perturbation to see a stately gentleman looking down at him, a well-beseen person from bewigged head to booted feet who bowed gracefully and smiled engagingly, saying:

"Tom, Dick, or Harry, here's heartsome morning. I wish you joy of it, and now be pleased to rise." With quick, instinctive movement, Mr. Warren folded cloak about himself and leapt nimbly afoot.

"Mr. Wayne," quoth he, "I said you might call me Tom."

"So be it, Tom, and I am Jason to thee henceforth."

"I prefer to call you Mr. Wayne."

"Why if you'd be so curst dignified first straighten your wig and hide that pretty hair—a golden lovelock." Mr. Warren settled his peruke in sudden, desperate fashion, while Jason, staring at the branches overhead continued:

“Howbeit, Master Tom, despite your high and mighty airs I would in all humility speak you my gratitude.”

“For what, sir?”

“Last night when I mistook our good Ben for creeping enemy, you, ’stead of lying down as I bade ye, leapt to my defence like any comrade.”

“Why, then, set this against your unjust suspicions of me!” quoth Mr. Warren with dignity.

“I will, Tom lad, I will.”

“And why,” demanded Mr. Warren, as if moved by sudden impulse, “why must you bid me to lie down?”

“Faith, I would not have such pretty boy anyways hurt on my account. And now for your present comfort and refreshment, Tom, follow me.” So Jason brought him to the brook and showed the little pool so discreetly hidden and sequestered.

“Behold your bath, Tom lad!” said he. “And here also soap, brush and razors to your shaving.” Mr. Warren started as if something had stung him.

“Thank you,” he answered hurriedly, “but I . . . I have no desire to shave. . . .”

“Not shave, sir?” repeated Jason, staring like one vastly amazed. “Tom, my good fellow, you astound me! Shaving, boy, is a cleanly habit and therefore necessary. A man unshaven is a man unregenerate—”

“No matter, sir, I’ve no desire for your razors.”

“Zounds, boy, never tell me thou’rt for growing beard and moustachio! I tell thee beards are clean out o’ fashion, and a beard will never suit thee, Tom. So have at that chin o’ thine ere it sprout unmodish hair. As for me I’ll go see to our breakfast.”

Having set forth such edibles as they possessed, Jason was in the act of slicing the ham when he grew suddenly rigid and still, for here, where was no wind, a bush had rustled faintly; so with head downbent he watched this bush, saw it move and instantly drawing pistol from pocket, challenged fiercely; and as instantly from the leaves stepped a tall, rough-clad youth, very dark and very hairy, who stood twisting a moleskin cap in powerful hands while he stared at the grim face behind this threatening pistol with wide eyes very dark and lustrous.

“Don’t ee goo fur to shoot I, Master,” said he in soft, musical tones, “ ’tis friend I be.”

“Well, who the devil are ye?” demanded Jason.

“Wentzelow, I be, sir. My mother was of the Hearn and kin to Sinfia Beshaley, and ’tis she as sends me for to warn ee.”

“Of what, fellow—what?”

“Sojers, Master, horse and foot, as do be a marching south to village for to take ee.”

“Are ye sure o’ this?”

“Ay, for that I sees ’em and Mistress Beshaley sees ’em likewise, and so sends me for to warn ee—”

“How did you know I was hidden hereabouts?”

“I sees the fresh tracks o’ your horse upalong yonder, likewise Ben told me. And Mistress Beshaley do say for ee to goo along o’ me or you’ll be took again so sure as your name be Wayne.”

“And, damme! how comes she to know my name?”

“Lord, Master, Mistress Beshaley be o’ the High Wise Ones and do know summat of everything.”

“Who is she?”

“Chief o’ the Poor Folk, the Wandering People, brother!”

“You mean gipsies?”

“Ay, brother, I do, she be o’ Royal Egypt.”

“And how,” enquired Jason, lowering the pistol, “how shall I know you are true and a friend?”

“Ax Ben Dunkin or Mistress Martha, they knows me and others o’ the Folk. Ben’ll be herealong in a bit, I wakes him as I comes.”

“Wentzelow,” said Jason, beckoning with the pistol, “come you nearer.” The young gipsy stepped forward very readily.

“What now, master?”

“Now look me in the eye, Wentzelow.” For a long moment keen eyes of brown glared into soft eyes of midnight blackness; then Jason pocketed his weapon, saying:

“When will these soldiers reach the village?”

“About noon, Mistress Beshaley do reckon.”

“Art hungry, Wentzelow?”

“Well, Master, I could peck somewhat.”

“Then sit ye down and eat with me,” said Jason, and began to slice the ham. It was now that Mr. Warren chose to appear, fresh from his ablutions and very neat and trim as to person.

“What, Mr. Thomas,” quoth Jason with an airy flourish of knife, “I present to your dignified notice one Wentzelow, a member of—”

“Oh, I heard, sir, I heard!” exclaimed Mr. Warren fretfully, “he warns you to fly and here you sit cutting ham, very fool-like.”

“Nay, Tom, these soldiers shall not be here yet awhile, also, having starved o’ late I would eat whenso I may. Sit you Tom and do likewise.” At this moment they heard a soft, familiar whistle, leaves rustled again and to them Ben came hasting, breathless and anxious.

“So Wentzelow’s found ee . . . told ee o’ the soldiers coming?”

“He has, Ben. He speaks also of a Mistress Beshaley,—what d’ye know of her, Ben?”

“Much and little, Mus’ Jason, for though of the Folk she be likewise o’ the Quality. Mistress Sinfia Beshaley be wonnerful wise and skilled in yarbs, simples and sech, ah, so wise she be that some do name her ‘witch’.”

“Fules!” quoth Wentzelow with his mouth full.

“And what think you, Ben?”

“Well, Mus’ Jason, I don’t nowise prezackly know, only she ha’ been mighty kind to Martha an’ me, cured me o’ the axey las’ winter she did, and give my Martha a charm for to rub on her chest agin her chacketing, and it done her a power o’ good tu, it did.”

“And you advise me to trust to her and Wentzelow?”

“Ay, that I do, Mus’ Jason. If anybody can keep they soldiers from finding of ee ’tis Mistress Beshaley; ye see she can work powerful charms, sir, and likewise cast spells. So as she’ve sent for ee—go to her, Mus’ Jason, and the sooner the better, says I. She’ve likewise sent a hoss for your young gentleman friend, sir.”

“Zounds!” exclaimed Jason, taking himself by the chin. “Damme, Ben, but how the plague should she know of my young gentleman?”

“Why, Mus’ Jason, sir, I—dunno. But these gipsy folk, being strange folk, knows a sight more than most other folk sure-ly,—though it don’t do to let ’em know it.”

“And where is this horse?” For answer Wentzelow rose and was gone in his quick, silent fashion, but was presently back again leading a somewhat ancient and bony steed, at sight of which Mr. Warren, forgetting to eat, opened his grey eyes very wide, exclaiming:

“Why this is my horse, my old Dapple, that was stolen from me yesterday.”

“Hem!” quoth Jason, glancing from the horse to the gipsy, “how say you to this, my lad?”

“Well, Master,” answered Wentzelow, “the cove as thieves him loses him and the Romany chals happens for to find him.”

“Ay and what became o’ the thieving cove?”

“Gets rapped o’ the sconce, Master, and left in the crackmans.”

“And I’m no wiser!” quoth Jason, whereat the young gipsy’s dark face was lit by a smile that came but to vanish as he rose, saying:

“When you’m ready, masters, I be—my li’l gry be out yon.”

“Gry?” enquired Jason.

“Meanin’ ’oss, sir!” Ben explained. “Shall I saddle yourn, Mus’ Jason?”

“Ay do, Ben, and thankee.”

So, when breakfast was done, they mounted and bidding a hearty farewell to anxious-eyed Ben, rode away behind the silent Wentzelow through the sweet freshness of this early morning. They went by lonely, unfrequented ways and at no great speed; and after they had travelled thus some distance, Mr. Warren, who had been riding very pensively, turned and catching his companion’s narrow-eyed furtive regard, instantly twitched his voluminous horseman’s cloak about himself, saying:

“Sir, I begin to wonder where in the world we are going.”

“And I, sir,” answered Jason, “am and have been wondering why you must wear your cloak on such hot day?” Mr. Warren merely glared, whereat Jason took out his snuffbox and inhaled a pinch of his stolen snuff.

"I am also wondering, sir," he continued, "and would ask you again, how youth so tender comes to be roaming the highways alone and to what purpose?"

"Sir," answered Mr. Warren, "it was for sufficiently good reason, let this suffice you."

"Art a very secretive young gentleman!" sighed Jason.

"And yourself a very curious one, Mr. Wayne."

So saying, he urged his horse forward and rode thereafter beside the gipsy youth, while Jason followed behind; now presently, the sun growing hot, Mr. Warren did off his cloak and Jason, riding thus alone and pensive, watched every graceful movement of that shapely back with the same musing, narrow-eyed gaze.

By winding, remote tracks and close forest ways Wentzelow led them, through leafy dells and along devious paths until, about noon, they were descending into a little valley that opened before them in the very heart of these dense woodlands, a very sequestered place where ran a pleasant rill, and, pitched beside this, was a spacious though weather-beaten tent from which there now stepped a woman, such as Jason had never seen.

Tall she was, of commanding presence and a strange, dark beauty, her handsome face framed in smooth night-black hair and lit by great, long-lashed eyes, dark eyes that yet held a light in their depths, a woman young, yet of such noble showing that instinctively Jason bowed to her, hat in hand.

"*Kooshti, divvus!*" said she in soft, rich voice, and with graceful gesture of greeting. "I bids a blessing on ye and fair welcome! You, as flees from cruel death, come ye now and be safe, a while." So they dismounted and, following her into the tent, stood amazed by its luxurious comfort, but forgot this in wonder of the woman who now spoke with speech and tone that matched her nobility of bearing:

"Gentlemen, I pray you to be seated."

"Your humble servant, Madam," said Jason, bowing very ceremoniously. "You are Mrs. Beshaley, I think?"

"I am called so among the Romany folk, sir."

"Well, may I ask why we are here, Mistress Beshaley?"

"Because I am friend to all folk anyways distressed, Mr. Wayne."

"Then, madam, pray know me very truly grateful."

“And me also!” said Mr. Warren, bowing in turn.

“But,” said Jason, “how should you know of me—my name?”

“How not, sir,” she answered, sighing, “how should I not when I have had my people watching the roads so long, ’twixt here and the Scots Border, for one that I have waited so anxiously, and now alas . . . one that I learned but lately is now a prisoner to be dragged to shameful death except I can scheme his freedom . . . as, God aiding, I must and shall. For, oh gentlemen, this poor prisoner is my . . . loved husband.”

“Ha—a Jacobite, madam?” whispered Jason. “Was he also out with Mar . . . rode he with Derwentwater, this hapless lord?”

“And was sore wounded at Sherriffmuir, but escaped with the Earl of Mar, and was carried into France and lay there very sick of his wounds. Three days ago he landed at Seaford, by Newhaven, and yesterday he was captured by the dragoons and to-day they will carry him to London unless I may contrive his freedom. But now for yourselves, sir, so soon as you be refreshed, Wentzelow shall guide you to such refuge as none shall discover.”

“Mrs. Beshaley,” said Jason, rising, “Madam, I’ve no words to thank you . . . that you, despite your present grievous anxieties, can trouble to aid such poor forlorn wretch as myself—ay, and my young friend here—moves me beyond the telling. Now, since my gratitude is above mere words, I can but proffer you my service in this matter of rescue. Madam, if the most absolute resolution can do it, your husband shall be safe with you this night.”

“Good gentleman!” she murmured, folding her long, white hands and looking up at him great-eyed. “But and ay indeed, no thought had I of this.”

“I can well believe it, Mrs. Beshaley. Howbeit I am your devoted servant in this business.”

“Then, Mr. Wayne, I shall now tell you my husband was your friend . . . in Scotland.”

“Friend?” quoth Jason, taking himself by the chin. “Alas, madam, I know no gentleman named Beshaley.”

“This is how they call me in the Romany, Mr. Wayne; my husband’s name is Gervas Calverly, of Thorpe Calverly, in the North.”

“Zounds!” exclaimed Jason. “Now God bless your ladyship. I know Sir Gervas well, he rode and fought beside me at Sherriffmuir until our line broke! I rejoice to know he lives, for I heard he was killed—”

“Killed!” she repeated in awful whisper and closed her eyes, while her long white hands clasped and wrung each other. “Killed? no no, he is alive, I know he lives . . . I feel it! And yet . . . the bloody *dukkerin* . . . thrice—” the whispering voice broke and the words it uttered were no longer English but a speech very soft and strange.

“Nay now,” quoth Jason glancing from this woeful figure round about him very helplessly, “I pray you, madam, be comforted, I beg!”

The luminous eyes opened, the stately head was lifted and she looked at him with a smile sadder than tears.

“Alas, Mr. Wayne,” she sighed, “we of the Romany may sometimes see and know that which is to be . . . and I have beheld that which warns me of bitter loss . . . a joyless future—”

“Never think so, my lady!” said Jason. “At sunset I ride to do all that a man may in your husband’s behalf—”

“And I also!” said Mr. Warren.

“God love me!” exclaimed Jason, turning to eye him in sudden dismay, “I had clean forgot the lad!”

“And your manners also, sir!” retorted Mr. Warren.

“Howbeit,” answered Jason, frowning, “you’ll bide here, boy—”

“Indeed, sir, and what shall stay me?”

“Myself, lad, ay, if I have to tie ye hand and foot—”

“At your peril, Mr. Wayne!”

“Tut, tut, Mr. Warren! Touch not that so ready sword o’ thine in lady’s presence,—yet sword or no, thou peevish lad, shalt run no such fool chances whiles thou’rt with me.”

“Being my own master, now as ever, Mr. Wayne, I shall do and say and act how I will.”

“Then needs must I shackle the arms and legs o’ thee when needful
_____”

“Be silent, sir!” Now as they faced each other, Mr. Warren flushed and indignant, Jason grimly sardonic, their hostess interposed gently, saying:

“Young gentleman, pray walk aside with me!” Scowling on Jason, the indignant young gentleman bowed, and with their hostess beside him went

forth into the sunset glow while Jason stared after them chin in hand; he heard the soft murmur of their voices in question and answer, saw Mr. Warren start and stop suddenly to gaze on his stately companion wide-eyed and thereafter walk on again, talking faster than ever, until they were hidden amid the leafage. Then forth stepped Jason and halted at sight of a tall man whose bull neck, long arms and mighty spread of shoulder were in themselves a warning, and yet this giant's face showed mild and kindly.

"Sir," said he, touching cap with the ponderous knotted staff he bore, "be Mistress Beshaley in yon—no, I sees she aren't!" Glancing whither the man looked, Jason saw Mrs. Beshaley moving towards them, still leaning on Mr. Warren's arm in close, murmurous talk.

"Good Jockabed!" said she, saluting the tall man with gesture of white hand. "You be well to time. Gentlemen, this is Jockabed Chikno, a great wrestler, and strongest of all the Romany folk. Jockabed, know these for my friends and therefore yours."

"Ay, Mistress."

"How many of the Folk are with ye?"

"Twenty and four, Mistress."

"You've told them what must be done?"

"Ay, I have sure-ly mam. They be's a-waiting in glade yonder."

"Then I'll go speak with them."

Treading lightly, for all his great size, the man Jockabed led them into the denser wood and so to a glade where the company was gathered, dark complexioned men of all ages and conditions, yet each with sleek pony or well-groomed horse; bright-eyed, quick-moving fellows muttering in strange dialect but who, beholding Mrs. Beshaley, bared their heads or touched hats and were dumb; whereupon she, lifting hand in greeting, spoke them in the same strange tongue. Then, gesturing suddenly towards Jason, said she, speaking now in English:

"Look ye, this gentleman, this *gorgio rye* goeth with us. Look well on him that ye know him again for he, like my noble husband, is friend to the Romany Chals. . . . Now eat ye, for half an hour after sunset we ride."

"My lady," said Jason as they turned back together, but she stopped him with graceful gesture:

"Nay, Mr. Wayne, here among my people I am Sinfia Beshaley."

“Why then, madam, may I enquire how you propose to accomplish this rescue?”

“Without bloodshed, I hope,” she answered gently, “so I must ask you to leave your sword and pistols behind.”

“Zounds, madam!” exclaimed Jason, taking himself by the chin. “Must I then go all unarmed?”

“Jockabed shall find you a cudgel, sir.”

“Hum!” quoth he dubiously. “Sir Gervas will be well guarded, I judge.”

“Indeed, sir, by ten soldiers and a corporal.”

“’Tis strongish escort! Art sure o’ this, madam?”

“I saw and counted them myself. To-night they will lie in Horsham, at the ‘King’s Head’, and to-night I shall go a fortune telling.”

“What—you, Mrs. Beshaley?”

“Myself, Mr. Wayne. Soldiers, like sailormen, are greatly superstitious, also they are forever thirsty, and the ale they shall drink to-night at the ‘King’s Head’ shall be exceeding potent—”

“What drugs?” quoth Jason, laughing softly. “Now this promises well.”

“Also, lying with them at the Inn are two of my own people to watch and aid how they may.”

“Faith now, this should achieve!” he nodded. “But as to my companion now, Mr. Warren, he is so young I would have him take no least risk—”

“And you are wise, sir. Mr. Warren hath promised he will take no part.”

“’Tis a something headstrong youth, madam, and wilful.”

“Mr. Wayne, you met each other very recently, he tells me.”

“Precisely, madam.”

“And pray what is your further estimation of him?”

Jason took out his snuffbox and tapped it thoughtfully while Mrs. Beshaley watched his lean, grim visage with her wonderful eyes that, looking deep, saw so much. “Well, Mr. Wayne?”

“Why, ’tis a comely youth, Mrs. Beshaley, yet over prone to instant quarrel, a truculent young gentleman and bloodthirsty.”

“As when he disarmed you, Mr. Wayne.”

“So he told you o’ this, boasted and bragged on’t did he, madam?”

“Why we have talked together, sir, and he is no boaster, Mr. Wayne.”

“Well, he was through my guard and pricked me i’ the arm afore I guessed such tender-seeming innocent knew one end o’ sword from t’other.”

“Indeed, Mr. Wayne, being so young he is in some sort very truly innocent, and, sir, so long as you company together I believe you will study to keep him so.” Now meeting the look in these eloquent eyes, Jason smiled, took off his hat and bowed.

“Mrs. Beshaley,” said he, gravely, “your belief honours me! I’faith, dear lady, I’m no wolf to rend and devour; this lamb shall go safe until we part.”

“And now,” said she, smiling in her slow, sad fashion, “I must to work, go you to the tent, Mr. Wayne, you shall find supper and Mr. Warren, nor wait for me.”

Returning to the tent Jason beheld a table set out with such luxury of fine linen, glass and silver as he (poor fugitive) had not seen this many a day and, seated at the table in solitary state, Mr. Warren, who glanced at him askance and sullen-eyed, wherefore Jason favoured him with elaborate bow and flourish of hat.

“The question being,” said he, seating himself before the tempting viands, “I repeat, Mr. Warren, sir, the problem being whether a meek lamb, having teeth and therefore the wherewithal, can bite? How think you, sir?”

Mr. Warren showed merely frowning and disdainful.

“I have but now,” continued Jason, helping himself to slice of juicy beef, “been in close confabulation with Mrs. Beshaley. She has surprised me!” Mr. Warren’s busy knife and fork were suddenly stilled and in his quick side glance was something very like anxious apprehension. “Mrs. Beshaley tells me, Mr. Warren, that you have promised to take no active part in to-night’s doing, the which, sir, is great relief to my anxieties. May I trouble you to pass the sallet, sir.” Speechless still, Mr. Warren did so, and for a while they ate in silence, but presently:

“Mr. Warren,” said Jason, setting down silver tankard, “this is most excellent ale,—old ale, sir, very strong, very nutty, extreme potent and heartsome—permit me to charge your tankard which I see is empty.”

“Thank you, I prefer water.”

“Astounding, Mr. Warren, and yourself such fire-eater! And yet to be sure such extreme youthful bravo that I would venture to ask once again how you came to be roving the country hereabouts.”

“And I will again answer you, Mr. Wayne,—to very good purpose.”

“Which brings us, Mr. Warren, to the second vexed question, to wit—how did you, roving to such excellent purpose, find your way into my cave?”

“I tell you once again, sir, by merest chance.”

“And this, Mr. Warren,” said Jason gazing down into his depleted tankard, “this is also astounding.”

“Then, sir,” answered Mr. Warren haughtily, “I suggest you drown your astonishment in your ale.”

“’Tis excellent suggestion, sir, I will. Yet first I would venture on this third question, namely, what do you propose to do with yourself?”

“This is my own business, Mr. Wayne.”

“Precisely, Mr. Warren, and I grow anxious lest you make sad botch of it.”

“I suggest you save your anxieties for yourself, sir.”

Here a maid entered, bearing candles, for it was growing dark; scarce was she gone than up rose Mr. Warren and running hastily to the tent door peered out into the sunset glow, for, from somewhere nearby, was sound of horses and men.

“Ay, we shall be up and away, soon!” quoth Jason. Then back strode Mr. Warren, his face showing pale in the candlelight.

“And you,” said he, pausing before Jason, “how can you sit there guzzling ale at such time?”

“Mr. Warren, sir, I can. And, ’stead of the word ‘guzzle’ may I humbly suggest ‘quaff’, sir?”

“In an hour or so you may be dead or—recaptured.”

“Nay dead, sir, dead!” quoth Jason grimly. “They shall never again take me alive to their foul butchery. Therefore, sir, I quaff ale whiles I may, and with the more reason.” Even as he spoke, Mr. Warren started and turned sharply as in to them from the glimmering dusk crept an old woman, a bent and wrinkled crone who now stood leaning upon a stick to peer up at them

with red-rimmed eyes, a look so wistful and pleading that up rose Jason, saying in his kindest voice:

“How now, grandmother, what would you?”

“Oh, my noble gorgio gem’man,” she answered in husky, mumbling accents, “shall old Hepzibah pen your dukkerin?” Then, even as Jason stared, the wrinkled old face smiled, the bowed form straightened and this whimpering, pitiful beldam was transfigured into the stately Mrs. Beshaley:

“Come, sirs,” said she, “*it is time!*”

CHAPTER IX

WHAT BEFELL AT THE 'KING'S HEAD'

The moon was just peeping above the horizon when they came where they might see, beyond the loom of ancient church, the chimneys and gabled roofs of old Horsham town. In the dimness before them flowed a little river, a murmurous stream crossed by a narrow bridge. Here Mrs. Beshaley reined up her horse and while all sat silent in their saddles, called softly in her smoothly resonant voice:

“Hezekiah!”

Amid the shadows beyond the bridge a vague shape moved, and to them on soundless feet came one clad as a drover.

“Is all well, Hezekiah?”

“Ay, mistress, town be asleep, and they sojers a snoring like s’many ’ogs, Mistus, ’cept one as wouldn’t nowise drink no ale and one as couldn’t by reason of his bowels being—”

“And the prisoner?”

“Laying in a stable, Mistus, and guarded by them two as be’s awake.”

“Is he fettered?”

“No’m, but trussed wi’ rope mighty secure.” Mrs. Beshaley dismounted, as did all the company.

“Mr. Warren,” said she softly, “you and Wentzelow will bide here with the horses. Mr. Wayne, yourself and Jockabed will go beside me, ye others follow and do as I said, and let there be no killing lest evil befall our folk—come ye!”

Jason had done off his spurs and now away they went, a company of shadows, and moving as silently. Past hoary church and along a pleasant, silent way in the middle of which grew sturdy trees, through a massive arch into the narrow street very silent and still, and then before them rose the ancient hostel called the ‘King’s Head’, this goodly inn whose gabled roof and massive walls had sheltered victorious Royalty back from the glory of Agincourt; but just now its many latticed windows showed all dark, its hospitable doors close barred, itself seeming to slumber as any honest inn should at such hour.

But all about it stealthy shapes came creeping, they were at every lower casement and every door, they were moving silently in the stable-yard.

“This way!” breathed a voice, and Jason followed, and with him the loom of Jockabed’s great body. Then a light beamed suddenly from the dark lanthorn in Mrs. Beshaley’s hand, a light that vanished again as suddenly; but Jason had glimpsed the pale, pitiful form of him that lay fast bound hand and foot and, coming thither, was on his knees and busied with his knife. And as he wrought thus, fumbling in desperate haste, the light beamed again and he saw eyes wide and dark in the pallor of a pale, thin face, heard a voice that stammered breathless enquiry, and Jason whispered cheerily as he hacked at the prisoner’s many bonds:

“What, Gervas man, all’s well . . . thy valiant wife is here . . . here’s rescue. . . .”

“Wife . . . my wife?” stammered the weak voice. “Rescue . . . for a dying man . . . too late. . . .”

“Now up with thee, Gervas . . . come, my arm!”

“Nay . . . I’m done . . . but you . . . do I know you?”

“Ay, In Scotland. I’m Jason Wayne. Up now . . . your arm about my neck so!” Saying which, Jason hove the sick man to his feet, but checked to sudden hubbub, distant as yet, and yet too near: then Mrs. Beshaley was beside them, her soft voice low and resolute as ever:

“Gervas . . . dear love, come now, summon thy strength—come!”

They reached the stable-yard, no longer dark, and Jason, guiding the sick man’s feeble steps, whispered bitter curses on the rising moon; then from an upper window came a man’s head, a hand and arm, a pistol flashed and Jason reeled, but steadied himself. Then from across the yard someone shouted hoarsely, a musket flamed and roared and Sir Gervas, sighing plaintively, slipped to his knees, but Jason’s arm was strong about this yielding form, bearing it up, hoisting it to his shoulder; came another fierce shout, a hurry of feet, and Jason was borne down, gasping to the sharp agony of goring bayonet and, lying thus helpless, saw a grim face above him, white cross-belts, red-clad arms upraised for finishing stroke, but the blow was turned aside, his failing eyes glimpsed Mr. Warren’s young, pallid face, saw his soldier assailant caught up in Jockabed’s mighty arms and, striving to cheer, Jason groaned instead and sank into a restful darkness.

CHAPTER X

WHICH IS A SOMEWHAT WORDY CHAPTER

Jason saw the moon above him large and so very bright that it dazzled him; then he became increasingly aware of pain and a sick weakness and thereafter, little by little, he roused to the knowledge that his head was pillowed on Mr. Warren's breast and that Mr. Warren's arms cradled him.

Now because his head ached and his mind was so confused, he closed his eyes again.

Something splashed down upon his burning forehead, and troubling to glance up, he saw Mr. Warren's eyes were shut and that upon the long lashes of one, the right,—no, the left, hung a great, glistening, unmistakable tear, that sparkled like any jewel ere it fell upon his hot cheek.

Once more Jason closed his eyes and despite the throbbing smart in his shoulder, lay in strange, dreamy content, pondering now upon this tear-drop and the soft, slow-heaving pillow that supported his languid head.

At last he spoke, and wondered vaguely to hear his voice so faint, and find speech such effort:

“Mr. Warren . . . my . . . dear soul, why . . . d’ye weep?”

The tearful eyes, opening suddenly, looked down on him in glad surprise, these cherishing arms held him closer, and Mr. Warren's voice matched his look for gentleness as he answered:

“You seemed like one at point of death . . . and the night so long . . . and I so helpless . . . and death all about us.”

“Death—ha, this minds me! What of Sir Gervas . . . they shot him, I think . . . what o’ poor Gervas?”

“He died in his noble lady's arms, sir.”

“Well, so end all his troubles and dangers!” sighed Jason. “And there was sweet dying. God send mine be half as kindly.”

“Can death be sweet or kindly?”

“Ay, surely! The bullet that took Gervas was kinder than bowelling knife and headsman's axe. . . . As for myself now, I remember a soldier made a push at me with his bayonet.”

“And cut you in the shoulder, Mr. Wayne.”

“Indeed,” sighed Jason. “I am sufficiently aware of it.”

“And would have killed you.”

“Ay faith a . . . very zealous fellow and right soldier, he should be promoted. And it was you . . . crossed him in his duty!”

“Mr. Wayne, I tell you again, he would have killed you without mercy.”

“Such being his duty!” groaned Jason. “But your sword parried his steel . . . so should I be humbly grateful, yet am not—”

“Mr. Wayne, I’ll have none of your gratitude—”

“Very true, Mr. Warren, for you denied me a death clean and swift, for chance of one . . . much the reverse. Howbeit my . . . life is yours.”

“I have no wish nor use for your life, Mr. Wayne.”

“And small wonder, Mr. Warren, for God knoweth ’tis poorest thing; I’d fain die like Gervas and so be rid on’t.”

“Mr. Wayne, I begin to think you are very far from dying.”

“Why, then, why must you weep all over me?” gasped Jason, wincing to the pain of his wound. “And . . . moreover . . . why must you . . . be bosomed so . . . extreme un-manlike? Why, Mr. Warren . . . sir, and . . . wherefore?”

The bosom, thus mentioned, swelled high, was still for a long moment and sank again, whereupon Jason sighed, murmuring:

“Ah, Mr. Warren, now am I very . . . supremely blest, and . . . thankful to have known . . . ere I pass . . . such tender-sweet pillow as this!”

Here ensued a silence, but this same pillow so tempestuous that Jason, nestling closer there, spoke again still sighful and now very plaintive because the arms cradled him no longer.

“Alack now and are these woman’s arms too coy to fold a man betwixt ’em,” he questioned, “even such stricken wretch as I. . . . Wilt not even speak? Not even a word now for poor Jason?”

“What shall I say?”

“First thy woman’s name. Because I have discovered thee . . . and because I lie here so extreme helpless, so faint and languishing, pray be so bold to tell me thy name.”

“Honoriam.”

“A pretty name!” he sighed. “Nay, I vow ’tis better. . . . Honoriam is noble name . . . yet hath a glamour.”

“Oh, Mr. Wayne,” she murmured, “your kind approbation touches me profoundly!”

Here, turning himself the better to look up at her, he blanched with the sharp pain of it, and stifled a groan, whereat the face he had striven to see was now downbent to his and she questioned him in a tender anxiety:

“Are you in such pain?”

“It . . . is not . . . unbearable,” he gasped, and closing his eyes groaned louder, nor in vain, for instantly her arms crept about him again.

“Honoriam,” he murmured, “pray where are we?”

“Somewhere in the forest. The man Jockabed bore you here in his arms, and sped away to bring help.”

“A lusty, stout fellow!”

“Indeed, Mr. Wayne, he carried you as you had been a little baby.”

“And here lie I,” murmured Jason, “cuddled to your bosom like any babe and as helpless, alas!”

“So I would to heaven he were back again!” said Honoriam very fervently.

“Meantime,” growled Jason, “I must needs lie here weak as any kitten, mild as dove and harmless as a lamb in a gentlewoman’s arms, plaguing my head for wonder that this same gentlewoman can masquerade thus boldly as a man. Tell me, Honoriam,—madam, why the breeches?”

“Sir,” she retorted, “you were wiser to sleep rather than plaguing me with your questions to no purpose.”

“Sleep?” he repeated pettishly. “And how the devil may I sleep in such cursed plight and now—ha, now burdened with this anxiety that is yourself? Madam, you are responsibility I’ll not endure. ’Twas bad enough when I thought you truant fool-boy to be shielded from . . . the consequences o’ your folly but . . . being a woman you are . . . impossible, and Death on the heels o’ me! So, Mistress Warren, Honoriam, child, leave me, back with you to home and sanity and so—farewell.”

“And thus am I dismissed!” said she, nodding down at him.

“Call it rather the parting of chance acquaintances,” he sighed, “only take that woman’s body into safety—go!”

“And leave you here alone and hurt.”

“Well, I’m used to such!” he snarled. “I’m a lonely man! I must be,—ay, faith, I hanker for solitude and my own company! His cares are lessened who rides alone—”

“Mr. Wayne,” said Honoria with her air of serene finality, “you are talking very fool-like.”

“And so Good night, madam!” he retorted. “Farewell, and heaven prosper you . . . up now and away with you! My cloak yonder shall make me pillow more restful than thy—”

“Be it so, ungrateful man!” said she, and, with a gentle ease, laid him comfortably as might be; then, leaning back against the tree behind, she crossed shapely legs, folded her arms and gazed down on him, chin out-thrust and slim brows close-knit.

“Well, Mr. Wayne,” she demanded, “seem I not sufficiently male and mannish to pass muster?”

“Ay . . . somewhat!” he answered sullenly. “But, damme, will you do as I bid and leave me—?”

“Curse me—no!” she exclaimed, mouthing the word. “Not I, sir.”

Now seeing how he clenched fists and scowled at her in his impotence, she gazed up at the moon; but hearing how he fumed and muttered fierce imprecations on his helplessness, she began to hum and then to whistle softly though very cheerfully; but presently she glanced down and askance at him to demand:

“Well, Mr. Wayne, seem I so very womanish now, sir?”

“Yet Madam Beshaley was not cheated!” he sneered.

“But then, sir, Mistress Beshaley is herself a woman and indeed a truly wise one—”

“And thou’rt a mere fool!” he cried angrily; “a vain, silly wench and random hoyden to so adventure thyself . . . for whereso I go is and must be chance of shameful peril to thee, girl! You know this!” he gasped, viewing her wild-eyed. “Ay, you know it . . . and the roads athrong with soldiery and worse,—so be warned! Your sex is a lure to all and any vile roguery, and

therefore a . . . menace to yourself. . . . So be warned and leave me! Ha, must I . . . be plainer?"

"No, Mr. Wayne, being very old for my years I apprehend you quite sufficiently well. So if you will talk, sir, let it be of other matters,—tell me just how you yourself discovered me . . . how and when."

"Tush!" he growled. "'Twas when we slept in a cave years ago."

"Last night, sir!"

"Nay, we have lived ages since then."

"And how, pray how did I betray myself," she questioned, gazing up at the moon again.

"It was Nature discovered you in your sleep, for, though you showed as dainty young fellow, there were evidences to the contrary, such very manifest evidences on close inspection as—to be precise—"

"Enough, sir!"

"Why so there were!" said he chuckling faintly. "For as I viewed thee in thy pretty slumbering, these same evidences—"

"Oh hush!" cried Honoria angrily.

"Will you leave me, woman, will you begone?"

"No!"

"Then hear now what beauties feminine yon same tender moon betrayed to my raptured—" Down upon his lips came a hand, slender yet compelling, so that, having mumbled a while, he fell mute.

"Fie on you, Mr. Wayne," she exclaimed, "to waste your breath on such needless detail."

"And shame on you," he retorted, "to so use a helpless man!"

Then they were both dumb, and each listening with a painful intentness, for the woods about them seemed full of vague and stealthy movement.

Reaching swiftly into the shadow behind her, Honoria took thence one of Jason's stolen pistols.

"Lord!" he whispered. "Now she'll be shooting herself—"

"Sir," she hissed back at him as she cocked the weapon, "if this carry true I'll snuff you a candle at ten paces—"

“Horses!” he whispered. “And coming this way!”

Honorio rose with that same easy grace he had noted before, and stood peering, wide-eyed, pale yet resolute; then she sighed with mighty relief, and uncocked the pistol as towards them through the leafy shadows rode mighty Jockabed with young Wentzelow, each leading a horse.

“How be’s he now, young master?” enquired Jockabed, reining in his animal to peer down at Jason, who lifted his hand in greeting, answering cheerily:

“Well enough, comrade, thanks to you.”

“Well now this be famous, brother, famous!” quoth Jockabed dismounting.

“And I’m grateful, comrade.”

“But, sir, ’twere young master here as turned yon sojer’s bagnet and likewise tied up and staunched your bleeding. And us ha’ brought your hoss sir, can ee ride?”

“Ay, well enough, good fellow, once I’m mounted.”

“Why, then, easy does it, brother, easy now!” So saying, the gigantic gipsy stooped and, lifting Jason very tenderly, hove him lightly into the saddle.

“How are you now?” enquired Honorio.

“I shall do, Tom, I shall do!” he answered through shut teeth, as he settled feet in stirrups and took the reins in his one hand. “Come, let us go!”

Thus presently they set out on this ride that was for Jason growing weariness and pain, though they went at leisured amble, and with seldom a word between them. But after they had travelled thus some distance, Jockabed, riding beside Jason, for they were traversing a broad, moonlit glade, sighed gustily and spoke:

“Ecod now, here be pretty kettle o’ fish, my masters! And all along o’ men not taking kindly to the good ale. For if them two sojers had only took and drank their ale like men, ah and like their comrades did,—but no, dammem! Con-sequently here be Mistress Sinfia’s noble wedded lord dead and your honour wi’ a bagnet through your shoulder—all along o’ they two dam sojers not a guzzling the good ale as sojers did ought and is nat’rally expected so for to do!”

“Which same good ale was drugged, eh, comrade?”

“Ay, brother, ’twere dooked sure-ly,—jest enough for to make a man snooze awhile, no more. But to think as they two sojers, being sojers, couldn’t nor wouldn’t nowise drink like sojers, be enough to make a honest man vomit, brother.”

“Agreed!” sighed Jason, wearily. “Pray did Mrs. Beshaley get safe away?”

“Her did, brother, and likewise all t’others on us.”

“And nobody hurt?”

“Nary a soul save yourself, sir, and the sojer as stabbed ee; I fetched he a clout as stretched he, brother. Which was only nat’ral-like for me so to do, eh, master—agreed?”

“Heartily, Jockabed. Though for sure the fellow did but his duty.”

“True, brother. He did his dooty by blooding ee wi’ his bagnet and I done my dooty by rapping he on the sponce wi’ my baston. Ah, but how much better if he’d took his ale like sojers should, eh, brother?”

“Yes, faith!” gasped Jason, wincing to the agony in his shoulder.

“Pains ee do it, sir? Shall us stop a bit?”

“No no. I’m well enough! Push on!”

“And what says you, young gentleman?”

“Stop!” answered Honoria. “I say stop, Jason, that I may tighten your bandages.”

“And I say no! I’m very well. Ride on—” Even as he spoke, the brooding quiet of this warm, stilly night was troubled by a sound faint with distance yet dreadfully ominous, the throbbing roll of drums.

“There!” cried Jason, a little wildly. “Did ye hear,—did ye hear?”

“Ay, brother, the sojers’ll be a mustering for to search the country hereabouts—”

“Well let us ride . . . ride, I say!” gasped Jason. “Let us spur . . . ay,—but whither o’ God’s name?”

“Into the wesh, brother, the true heart o’ the forest where no one don’t never come save hunted men and the likes o’ we as be Romany—”

“And lookie pal,” quoth the taciturn Wentzelow, “some o’ they sojers be dragoons wi’ horses, so the sooner us be gotten to Mistus Sinfia the better,

thinks I.”

“True for ee, lad!” quoth Jockabed. “Ride then!” and he set his horse to faster gait.

On they rode through broad forest glades bright with splendour of moonlight, along narrow tracks and dark, leafy ways, on and on until the moon was low and Jason so faint and spent that more than once he reeled in the saddle and would have fallen but for Honoria’s ready aid or Jockabed’s mighty arm.

The moon was down at last and they riding in the dense gloom of trees and thickets when Jason’s failing eyes descried three points of light that made a rosy glimmering dusk . . . and presently he saw these for three torches that lighted an open grave, and beside this grave, looking down into it with great, tearless eyes, he beheld Mistress Sinfia Beshaley backed by the dim figures of her gipsy company.

Then Jason rode towards this desolate figure and took off his hat.

“Comfort you, madam!” said he between stiffening lips, “Noble lady, he is risen up beyond all pain . . . and sorrow. Think on this and take comfort . . . indeed, dying is . . . none so bad—” The words ended in quivering sigh, he swayed suddenly, caught at his horse’s mane with hands too feeble; then leapt tall Jockabed to catch him in long arms, saying:

“Looke now, Mistress Sinfia, here be another us’ll be a-burying of, except ee can do summat, I reckon.”

Mrs. Beshaley turned from the dead to look upon the dying.

“Nay,” said she, “have him into my tent, Jockabed and bid them bring me water that hath boiled.”

And so, glancing from where they were now filling in the grave, she sighed and went to battle with Death yet again.

CHAPTER XI

WHICH IS A SHORT CHAPTER OF NO SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

“Madam, will he live?”

“Child,” answered Mistress Beshaley, washing Jason’s blood from her so capable hands, “such men as he die not so easily. Young Squire Wayne cometh of sturdy ancestry, also his wound is nowise dangerous and shall soon heal an it be well cared for.”

“Then oh, Madam, dear lady,” cried Honoria on warm impulse, “we are greatly beholden to you . . . indeed you are very wonderful, I think.”

“Nay, child, a creature very sad and lonely, I! And I’m no lady, all this . . . my happiness and hope of children, lies buried with my husband out yonder. Henceforth I am Sinfia Beshaley, the Gipsy woman, a Romany of the Romanys again, to live with my people in the wild, ay and for them likewise . . . roving . . . roving ever like the wind, and yet to better purpose. But of yourself now, young gentlewoman—”

“Oh pray call me Honoria. For indeed my friends be very few and not one so strangely wise or gently kind as yourself, Sinfia . . . you that can put by your own bitter sorrow to aid and comfort such strangers as we.”

“Why truly, child, whoso shareth another’s burden easeth their own griefs awhile. So you, Honoria, can forget your own weariness for sake of others. And this is well, for by dawn we must be many miles hence, where you—” She paused to the sound of voices outside, the one hoarse and pleading, the other high and imperious.

Then into the tent strode Jason with the gigantic Jockabed on his heels. And Jason was booted and cloaked for travel, and though his face showed frightfully pale against the long curls of his black peruke, his eyes were bright and purposeful, his mouth and chin at their very grimmest, as, hat in hand, he bowed to them as best he might.

“Mrs. Beshaley,” said he, lightly, “thanks to your arts surgical I find myself sufficiently recovered to continue my journey and rid you of my perilous company.”

“Mr. Wayne,” answered Sinfia in her smooth, rich voice, “the soldiers are mustering to beat and search this forest country.”

"I know it, madam. I've heard their cursed drums, and so it is I'll off and away. I must not chance their finding me among your good folk."

"Nor shall you, sir—"

"Nay this I'll warrant me, lady, for ere dawn I shall be at the coast, Seaford or Newhaven."

"Mr. Wayne, you will never get so far."

"Well, no matter, madam, so I ride alone—ha, and there it is—alone! Madam, my gratitude to you is already far beyond my poor expression, yet I am here to crave one other favour in regard to this young"—here he paused to glance at the silent Jockabed—"this young gentleman, Mistress Beshaley, I beseech, I beg you to keep him safe with you . . . hold him, ay by force if needful, only see, I do entreat you,—see that he doth not follow me."

"Nay, sir," said Honoria, rising, "I shall not follow, I shall go beside you."

"By God, but you shall not!"

"By heavens but I shall!" she retorted, turning where lay her cloak, hat and sword,—then Jason leaped; she saw the pistol-butt upraised to strike her down, saw it waver and fall from his failing grasp, saw him stagger and then he was in her arms, his breathless whispering in her ear:

". . . To break thy . . . pretty head . . . better than death. For—ha, don't y' see . . . I should lead you to . . . death most like . . . to death or . . . worse. . . ."

Then he was huddled in chair, gazing up at them both in troublous dismay.

"Confound me!" he exclaimed bitterly. "But I am weaker than I supposed."

"You are but human, Mr. Wayne," said Sinfia touching his haggard brow and drooping wrist.

"So very human, sir," said Honoria, shaking head at him, "so human that you would have broken my poor head."

"Ay, I would indeed!" sighed he, wearily. "To save you from worse harms. . . . And now, Mrs. Beshaley, if your strong Jockabed will aid me to my horse I'll go my way—"

“Why so we will, sir,” answered Sinfia gently; “in but little while we shall all be gone . . . all save my sleeper that lieth out yonder waiting there . . . waiting for the Great Awaking. Come then! Jockabed, aid you Mr. Wayne.”

Hardly were they outside than came silent, quick-moving fellows to dismantle and strike the tent, packing it and its furniture on sumpter horses that stood ready, and all very swiftly and scarce a word.

Suddenly into the torch glare rode a horseman white with dust who, pointing backward with fierce gestures, spoke Sinfia in the gipsy dialect; and when he had done, she raised her arms and turning to these dark and silent men of her own following, spoke them in the same strange tongue. She pointed to that new grave now hard to be seen for the sod had been replaced, she pointed to Honoria, to Jason and lastly to herself, then threw wide her arms with gracious yet commanding gesture.

And presently, by ones and twos, these men and horses merged into the shadowy underwoods until, of them all, there remained only tall Jockabed and silent young Wentzelow.

And now, with her sombre gaze turned toward that grave which, close hidden beneath dewy grass and falling leaves, was so soon to vanish from all human knowledge, she spoke in her soft, untroubled voice:

“Mr. Wayne, I have news that a company of dragoons is riding ’twixt us and the sea to patrol the coast from Birling Gap to Newhaven and beyond. Also foot soldiers are mustered at Guildford and Horsham to search these forests from end to end so soon as it be light. . . . But yonder lieth one, very peaceful now, one they shall never find. . . . And here is yourself that I must see safe hid ere dawn. . . . So . . . Wentzelow bring hither the gryns.”

And soon, being mounted all five, they followed very silently whither Sinfia Beshaley led.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THEY CAME TO HAVEN OF REFUGE

Dawn was breaking and every leafy dell and dingle abrim with wreathing, pearly mist that struck chill to Jason's pain-racked senses and made the world a place of creeping phantoms to his weary eyes. Down into this ghostly mist they rode, silent themselves as so many spectres, down and on until before them showed a jagged outline of ruined walls with, above and beyond, the vague loom of bush-girt eminence; on amid dim-seen brush-wood and fallen masonry Sinfia led them, through dewy bracken, past trees gnarled and misshapen, and so at last beneath a deep arch flanked by age-old ivied walls. Then they rode across smooth turf until Sinfia stopped in a shadowy angle of these ancient walls where ivy grew very thick; fumbling amid these dense leaves she drew forth a stout cord whereat she pulled three times and once, and from some profundity beneath them a bell tolled, faintly sweet.

And after some little time the leaves in this corner stirred and Mistress Sinfia spoke, soft-voiced:

"It is I, good friend, Sinfia Beshaley."

Forth into the waxing daylight stepped a quick, small, bright-eyed person wrapped in a black riding-cloak, on his close-cropped wigless head a pointed night-cap, on his feet furred slippers, in his hand a great horse-pistol, the which he instantly hid within his cloak.

"*Kooshli divvus, prala Robin!*" said Sinfia, lifting hand in salutation.

"Mistress Beshaley—God bless you!" he answered blinking and smiling up at her very benevolently. "What's amiss, ma'm, and how may I serve ye?"

"By giving sanctuary to these gentlemen, my friends, until they can win away to France."

"Oh, ma'm, with all my heart!" quoth he, cocking bright eye first at weary Jason, then at Honoria. "Are these also fugitive and outcast in a cruel world, Mistress Sinfia? Is it the High Toby lay, ma'm? Is it damned Jonathan Wild again and his constables, with a curse on 'em?"

“Nay, Master Rob, this is Mr. Wayne, a wounded Jacobite gentleman the soldiers be hunting to his death,—and this his friend, Mr. Warren. Gentlemen, here is Master Rob, called also the Galloping Parson.” Now hearing this dread name Honoria forgot her drowsiness to stare down at this little personage in his ridiculous night-cap and velvet cloak, with eyes of disbelief, while he, meeting her look, sighed and shook his head very gloomily.

“Ah, young gentleman,” quoth he, “I perceive you have heard tell of me.”

“Nay, sir,” she answered, “the Galloping Parson I’ve heard on is a bloodthirsty monster, a ferocious malefactor for ever killing and maiming all such as anyways dare him.”

“Myself, young sir, myself, alas!” answered the little personage, sighing more dismally than ever. “I call myself Robin or Rob for that rob I do. And I rob that I may eat, and kill lest I be killed, eating and living thus to the one great purpose, namely and to wit, sir, that I may fulfil the destiny laid on me by cruel circumstance, as the instrument of a holy vengeance for the Innocent Blood. Yea, verily, I am him they name the Galloping Parson, gentlemen, and your very humble obedient servant to command, for Mistress Sinfia’s friends are mine, and, moreover, being hunted by German George’s redcoats, dammem, ye are doubly welcome!”

“Nay . . . nay but . . .” faltered Honoria, and then hushed to the reassuring pressure of Sinfia’s hand, who now spoke in her calm, leisured voice:

“Therefore, Master Robin, I ask that you shield and cherish these my friends here in your safe harbourage until I come again or send you word.”

“As God’s my life, lady, this will I!” he answered fervently. “For was ’t not yourself first showed me this haven of salvation and myself at point o’ death . . . binding up my grievous hurts, pouring oil and wine like blessed female Samaritan? Ah, Madam Sinfia there’s never night passeth but upon my knees I humbly implore God’s blessing on thee! As to these your friends I say again be welcome, gentlemen, you shall find me yours most humbly, for, though I am become an Instrument o’ Vengeance, dealing out death whenso I must, yet in my soul I am lowly and meek, a creature o’ gentleness, a man o’ my word and friend to all distressed. For what’s bred in the bone must out, and I, sirs, was bred to the Church, and so ’tis they call me Parson. . . . But, sir,” said he, cocking bright eye at Jason’s drooping form, “your wound troubles you, I see.”

“And my poor young friend, Mr. Warren, yearns for bed and sleep, I’ll warrant,” answered Jason.

“Which reminds me,” said the Parson, turning to Mrs. Beshaley, “James Ahearn tells me that during my absence last night, divers of your folk, ma’m, brought here a feather bed with other furniture; was you thinking of biding here a night or so, ma’m?”

“Nay, Master Robin, this was for Mr. Warren here. There is the little chamber I was used to sleep in, he shall lie there.”

“As you will, Mrs. Sinfia.”

“Then let us see to it, come!” said she, and turning her horse, rode before them through a maze of broken walls and fallen columns, down bush-grown slope into an echoing, gloomy place where a tall, comely fellow met them with a lanthorn which light showed a wide, paved floor with rows of squat, stone pillars supporting the massive arches of dim stone roof.

“Hey, Mistress Beshaley,” cried the man, with gleam of white teeth, “ ’tis good to see ee again, like old times, it be!”

“Nay, James Ahearn,” she answered, frowning, “I’d fain see thee safe back wi’ thy sheep and cows, ’stead o’ wasting thy days to such ill purpose—more especially after the black and bloody *dukkeripen* I foretold for thee. Thou’rt too good for such life, James, and such . . . death!”

“Why, Mistus,” he answered, staring into the lanthorn, his cheery smile quite gone, “I be what I be. What’s done is done! So if they go for to hang me somewhen—hang I must.”

“And leave some poor soul to grieve and break heart for thee! Be warned, James Ahearn!” Then she dismounted, and seeing how Jason sat bowed in saddle between swoon and sleep, she motioned Jockabed to aid him down, while Honoria, wearied almost beyond endurance, swung from her tall steed so clumsily she would have fallen but for Sinfia’s ready arm.

Supported by this guiding arm, she stumbled up crumbling steps, along flagged passage, up a narrow, winding stair and, nodding with weariness, found herself in a small chamber furnished to her comfort, though her sleepy eyes heeded but two objects, one the cosy bed and the other a goodly, sizeable looking-glass, beholding which, she turned instinctively and folding Sinfia in sudden arms, kissed her with slumberous murmur of thanks. And as she murmured, so murmured Sinfia saying:

“Perils amany lurk afore thee, Honoria. . . . Death goeth beside thee, yet there also is Joy. . . . And in thy hands shall be death and life also. But thy hands are strong and hast thy woman’s heart to guide thee, and ’tis a clean heart shall counsel wisely. And now a while—farewell.”

The small, heavy door closed softly and Honoria was alone. Then, rousing with an effort, she secured this door with the stout bar for the purpose.

And presently stretching her weary limbs to the luxury of these cool, fragrant sheets, she sighed blissfully and yet, too worn out for sleep, lay there in the darkness listening to the murmur and mutter of voices that reached her from somewhere adjacent; and staring thus wide-eyed upon the dark she thought of all that had befallen, and of the ‘perils amany’ the future must bring down upon her, even as Sinfia had foretold, and felt her courage fail. And because of this Robin, men called the Galloping Parson, this self-proclaimed slayer, she thought of yet another Parson Robin very tenderly, yearning greatly for the sweet security she might have known with him in his rambling old vicarage-house; and with this gentle-souled, valiant-hearted gentleman in mind, said her prayers, drawing therefrom such comfort for the present and hope for the future that her fears diminished and gentle sleep took her.

CHAPTER XIII

GIVES SOME DESCRIPTION OF JAMES AHEARN AND THE GALLOPING PARSON

A heavy fist pounding on the door startled Honoria to such sudden wakefulness that she cowered instinctively beneath the bedclothes though demanding 'who was there' in her most manly voice.

"Lord, only myself, friend, Jimmy Ahearn, and wondering if youm asleep or dead or whatever, for snoggers, pal, 'tis past four o'clock!"

"Zounds!" exclaimed Honoria voicing Jason's oath as nearly in his manner as possible.

"Ar!" quoth Mr. Ahearn through the door, "ye may well say so, friend, nigh 'pon five o'clock it be. And here's me wi' a pot o' stout ale for to sluice your ivories."

"Your pardon, sir, but sluice my what?"

"Your ivories,—teeth, friend. So open the door for 't and swig."

"Thank you, Mr. Ahearn. I'm very—no, I'm devilish sharp-set, egad, but I'll dress me first. Pray how is my comrade, Mr. Wayne?"

"Just woke up, friend, and pretty spry considering his wound. Rob be a tending on 't now. Ay, and for wounds, ball or steel, there be never surgeon better nor my pal Rob. When youm ready to feed—t'other end o' this passage right afore ye." So saying Mr. Ahearn took himself off, spurs jangling.

Then up leapt Honoria vigorous with renewed life, to take huge joy in her ablutions, pouring with the water heartfelt benedictions on the head of Sinfia Beshaley who had provided thus thoughtfully to her comfort.

Having dressed at her leisure, she settled on her own bright, closewound tresses the long curls of her great wig, surveyed the result very closely in the mirror provided by that same womanly care, took her sheathed sword beneath one arm and stepped forth of her chamber, then, remembering the value of first impressions, she began to whistle cheerily as Mr. Ahearn and made her spurs jingle as loudly as possible.

She followed a stone-flagged passage, dim-lit by small openings high in the wall and roofed with age-old masonry, a crooked passage that turned

many sharp angles but eventually brought her to an open door and so into a roomy chamber of irregular shape, yet very neat and orderly, with two pallet beds in recesses, above one of which was a shelf of books with quills and an ink-horn; against panelled walls on pegs and racks well-carved and fashioned hung two or three swords, with pistols of various sizes and muskets; in the midst of this chamber stood two chairs and a table bearing a joint of cold beef and a ham flanked by bread, cheese, butter and a large tankard of ale, while seated on one of the beds, busily cleaning a very large pistol, sat a fresh-faced, blue-eyed, comely fellow, who nodded in friendly sort, then paused in his labour to stare.

“Well now, strike me blind!” quoth he, viewing Honoria from head to foot in frankly admiring wonderment, “Lemme die but you’re young, pal, you’re on-common young for a flash genty cove o’ the High Toby, ay rot me if you a’n’t. Ecod, but you must be a rare plucked un though so mortal young, for the high pad is desperate chancey business these days, my dimber flash cove. Mrs. Sinfia tells us your name’s Warren, I think? Well, mine’s Ahearn, James or Jimmy to you, friend, and pretty well known i’ the profession.”

“Pray what is your profession?” she enquired, meeting his searching regard with her own level gaze.

“To bite the cully of his cole, friend, a popper in my famble and tother in my cly—eh?”

“I fear I don’t understand you in the very least.”

“Well, set down, pal, and eat hearty—your breakfast ’ll be our supper so soon as Rob do finish wi’ your friend. But don’t ee wait, eat, drink and good health.”

“Thankee, friend!” quoth Honoria very manlike and, waiting for no second bidding, sat down at the table forthwith.

“So ye don’t patter flash, eh, pal? Well, some on us do and some on us don’t. But then to be sure I ain’t ever heard tell of any flash High Tobymen called Warren.”

“If you would put it more plainly, Mr. Ahearn,” said Honoria, busy with knife and fork.

“Sure-ly. But Lord, pal, don’t come me no Mist’ers. James or Jimmy, and what are you?”

“You may call me Tom.”

“Why then, Tom, a genty flash High Tobymen means a gentleman o’ the road.”

“Oh, a highwayman? Well, I’m not a flash High Tobymen, James, nor is my friend, Wayne.”

“Well,” exclaimed Mr. Ahearn, shaking his comely head, “strike me dumb if this a’n’t a queer go! Then why have ye took to earth herealong wi’ the Parson and me, eh, Tommy?”

Now at this question Honoria surveyed the speaker askance, and despite his frank and open look, hesitated; and then, before she might answer, in to them from another door stepped Jason, newly shaved and very much himself except that his left coat sleeve was empty, his arm being strapped up that he should not use it.

“Mr. Warren,” said he bowing, “ha, Thomas lad, I hope I see you well.”

“Mr. Wayne,” retorted Honoria, wagging fork at him in salutation, “thankee, never better! Ha, Jason man, sit down and feed, sit, man, and sluice your ivories.”

Jason, in the act of reaching for a chair, paused to stare, and before he could speak, James Ahearn addressed him:

“How’s your flipper now, friend?”

“Mending apace,” answered Jason, seating himself at the table; “your comrade Robin is no mean surgeon.”

“True enough, friend Wayne! Strike me dead, but there a’n’t a surgeon to match him!”

“And yet,” said Jason, viewing Honoria’s intent face a little uneasily, “he is the Galloping Parson! A . . . man with a price on his head!”

“Ay, by Goles!” exclaimed Mr. Ahearn, flourishing the pistol he had been cleaning. “There be bills wi’ rewards at every cross road and inn yard ’twixt here and London, ay and beyond, for Rob be the greatest flash High Tobymen as ever cocked popp or twitched trigger.”

“Hum!” quoth Jason dubiously. “He is, by accounts, a most desperate fellow . . . very deadly.”

“Why, so he is, friend, but only when, according to his lights ’tis a necessity. Ay, for lookee now,—there be rogues and rascals as the law, curse it, can’t touch, gentry o’ the quality or men in high places, d’ye see! And these, being too clever in their roguery for the damned law, goes their sinful

road till one day the Parson'll say to me, 'Jimmy, bide you in to-night,' he'll say, 'for to-night I'm off on the Concern.' So in I'll bide, and next morning one o' these rogues'll be found groaning and bloody or stone cold and silent. And that's the Parson's 'Concern'."

"Oh . . . murder?" whispered Honoria.

"Why so some do call it, pal. But there's never a one so used but don't deserve it, and you can lay to that. And, what's more, though he's the most fort'nate man in the profession, he's scarce ever a groat in his pocket—and for why? Because he's too open-hearted, takes from Peter, as is gen'rally rich and can afford it, and pays Paul as is gen'rally poor and in need. And, what's more again, and lastly, there's them as used the law, blast it,—for to murder his own father!"

"How . . . how so?" enquired Honoria, breathlessly.

"Why 'tis a long story, Tom, pal, you must ask himself, he'll tell ee—mayhap. For to speak on 't is apt to shake him woundily ah, and raise the devil."

"However," said Jason, "my shoulder is easier thanks to him."

"Ar, Rob's a wonder! Took a ball out o' my leg last year clean as a whistle and I scarce felt it—"

"Yet you swore, Jim lad," said the Parson entering at this moment, "you cursed very damnably, James!"

"Well, but drownd me, Rob, a man must do summat at such times, d'ye see!"

"Mr. Warren," said the Parson, bowing ere he seated himself at the table, "I am happy to assure you our friend's hurt shall heal very speedily if—I say if he abstain from all exertion awhile. A slice of beef, James, and snippet of ham,—nay first suffer me to plead Heaven's blessing on these mercies!"

Then, to Honoria's amazement, the Galloping Parson folded his hands, bowed reverent head, and in his sweetly sonorous voice, prayed a blessing on their repast.

And now as they ate and talked together, Honoria surveyed this small, strange person with new and ever-growing wonder; she viewed him covertly from neat wig to trim, black silk stockings and buckled shoes; this slim, very alert man who spoke and dressed and bore himself like one of gentle breeding yet whose repute was so terrible. She noted with quick, feminine eyes, the excellent cut and fit of his sombre garments, his coat of black

velvet garnished with buttons of cut jet, his snowy linen, with cravat and ruffles of rich lace. She surveyed his saturnine yet whimsical visage with its long, melancholy nose and wide, humorous mouth, peaked of chin and lit by eyes deep set and strangely bright; eyes that could glare unmoved on death and bloodshed but that now were beaming on her with such mild benevolence as, leaning near, he addressed her in his pleasant voice:

“Mr. Warren, sir, you are younger than I thought—”

“Sir,” she answered, “I am older than I seem.”

“Nay, young sir, youth is no reproach, ’tis rather a gladness, a joy to cherish, for it passeth all too soon. But youth is ever impatient, and so, Mr. Warren, should your enforced confinement prove irksome my small library is heartily at your service; yonder above my bed are some of my books, the Bible, great Bunyan’s tale of valiant Pilgrim, his *City of Mansoul*, an odd volume of Dick Steel’s *Tatler* and Hakluyt’s *Voyages*, for truly there is no better diversion than a book, a tale of noble doing and achievement. . . . Achievement!” he repeated. “And to-night is the eighth of the month!” and leaning back in his chair, glanced round at Mr. Ahearn.

“James,” said he, “I remind myself that to-night I ride out on the Account, so bide you here, James, I must forth on the Concern.”

“Who now, Rob?” enquired Mr. Ahearn, round of eye.

“A perjured witness whose testimony shall send his enemy to the gallows . . . ha, the cursed, nubbing cheat! So this same witness must be dumb henceforth. . . . I’ll trouble you, Mr. Warren, for another slice of bread—crusty, if you please.”

But Honoria could but stare dumbly at her platter lest she betray the rising horror conjured to her mind by his glibly spoken words . . . then the air about them was vibrating to the sudden clamour of the sweet-toned bell, three rapid strokes and one . . . but ere its mellow sweetness died away, Jason was afoot, had snatched pistol from wall and cocked it, strung for desperate action like the fierce, hunted creature he was.

“Friend Jason,” said the Parson gently reassuring, “be easy, yonder is a friend—or should be.” Even as he spoke, his slim hand vanished, to reappear grasping a small yet very serviceable pistol. “James,” quoth he glancing at its priming, “go see who summons us and, James lad, be wary!”

CHAPTER XIV

INTRODUCES ONE, GEORGE POTTER

They waited silently, Honoria scarce breathing, until from somewhere high above them came a whistle, faint but clear, whereat the Parson's weapon vanished again, Jason relaxed and Honoria drew a deep breath.

"All's well, friends," nodded the Parson, "for truly ye are safe here from damned redcoats and catchpolls as if ye were in France or sweetly asleep in Abraham's bosom." Almost as he spoke Mr. Ahearn reappeared followed by a sturdy young countryman and of very guileless seeming; a bland innocence beamed from him, it was in his round eyes, his tip-tilted nose, his wide smile, as he touched smooth brow to the company.

"Well, top me if it isn't George Potter!" exclaimed the Parson heartily, "and with news, eh, George, lad? How it is with thee, man?"

"Ay, Master, full o' noos be Potter. And times be naun so bad 'cept for they sojers as be a marching and a riding hither and yon—which beant nowise good for the trade. But sir I be—"

"Wait, lad, you come pat to the occasion, for these two gentlemen, being friends both of Mistress Sinfia Beshaley and therefore mine, are wishful to be put over into France, George."

"And soon as possible, if you please," said Honoria.

"And myself only!" added Jason, "I only am for France."

"Sirs," answered Potter, shaking his head, "theer wunt be never no chance nohow till they sojers be gone."

"This is understood," nodded Jason, "yet soon as may be. As to charges, I fear I can pay but little—"

"Nay, sir, Mistress Sinfia's friends travel free wi' us o' the trade, and us ha' carried over one or two ere now. . . . But, Must' Rob, what I be come for is to warn ee—"

"What again, George? Well, what now?"

"Well, first, Must' Robin, there be a evidence swore out agin ee along o' some chap name o' Sylvanus Todd as was found dead on Kennington Heath."

“True enough!” nodded the Parson. “Todd was one o’ Wild’s perjurers, and black a rogue as ever sold man or woman to the gallows. Ay, I ended Sylvanus. But how should they trace it to me at last?”

“There be likewise a evidence agin Jimmy Ahearn for stopping the mail at the four-wents ayont Cuckfield.”

“Now, dammem!” cried the Parson angrily. “The fools blunder again. Jimmy had nought to do with ’t, this was my doing. And very fair collection I made on ’t, being two hundred and thirty odd guineas, four watches and a ring.”

“Ay, I mind it!” quoth Mr. Ahearn, shaking his head. “A mortal good taking, Rob, but there you sit and nought to show for it—eh, pal?”

“Yea, James, yea,—the freehold of Mother Button’s cottage.”

“There be moreover and likewise,” continued Potter, reaching into capacious pocket, “a reward out for ee, Must’ Robin.”

“I’ve read it, George. I’ve read many an one, and the description of me always wrong; dammem, they make me ever a little man!”

“But this here is a noo un, Must’ Rob, and for—Five—Hundred—Pounds!”

“So? My value riseth, George.”

“Ay, Master, and ’ere it be!” So saying George Potter unfolded and held up a large handbill with these words large-printed:

£500 — REWARD

THE GALLOPING PARSON

DEAD OR ALIVE

The above reward shall be paid to whoso shall give such information as shall lead to the capture of the NOTORIOUS MALEFACTOR known as the GALLOPING PARSON, highwayman and murderer. Last seen in the vicinage of Cuckfield, Sussex. His description: viz: A small, puny man in sad-coloured clothes. Rides either a chestnut horse or bright bay with a white blaze. A very desperate, bloody rogue and dangerous.

GOD SAVE THE KING

“‘A small, puny man’!” exclaimed the Parson, and swore very bitterly. “Alack now,” he sighed, “*eheu fugaces!* To think I was once a tender innocent cooing in gentle mother’s arms, and now—a ‘very desperate, bloody rogue to be taken dead or alive!’ Oh *tempora*, oh *mores!* And is this all, George lad?”

“Not by no manner o’ means, Must’ Rob. First there be seven constables come down from Lon’on for to capture ee, seven constables, sir, and all armed!”

“These will be some o’ Wild’s chosen rascals,” quoth the Parson sitting up in his chair suddenly intent. “Now did ye contrive to learn their names, eh, George, eh?”

“Sure-ly, Master. I’ve got ’em arl wrote down for ee,” and diving again into deep pocket, Potter, after much fumbling, extracted a crumpled piece of paper, and smoothing it out carefully, read forth slowly these names:

“Richard Wills, Thomas Fenn, Simon Tranter, Oliver Twitt, Henry Brown, Timothy Dwyer and Robert Shand—” then he started and checked suddenly to an inarticulate, bestial snarl, and recoiled and dropped the paper to stare, for the little Parson was afoot and dreadfully transformed—writhen lips back-drawn from gnashing teeth, while from narrowed eyes death glared. . . .

Now, beholding thus, as it were, the very incarnation of Murder, Honoria gasped and shrank instinctively nearer to Jason, who stood watching this direly-contorted face beneath drawn brows; for now from these back-drawn lips issued a whimpering sound very terrible to hear, and then a soft, quick muttering that grew louder to a spate of fierce curses and blasting imprecations so horrible at last that Jason, leaning nearer, smote upon table with the pistol he yet grasped.

“Sir,” cried he, harshly, “rule that tongue o’ yours, it grows foul as your looks!”

The Galloping Parson started, glanced up and about him, then bowing head, covered his face with both hands, saying brokenly:

“Ay . . . God forgive me, I . . . fear it was. Gentlemen, I ask your pardon. . . . But, sirs, two of these men helped to . . . murder and hang the saint that was . . . my father—”

The quavering voice was suddenly dumb, from between those fierce-clutching fingers something fell glittering, then turning abruptly he stumbled from the room.

“Lord!” exclaimed Mr. Ahearn, shaking his head, “did ye see, George?”

“Ar, piped his eye, he did.”

“He ain’t often took so, George. There’ll be blood on the road to-night, I’ll warrant me. Let’s after him and softly, lad!”

CHAPTER XV

TELLS HOW AND WHY HONORIA RODE FOR HOME

“Jason!” whispered Honoria, so soon as they were alone, “Oh Jason!” And she sank down into her chair as if suddenly weak.

“Zounds! And what now?” he demanded querulously.

“That man! This dreadful place!”

“I’ve known worse!” growled Jason.

“Thieves and—murderers!” she whispered.

“Well, Adversity maketh strange bedfellows, to-day this Galloping Parson and afore him were two fellows shared bed of fern in a cave—with a penknife!”

“Oh, will ye jest and at such time?”

“Ay, faith, why not? And, damme, who are you in your puling inexperience to judge him, ay or me? He kills lest he be killed, and so have I ___”

“And here is very hateful thought, Jason Wayne. Though if you killed in battle—”

“Ay and on the road also—”

“The . . . road!” she repeated, her grey eyes widening on him.

“Well, and how else d’you think I won free?”

“Pray tell me . . . tell me of it,” she pleaded.

“Not I!” quoth he, sullenly. Now at this, she closed her eyes as if to shut out some horror then, bowing face upon her hands, questioned him again and in the same hushed tone:

“And did you . . . kill Sir Wilfred Rokeby before robbing him?”

Jason started, then leaned forward across the table to peer at her through narrowed eyelids.

“Rokeby?” he repeated, and saw how she watched him between her fingers.

“Yes!” she nodded. “Was he dead before you robbed him of his horse and clothes? Oh, I recognised them from the first moment—almost. Did you kill him?”

“How then,” questioned Jason with his sneering smile, “is this fine gentleman so dear to your fancy—”

“I despise him!” she whispered fiercely. “But did you kill him?”

“Oh, be easy,” he mocked, “for being the fool I am, I suffered the damned fellow to live, since I’d settled accounts with his companions beforehand—”

“His . . . companions?” she gasped.

“Ay, his friends, his fellow huntsmen that made me their quarry, that dogged and would have retaken me,—well, I broke my sword in one and t’other I clouted from his saddle with a hedge-stake. And so—”

“You . . . killed them?”

“It is to be hoped so. At the least, I did my best that way.”

“And left them . . . lying dead?”

“Certainly I left them, and at my best speed, but whether perfectly defunct or no I’ll not be sure.”

“Can you . . . pray will you describe them . . . these two?”

“I will not!” cried Jason; and taking his place at table reached for the ale, while she watched him with that same fearful intentness until Jason, meeting this troubled scrutiny, frowned blacker than ever.

“Well?” he demanded angrily. “Why a plague must you stare so?”

“I am wondering!” she answered murmurously. “Yes, I am wondering what manner of man you truly are.”

“No worse than most—and little better,” he growled, “so, d’ye see the sooner you rid yourself of such dangerous fellow the wiser you’ll be, ay and the better for—” He stopped at sound of approaching footsteps, and next moment George Potter was looking in at them with his so guileless-seeming eyes.

“Ax your pardons, sirs,” said he, touching an eyebrow, “but Must’ Rob do bid me for to tell ee as how there be a gen’leman late come to the Star in Alfriston, a mighty fierce curse-your-eyes gen’leman, as do be questing for

one Jason Wayne, seeking and a searching, ay, and offering fifty guineas for information.”

“Fifty guineas!” repeated Jason and whistled.

“And is he, this gentleman . . . alone?” enquired Honoria, quick-breathing.

“No, young sir, there be two other gentlemen along of ’e, though one on ’em be sick abed and t’other goes wi’ his sponce in a clout.”

“The which meaneth his head in a bandage, Tom lad,” Jason explained, “and by reason of a hedge-stake doubtless. And they are offering reward of fifty guineas, eh, friend George?”

“Ay, sir, they be,—for this here Jacobite highwayman and murderer, Wayne. Consequently the sojers and all be keeping mighty sharp lookout for him. . . . So gen’lemen both if you should chance for to know this here Wayne, why then warn he not to come anigh Alfriston.”

“He will be truly grateful for such warning, George lad.”

“Why then, sirs, happen you or he should chance-like to find your ways to . . . Birling Gap, say,—ah and say two nights from now you’d see a boat laying inshore and in it me and—well a friend o’ mine.”

“Ha, George—d’you mean—?”

“Sirs, two nights from now the *Sally* is for Bullong, in France—if possible: if not, then Potter knows where y’ may lie snug till ’tis safe to slip to sea.”

“Now here’s prime news, George, and this guinea for it.”

“Thankee, sir, but you’ll be a needing of it more than me most like—in France, and so the word’s no, sir, and thankee again.”

“Why then,” said Jason rising, “here’s my hand instead, George. Two nights hence you shall see me at Birling Gap or—well, I shall be sweetly dead,—asleep in Abraham’s bosom, as our friend Rob puts it.”

“Then good night, sirs, and good fortun’. I must be away.” So saying George Potter touched his youthful, guileless brow to them and departed.

“Yonder,” said Jason, peering into his empty tankard, “goeth a right good fellow!”

“And here,” retorted Honoria, viewing him with her most disparaging look, “here, upon two weak legs and with but one usable arm, stands a very

fool!”

“Yet a mighty determined fool,” he nodded, “with legs strong enough to straddle leather, and finger able to pull trigger.”

“More killing?” sighed she wearily.

“Ay—myself if need be!” he nodded grimly. “For never again shall I be —” He paused to the approaching clatter of quick, light-tripping feet, and in hustled the Parson clad for the road, though his long riding-boots carried no spurs.

“Gentlemen,” said he, hat a-flourish, “duty bids me hence, but I shall greet ye to-morrow if an all-wise Providence seeth fit.” Saying which, he took from the wall beside his bed two long pistols, glanced heedfully at their flints and primings then, turning to be gone, paused.

“Friends,” said he, “I have already apologized for my outburst awhile since, but it was a natural sentiment, for upon a day, sirs, I watched an innocent man die on Tyburn Tree, beheld my loved father, gentlemen, kick out his most precious life in shameful noose—set there by perjury. Seven lying rogues were concerned and, ah friends, I have so wrought with them that these seven are now but four. To-night, by grace of a just Heaven, I will make these four, three—or perchance but two. For the which good purpose, friends, I ask your prayers.”

Then he was gone, and they were listening to those quick, light-treading feet until their tripping echoes had died away. Honoria shivered and rose to her feet.

“Oh—blasphemy!” she exclaimed.

“I wonder!” quoth Jason thoughtfully. “Well, what now? Whither away?” he demanded, for she had taken up one of the candles.

“To bed,” she answered. “Pray lend me your tinder-box.”

“So very early? Nay, bide awhile and let us talk.”

“I’m in no mind for talk, Mr. Wayne. Your tinder-box, pray.”

“Then take it, lad. Sleep well, pleasant dreams, Thomas.”

“God send I dream not of blood and murdered men!” sighed she, and so away to her little bedchamber.

Having barred the stout door, she drew off her riding-boots, tossed aside cumbrous wig, slipped from her coat and sank down upon the bed. But now,

being in no mind for sleep, she lay staring up at the groining of the roof with eyes that saw, instead, the pain-contorted features of Charles, her loved brother . . . smitten perhaps to death by the hand of this desperate wretch, Jason Wayne. And in this moment she knew she hated him . . . the cruel, sneering mouth of him, his mocking eyes, long-lashed but utterly detestable, his odious self-assurance and confident bearing. . . . And he had stricken her Charles perhaps mortally . . . had left him lying on the road helpless in his blood . . . he had hoped Charles was dead. To be sure he did not know Charles for her brother . . . and to be sure Charles was still alive, according to the man Potter, alive and either languishing in bed or with his dear, wilful head swathed in bandages. . . .

At this moment her anxious speculations were arrested by a soft rapping on the door, and up she sat to frown, knowing instinctively whose hand was tap-tapping so gently yet with such irritating persistence; at last, since she deigned him no answer, Jason spoke:

“Art asleep so marvellous soon, Tommy? Art in thy naked bed, lad?”

“No.”

“Why then prithee to thy friend and comrade, ope and let him in.”

“Not I. Get back to your thieving highwaymen.”

“Mine, lass? Well, so I would, Mistress, but the Parson, as you know, Madam, is off and away on The Account, and so is Ahearn. Thus I am alone out here, Lady, and you are alone in there, Child, so if you’re not sleeping, Girl, why not open your door and be alone together?”

“Because I’m in no mind to your company, Mr. Wayne.”

“Is this pure fear of me or an over-weening modesty, Mistress Warren?”

“Neither, sir, it is merest dislove for the sight and sound of you.”

“Alas, dearest Honoria, leave not thy Jason, sick and wounded, to languish thus solitary, I beg, sue and entreat. Come now, out with thy penknife, clench it fast in thy so virginal fist, sweet soul, and open the door, for on my soul I’ve much to say!”

Instinctively she glanced where lay her sword with Jason’s stolen pistols close in reach, snatched up her peruke, clapped it on anyhow and leaping from bed, unbarred and flung open the door.

“Come in then, poor wretch!” said she.

For a long moment Jason stood dumb and motionless, gazing round upon this little, orderly chamber with a look strangely wistful.

“Honoriam,” he murmured at last and with an unexpected tender gravity, “I vow to God you honour me! This ancient cell breathes all—of you, and was never such holy place as now.”

As he spoke she saw his mouth no longer cruel or sneering, and in his eyes such look that she caught her breath at what she thought to read there.

So they gazed on each other with a new vision, and both of them speechless awhile; then Jason’s look faltered, he shook his head and turned away.

“What is it?” she questioned, wondering.

“Why . . . indeed . . . faith,” said he, stammering, “I find . . . I feel it such extraordinary privilege, such honour that I . . . you must bid me in again, Honoriam.”

Seating herself upon the bed, and face now hidden from him by the tumbled ringlets of her long wig, she smiled, yet spoke him in her most mannish voice:

“Come in, Wayne, come in, man!” Jason glanced a moment silently at this downbent head, then:

“Thankee, Tom!” said he, stepping in forthwith. “And call me Jason, I beg. Will you have your door open or shut, comrade?”

“Oh shut, Jason, shut. And pray be seated—on the chair yonder.” Mutely he obeyed, and so for a space was silence again while Honoriam looked thoughtfully at the mellow candle flame and Jason at her.

“Well,” she enquired at last, “you have something to tell me, I think?”

“Ay faith,” he nodded, “I am here to bid you farewell. We part to-night!” Speaking he rose and seated himself beside her, then drawing from his pocket a handful of gold and silver, poured these coins on the bed between them. “We part this night,” he repeated, “but first we will share our resources as good comrades should. Here are fifteen odd guineas and the half for you.”

“And this,” said she, touching the money with one finger-tip, “is the money you stole from Sir Wilfred—”

“That same!” he answered, frowning. “And one half yours; come, take it up.”

“So, Mr. Wayne, being a thief you would make me one also?”

“Now, damme!” quoth he pettishly. “Why boggle? Since you know the fellow, you can pay him back if you will, but take this money you shall.”

“And pray why, sir?”

“Because you cannot travel with empty pockets.”

“But where must I travel and when?”

“Home, child, and to-night.”

“And why to-night?”

“Because the time is come to . . . face my destiny alone and whatso comes I shall front with better heart knowing you at least are come home or safe with your friends. So take your money and—”

“I will!” said she, and gathering up the coins every one, thrust them into breeches pocket.

“Zounds! I said the half, Honoria.”

“And I take the whole!” she nodded serenely. “Thus do I steal from you, and so is the robber robbed.”

“Well, so be it!” quoth he, viewing her somewhat ruefully. “Come now, take my pistols also, don your sword and let me see you on your way.”

“On the contrary, Mr. Wayne, it is I shall see you safe out of England two nights hence.”

Up rose Jason to frown and stride to and fro.

“So you refuse to go, you will not leave me?” he demanded.

“No!” she murmured. “I shall not.”

And when he had tramped and frowned and muttered awhile, down he sat again, looking on her with such pitying smile that she frowned in her turn.

“My poor creature,” said he, “can it be that you are so deep smitten with love for me, consumed with such passion of longing that you cannot bear to part until the ultimate moment, surely not?”

“Most surely not!” she retorted. “Indeed, my feeling for you is so very much the opposite that you shall never be quit of me until England is rid of you. So save your breath—”

"I will," said he, rising, "and to better purpose!" And he turned towards the door, but ere he might unlatch it, she was before him.

"And what is your purpose, pray?" she enquired.

"Since you will not go, I must."

"Go?" she repeated. "Without money and helpless as you are?"

"This moment if you will suffer me to pass."

"But whither would you ride and to what purpose?"

"This is my business," he answered sullenly.

"Oh, very well," sighed she wearily. "Come then, let us go."

"So be it, Mistress Folly, for mark this, so soon as I'm mounted 'twill be sharp spur and loose rein, and before your old horse may go fifty yards I shall be out of your sight."

"And be taken or killed!" she retorted.

"This again is my business."

"And maddest, wicked folly, Mr. Wayne."

"Why so I think," he nodded, "but, since you force it upon me, I needs must. For lookee, Honoria, do or say what you will, we part to-night, this very hour one of us rides hence, but with this difference,—you may go all unchallenged and within the hour may be safe home for aught I know, or lodged snugly at some inn, but I go with a price on my head, on stolen horse and in stolen clothes that shall have been well described and doubtless watched for by eager eyes—"

"Meaning you go to your death."

"You apprehend the situation very well, Honoria."

"Yet go you will . . . to be quit of me, Mr. Wayne?"

"Just so soon as without unseemly struggle I may win free of your bedchamber, Mistress Warren. So now, by your leave!"

But instead of moving she stood there still leaning against the door, viewing him with her level, dispassionate gaze, head a little bent, wig awry and a tress of her own bright hair gleaming against her white brow; and beholding all the unconscious beauty of her, Jason knew he must carry this memory of her so long as he lived and, checking the sigh upon his lips, frowned instead and made his voice harsh as he might.

“Well, have you decided?” he demanded.

“I will go!” she answered, and crossing the little chamber drew the coins from her pocket and tossed them upon the bed. Then, while she pulled on her long riding-boots, Jason divided the money and reaching her coat whence it lay, dropped her share into the pocket. And when she had equipped herself for the road, he opened the door for her but, as suddenly, closed it again.

“Honorias,” said he, staring hard at the flame of the candle she had taken up, “I . . . because this is indeed Farewell, and because we are never like to meet again, I would have you know me a very grateful man.”

“For what?” she enquired, staring also at the candle flame.

“For leaving with me a memory very fragrant . . . to cherish.”

“You were wiser to forget,” she murmured.

“Child, shall you forget?”

“Nay, how should I? We . . . have been through so much together and my life hitherto hath been so quiet. . . . So I bid you farewell and may God bring you safe, Jason Wayne, to your journey’s end. And now pray . . . open the door!”

Mutely he obeyed and followed where she went before him, shielding the candle flame, until they were come to that wide crypt where their horses were stabled.

“So,” said she, frowning to see her Dapple, this ancient steed, already saddled and bridled, “so you were very sure of my obedience?”

“Say, rather, I never doubted you would see reason, Honorias, and so, having but one hand, I got Ahearn to saddle up for you.” Frowning still, she gave him the candle and turned to her horse.

“Child,” said he in such tone that in the act of tightening her horse’s girth she paused, “Honorias—”

“Well?” she demanded, not looking towards him.

“This being our . . . last farewell,” said he in voice strangely uncertain, “our final good-bye . . . would you . . . might I . . . kiss you . . . once?” Frowning, she turned on him, but reading all the reverent, almost shy humility of him, she answered in voice gentle as his own.

“Jason, I am no child alas! And so . . . because I am a woman let us part not like man and woman but rather as friends and comrades.”

So he set down the candle and taking the hand she had reached out to him, grasped it firmly, shook it heartily and then or ever she might prevent, stooped and kissed it as no man had ever done; then he loosed it, took up the candle and meeting her troubled eyes, nodded.

“Think all and what you will,” said he.

Silently she mounted, and, candle in fist, he walked at her stirrup until they were come forth of this dark and echoing place, out into a sweet, fragrant night lit by a radiant, full-orbed moon.

“A safe journey, comrade!” said he, smiling at her.

“And to you,” she answered, gazing down on him with that same troubled look. “I pray God bring you safe into France, Jason . . . and . . .” The soft voice quivered to silence, old Dapple started to the unwonted prick of spurs.

So she rode away, a slim, shapely figure very upright and resolute, never looking back, until the shadows closed upon and hid her quite. But Jason stood there, chin on breast and all heedless of the guttering candle that flared to the moon so ineffectually, stood there very still and pensive, long after old Dapple’s plodding hoof-strokes had died away.

CHAPTER XVI

TELLS HOW ROBERT SHAND WAS CALLED TO THE GREAT ACCOUNT

It was a windless night of brooding silence, and the rising moon so bright that all things showed very plain and clear; yet Honoria's eyes were dim and she wondered angrily at the scalding smart of these tears that blinded her, and why she went in such hatred of this solitude, this wild desolation through which she had been riding haphazard, or rather, trusting to the instinct of wise old Dapple who was following a dim path, a narrow, leafy track hard to be seen.

And the deeper she rode into this silent wilderness, the sharper grew her sense of loss and, with this, a dread of she knew not what, but such as she had never known.

And now it was not of Charles, her stricken brother, she thought, but of the solitary fugitive who had driven her from him lest he bring down evil upon her . . . this strange, fierce man with his haggard face and greying hair, aged and embittered by suffering and hardship . . . showing thus so much older than his years . . . and yet sometimes seeming such very boy. . . . Two nights hence he would be safe at sea or lying dead . . . And he had begged so humbly for a kiss . . . shy indeed as any boy.

Here she checked old Dapple very suddenly and turned to look back upon this wilderness of ghostly trees and dense underbrush that hemmed her in; but presently old Dapple, snorting impatiently, ambled on again, and his young mistress, bowing her head, suffered him to go where and how he would, for her thoughts were all of Jason Wayne . . . of her first sight of him . . . of how, recognizing Sir Wilfred's fine horse and clothes, she had tracked him to his hiding place. . . .

Lost in such reflections, she rode these desolate ways until Dapple's heavy-plodding hoofs rang louder and she thus became aware that he had brought her out upon a winding road shaded by trees that dappled the white dust with inky shadows.

She had ridden thus slowly some distance when she started and reined up again, for upon the road before her were sounds of approaching horsemen, trampling hoofs, muttering voices and a chuckling laugh that broke evilly on the pervading hush. Instantly she wheeled from the road, and

coming amid shadowy trees, halted there lest she be heard and, sitting motionless and silent, watched the road with fearful eyes, waiting for these travellers to pass.

“ . . . Pretty a gell as ever you see, Simon and willing—”

“Ay ay, Bob, but lookie now, if this information be true we’ve got the Parson at last, five hundred guineas, Bob, and just you an’ me. So wot I says is—”

This harsh voice was lost in the sudden whinny of old Dapple, whereat was sudden clatter of hoofs, fierce shouts and ere she might turn, the two horsemen were upon her, hands grasped Dapple’s bridle, faces scowled, she saw the muzzle of a pistol dreadfully near.

“Have him out, Sim—out into the moonlight—so! Now let’s look at him! Up wi’ your head there! Damme, now which on ’em ha’ we got—not the Parson? Who are ye—speak!” Honoria looked from the weapon that menaced her to the grim faces and fierce eyes that glared on her and was dumb.

“Won’t speak, hey?” demanded one, peering closer. “Then let’s see your chivvy—” and with sudden, darting hand he twitched off her hat and wig.

“Why . . . blow my dicky . . . a gell!” cried he, thrusting closer. “And lemme die but a rare handsome moll she be—”

“Well, nab her cole, Bob, and come on. She ain’t our meat—”

“Ain’t she though!” quoth the man Bob, viewing her pale, shrinking loveliness with gloating eyes. “Speak for yourself, Sim! Ride on, Sim, ride on . . . I’ll meet ye in the village by ’n by.”

“Oh be cursed, Bob! Why waste time for a petticut? And the Galloping Parson waiting to be took if we get there in time. Come on, man, don’t flam our chances for a petticut.”

“We ain’t s’ sure as our information’s right, Sim—leastways I ain’t . . . besides she ain’t got a petticut—”

“So ye won’t come arter the Parson, eh, Bob?”

“Surely Sim—but not yet awhile. But don’t wait, lad,—if you’re so sure you can come at the Galloper all unexpected, ride on and chance your luck, but—”

“What—alone?” cried Sim fiercely. “Not me!” Then, cursing very bitterly, he reined his horse about and galloped back down the road.

Faint and sick with numbing terror, Honoria stared on her captor, a powerful man, who smiled; and beholding the merciless beast in his leering eyes and curling lips, she looked instead at the twinkling plate buttons of his full-skirted riding-coat and strove to pray.

“Well, my beauty,” said he, thrusting the pistol he held into wide coat pocket, “first a kiss and then . . . into the wood with Bob.” Then his arm was about her, and sensing all the brutish strength of him, she swayed and closed her eyes; but, nerved by desperation, she presently looked up at him all unresisting, and contrived to smile and speak:

“Nay, first . . . pray restore my hat . . . my wig—there . . . on the road.”

“Ecod, my pretty,” said he, “since you take it so kind and willing, I don’t mind if I do.” Loosing her, he dismounted, but as he did so, in went her spurs and she wheeled Dapple to ride him down The man leapt, his long arms gripped and crushed her and, thus helpless, she was dragged from the saddle; his cruel fingers strangled the outcry in her throat and she was borne towards those leafy shadows. But now from this same dreadful gloom a voice spoke, a hearty voice and jovial.

“What Bob! Ha, Robert Shand, up to thy deviltries as ever, my bien cull? Open thy peepers lad, and see the man you came a-seeking!”

The strangling fingers relaxed, and staggering free, Honoria beheld a little, grim shape come tripping forth into the moonlight; a small sober-clad figure that now stood, head a-cock and arms folded, surveying her mute assailant with eyes that twinkled very brightly through the slits of his hideous, black half-mask.

“What, are ye dumb, Robert? Well, look me over, for I’m the poor wretch you came to hunt for my blood-money. But ha, Bob, I’m the man hath been waiting for you this long while, for I am son to one of the many innocents you and six other rogues sold to the gallows years ago, and they call me the Galloping Parson!”

Robert Shand recoiled, his eyes opened in dreadful stare as he viewed the little speaker’s ghastly, smiling visage.

“Well, what . . . what now?” he stammered.

“A gipsy lad told you how I might be taken to-night asleep in bed—eh, Bob? So hither you come with your comrade, and myself following ye till I might get you alone. And now . . . well now, since you ask, I am about to rid the world of you, Robert—”

“No . . . no . . . not . . . murder me—”

“I shall bless you with death quick and merciful, Bob, lift you above all pain and further sinning—one pang, Robert and your black soul will be grovelling before the Great Tribunal. So pray, Bob, pray God’s mercy. Or shall I?”

“No . . . don’t . . . oh don’t . . . kill me—” gasped a whimpering voice, drowned in another voice deep and sonorous:

“Great and everlasting Spirit of Justice and Mercy look down on this vile soul about to rise for Thy judgment and have pity thereon—amen! Now Robert Shand, in the right hand pocket of your coat is a pistol, in my own coat pocket another. I call it Jonathan . . . we will shoot on the word ‘Three’! One . . . two—”

Shand whipped out his weapon and shot wildly.

“Three!” said the Parson, and taking out his pistol levelled very deliberately and fired. . . .

Honoria saw Robert Shand jerk with his arms and totter, heard his gasping screech and ran, stumbling. . . .

Somehow she was on Dapple’s back and now, finding she had snatched up her hat and wig, set them on as she rode. . . .

But, turning presently, she saw the Galloping Parson stand above a sprawling, motionless thing, his hands outstretched, his masked face uplifted to the radiant heaven ere a bend in the road hid him from her horrified vision.

CHAPTER XVII

HAS SUGGESTION OF PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT

The ancient town of Horsham was preparing itself for sleep; house doors were closing with rattle of bolt and chain; lights were beginning to twinkle from upper lattices; footsteps of belated townsfolk made drowsy echoes; voices murmured slumberously or called neighbourly 'good nights'.

But the old 'King's Head' inn was still very wide awake and full of cheery stir and bustle when into its wide stable-yard plodded old Dapple bearing his young mistress at his own will, since her capable hands had neither turned nor checked him since he had cocked his ears to those sudden shots back there on the desolate road. Thus, being a horse wise by years of experience, he had ambled unerringly towards the nearest stable and fodder, and here they were—no, wait a bit! Why must she jerk him to such sudden stand? Why must her legs so grip at his ribs and her knees begin to shake? And why, ye Gods, why must she now try to turn him short about? Yonder close by was snug stable, bedding, oats and water, was he now to be denied them? No, confound his hide and hoofs, not he!

So, despite tugging rein and gripping knees, Dapple plodded resolutely towards the cheery man who, whistling softly between teeth that chewed a straw, had stepped from the spicy gloom of a stall nearby and who now, touching an eyebrow to Dapple's mistress, spoke in hearty though respectful greeting:

"Good evening to your honour."

"Is this the . . . the 'King's Head' Inn?"

"Ay, sir, it be, and the best in Horsham or anywheres else I rackon. And I be Jacob, the 'ead ostler, sir."

So saying Jacob took the bridle Dapple proffered and Honoria, yielding to fate or deeming boldness the wiser course, dismounted and, remembering what had befallen here so lately, stood glancing up and around at dim-lit stabling and the many glowing lattices of this ancient hostel, in no little apprehension.

"Be you bidding the night, sir?"

"Yes . . . I think so, yes . . . yes I am."

“Couldn’t nowise do no better nowheer, sir. Best ’commodation for man an’ beast! Eh, you be lookin’ at yon casement, young master? An’ well you may, for out o’ that very winder, sir, a nofficer shot a man dead, leastways theer was blood enough for a dozen dead uns, me an’ my mate ’ad to wash it away. Like a battlefield it were, and one o’ they sojers laying over yonder like a corpse, wi’ the rest on ’em laying all witched, sir, sleepin’ and snorin’ and no wakin’ of ’em nohow—”

“But they are not . . . not here now?”

“Lord love ee no, sir, no! Marched away that same day they did, though precious doddlish on their pins. But here be plenty o’ company, sir, runners from Lon’on, constables an’ catchpolls, sir, all for to take the Galloping Parson—which I lay they wunt, and these here ’scaped Jacobite prisoners—which they may, pore chaps! And wot time will ye be for riding in the morning, sir?”

“I don’t know, I . . . I’m not sure.”

“Well, your time’s mine, your honour, and good night, sir!” Saying which, Jacob knuckled an eyebrow and led Dapple stablewards.

Now as she stood looking up at this ancient inn, and the moon very bright on her face, she became aware of a slowly-opening casement, of a bewigged head out-thrust therefrom, and of eyes that watched her with a too-persistent, very disquieting scrutiny,—the head and eyes of her brother’s modish friend, Mr. Dartry. For a long moment their glances met, she saw Mr. Dartry’s sleepy eyes widen suddenly; then she was back in sheltering gloom of the stables, though very conscious that Mr. Dartry was leaning yet farther through the window to stare after her; but his head vanished at last and she sighed, whereat straw rustled and a soft voice spoke:

“Eh, Mus’ Warren, what would ye now?”

“Oh,” she whispered, peering into the shadows, “is this you, Wentzelow? Ah, how glad I am to see you!”

“But whatfor brings ee herealong, sir?”

“I’m on my way . . . home, and, oh, Wentzelow, so tired, so worn and weary! But what do you here?”

“Sleep, sir, Jacob, the ostler, be kin’ to me, being o’ the Hearn’s, so when I comes hereabouts I sleeps in stable, sir, and I’m here by orders. Be you abiding here to-night, sir?”

“Yes—no! I’m dying for sleep, and yet . . . the place seems so full . . . so many eyes to stare!”

“Ar! Folks be come for to look an’ hear tell o’ the shooting—as you and me minds, sir. But I can bring ee in so none shall see, ay and get ee bedchamber and bite o’ supper, if ee will. Tom, as be head drawer, be also one o’ our folk, though he be a Lovel. So if you’m sleepy, sir, an’ peckish, say the word.”

“Oh, I am!”

“Then, Must’ Warren, go along o’ me.”

Following whither the young Romany led, she entered the inn by a back way, presently found herself in a long, low room with tables set in boxes and, choosing one farthest from the door, she sank down, weary head in clasping hands.

“Shall I see you to-morrow, Wentzelow?”

“Happen ee may, sir, though I starts early. Now I’ll go see Tom for ee, bed and supper, Must’ Warren, sir.”

Being alone, she sat, head in hands, her mind still in dreadful turmoil, whelmed in the emotions of the past eventful hour and quite oblivious of her present surroundings. But, little by little, drowsiness stole upon her, a sweet languor that closed her weary eyes and, though vaguely conscious of sounds nearby, she was nodding to sleep when she started to sound of a voice that instantly banished all desire for slumber:

“Eh,—in breeches, and astride? A woman,—are ye sure?”

“Sarten-sure, Sir Wilfred,—for, when we grappled her, off goes her hat and wig and there’s her hair, and plenty on it, all twisted round her head, sir, golden hair ’twas. And with her bides Bob, curse him! And the Galloping Parson snug abed fair waiting to be took! Ah, and five hundred golden guineas in it for us—”

“But this woman, what like was she, Tranter? Her age, her looks?”

“Why, sir, she showed a rare handsome piece, I’ll allow, by moonlight, ay and young. But when I think of all that good money and me choused out o’ my share b’ reason of a petticoat—”

“Ha, young, handsome, golden hair! It might be . . . we know she’s off and away! How think you, Dartry?”

“Dev-lish odd, m’ dear f’low. What of the horse—”

“Ay, her horse, Tranter? Did you notice his points, his colour, gait? How old was he by guess?”

“Precious old, Sir Wilfred, ay and raw-boned, a dapple grey—”

“You hear, Dartry? A dapple grey! There can be no mistaking . . . and she somewhere on the road with this damned Bob, this cursed villain—”

“But, m’ dear Wilfred, she may, on the other hand, be perfectly safe, as indeed I think she is, so why this extremity of perturbation?”

“Damme, you hear why! Tranter, tell us again how and where you left this . . . this woman.”

“Along o’ my mate, Bob, sir, ’bout a mile back. Ay, Bob’s off with her—and me diddled o’ the reward—”

“Curse the reward! Ay and you for leaving her! Lookee, Tranter, if she . . . if this lady . . . ha, if ’tis as I fear . . . if she be anyways harmed, then by God someone shall bleed for it! Ay, if aught’s amiss I’ll be the death of one or both of ye! Ring for our horses, we ride till I find her—”

“Why so thou shalt, Will,” tittered Mr. Dartry, “and in good time, so calm thy loverlike frenzy—”

“What the devil d’you mean?”

“She shall bless thy sight anon, my Wilfred, anon—meantime hither comes the rogue we wait for, I guess! Ay ’tis he,—hither rascal, hither!” Ensued shuffle of steps, without the open lattice, and a voice that muttered hoarsely:

“Sirs, be ye the gen’lemen as do offer fifty guineas for information o’ this yere Jason Wayne, the rebel Jacobite prisoner as ’scaped?”

“Yes, yes!” answered Sir Wilfred, impatiently. “If you be the fellow can give us news of him, speak and be brief.”

“Ay ay, master, ’tis me as sent ee word for to speak me yere to-night. You don’t know me, so—”

“Ha, but I do! Your name’s Meecher and you’re one of these rascal smugglers—”

“Hush, master, hushee now! I does naun but a bit o’ free-trading noo an’ then; this be ’ow come I can tell ee sure-ly ’bout this yere same rebel, Wayne—”

“Then tell it and be done.”

“Well, but first now, master, wot’ll ee pay down afore I tell ee? Say twenty-five guineas—”

“Twenty-five devils! No,—ten guineas if your news be worth while, and forty more so soon as we take the fellow. Now, speak or begone!”

“Right so, master. I rackon as I can trust a fine gen’leman like as ee be. Well now, I some whiles sails ’long o’ Cap’n Sharkey Nye aboard the *Sally* lugger when she be short-’anded, and so I do know as to-morry night she’ll be laying off o’ Birling Gap bound for Bullong, an’ will carry a gen’leman over to France—”

“You mean this rebel Wayne. Are you sure?”

“Ay, I be! I heered young Potter telling Cap’n Nye this yere very morning over to the old Market Cross in Alfriston and—”

“Alfriston?” repeated Sir Wilfred angrily. “I am staying there at ‘The Star’, as you must know, why the devil must you drag me over here, fool?”

“Because, sir, I dassent s’ much as breathe a blessed word in Alfriston nor nowheres thereabout, the folk be arl mighty ’spicious-like, ’specially young Potter, and young Potter beant no manner o’ friend to I, and young Potter be mighty sharp—”

“Very well! To-morrow night, at Birling Gap.”

“Ay, sir, east o’ Cuckmere it lays—”

“I know. But at what hour?”

“Well, master, ’twill be flood tide ’bout one o’clock, and the *Sally* shall stand away on the ebb ’less them Preventives be on the watch—”

“I’ll see they shan’t interfere. . . . Here’s your money, take it and go! Now, Dartry, pray order our horses whiles I go warn Jessop have his men watch the roads.”

“Eh? Jessop?” yawned Mr. Dartry. “Do I know him, Will?”

“Ay, he’s captain o’ the coastguard, and waiting me upstairs. Let the horses be ready, for we ride at once.”

Thus, while Sir Wilfred hasted about his business, Mr. Dartry, bidding Tranter wait in the taproom, stepped forth into the radiant moonlight and made himself invisible in the yard.

Now scarcely had they departed than Honoria caught up hat and cloak, clambered through the casement and sped silently to the stables, wholly

unconscious of the keen eyes that watched or the stealthy feet that followed as swiftly and more silently, or the sharp ears that hearkened in the next stall:

“Wentzelow,” she murmured, “are you here?”

“Ay, I be, sir, though nigh asleep.”

“Then rouse you! Hush now and listen.” And forthwith she related what she had just overheard. “So you see,” she ended, a little breathlessly, “you see, Mr. Wayne must be warned . . . and at once!”

“Nay, sir, there be plenty o’ time,” answered the young gipsy, drowsily. “So I sleeps now and I goes t’morrow morning early—”

“No no! He must be warned to-night! So up, Wentzelow, up and saddle my horse. I’ll go now!”

“But can ee find the way, Must’ Warren?”

“No, this is why you must guide me. Come then . . . oh where is my horse? You must help me saddle him . . . and hurry, hurry!”

Rubbing sleep from his eyes, Wentzelow arose and led the way across wide, moonlit yard to another long row of stabling; but scarcely had they entered this spicy gloom than they halted suddenly, for one of the many stalls glowed with lantern light, and, above the stamp and snort of horses, rose a murmur of voices in question and answer. But Honoria, trembling with haste and bold in her anxiety to be away, stepped forward, and entering this stall, beheld Jacob, the ostler, holding up his lantern for better inspection of her placid, old horse by a tall man who, turning at sound of her, showed the handsome, masterful face of Sir Wilfred Rokeby.

“Sir,” said he, peering at her as keenly as he had just been surveying her steed, “your pardon, but is this your animal?”

“Yes,” answered Honoria, shrinking instinctively into old Dapple’s broad shadow. “Ostler, saddle him at once, I’m in haste.”

“Ostler—wait!” quoth Sir Wilfred, with imperious gesture, then moved to survey Honoria’s dim figure.

“Pray, sir,” said he, leaning yet nearer, “if this is indeed your horse I shall be glad to know when and where you became possessed of him, for I know this animal past all mistaking.” Instead of answering, she reached up where hung Dapple’s saddle and bridle.

“Ostler,” said Sir Wilfred, in compelling voice, “give me the light!” Thus Honoria had the heavy saddle in her arms when the lantern was thrust into her face, and lifting her head with angry desperation she saw his heavy-lidded eyes narrow on her, saw his full, though shapely mouth curve in slow smile as, with gaze thus intent, he spoke:

“Ostler, you may go.”

“Go, sir? Eh? Why—no, sir, this vere young gen’leman—”

“Is a friend, a very dear friend of mine, ostler! So off with you, go saddle my horse instead.” Jacob scratched his head dubiously but, meeting the speaker’s compelling look, knuckled an eyebrow and departed.

And now, setting down the lantern, Sir Wilfred bowed very ceremoniously, smiling into the handsome, bewigged face that frowned back at him.

“Honoria!” he murmured. “Here now is astonishing happiness—for me, at least . . . Charles should be overjoyed to see you. So it is thus you keep your vow to follow him . . . in coat and breeches! And I swear ’twas very well thought on and should be sufficing safeguard to roving virginity, for I vow and protest you show for very spirited young fellow! Though, to a lover’s eye, all the tempting-sweet, feminine allure of thee leaps manifest despite those same—”

“Oh,” she cried angrily, “if you must talk, tell me of Charles!”

“Why, so I will, dearest lady, and, better still, show him to you this very night in Alfriston. The mere sight of you shall be refreshment and new health to him—mayhap!”

“Is he then so very ailing indeed?”

“He languishes of his hurts, child . . . smitten down by that black rascal, Wayne—”

“And yourself not so much as scratched!” she retorted with curling lip and viewing him with such bitter scorn that his smiling assurance vanished, for the moment, and he scowled.

“Mistress Warrender,” said he, fiercely, “had I been on hand—oh believe me there should ha’ been a different story—”

“Indeed,” she nodded, “you would have lost your horse and clothes the sooner and beyond a doubt!”

“Ha, and pray, madam,” he demanded between shut teeth, “how should you know of this—how?”

“Oh, sir, I heard tell of it upon the road, ’tis already a tale folk laugh at.”

“So, madam?” he muttered, leaning nearer. “Well, there is another tale I’ve heard o’ late of a poor woman-creature that, and despite her breeches, was compelled—and most urgently—to own her womanhood! Aha, and how then, thou pretty modesty—?”

“Oh base . . . vile!” she gasped, and out flickered her sword.

“Hold now!” cried Sir Wilfred, recoiling before her levelled steel. “Honorias . . . pray . . . don’t force me—” But, reading all the desperate menace of her, he drew to his own defence and the narrow blades winked and flashed in the lantern light.

“Honoria . . . child . . . enough!” he pleaded, but she attacking only the fiercer, he retreated clumsily, feigning the utmost dismay, then—with sudden, cunning disengagement, beat upon the forte of her blade so strongly that the weapon was torn from her grasp.

And now as she stood thus defenceless, cherishing her numbed wrist, he sheathed his blade, picked up her fallen sword, thrust it into her unwilling grasp, and sinking upon one knee, flung wide his arms.

“Honoria,” said he, humbly, “come now,—strike or forgive!” But, scorning the extravagance of his gesture and bitterly mortified by her so easy defeat, she turned her back upon him, sheathed her useless steel and busied herself to saddle Dapple until, Sir Wilfred insistent on doing this for her, she stepped out into the yard and glancing eagerly about for Wentzelow, presently found him beside her.

“Lord, sir,” he whispered, his dark eyes very round, “I sees you an’ him . . . a-fighting! Was you hurted?”

“No—no!” she whispered breathlessly. “Only haste you . . . haste to Mr. Wayne, for I must to Alfriston . . . tell him he is betrayed . . . that Birling Gap is death to him. And say I shall be . . . no, bid him meet me to-night on the Down above the village of East Bourn . . . at daybreak. Hire you a horse, Wentzelow, and go so soon as we are away, and, oh, Wentzelow, ride hard! Take you this!” And, thrusting a guinea upon him, she turned hastily to the clatter of horse-hoofs where came Sir Wilfred and Jacob with the horses.

“Your acquaintance, Mr. Dartry, is somewhere about,” said Sir Wilfred, as they mounted, “but we can do very well without him, I think.”

“Oh, as you will, sir,” she answered wearily. And so they rode away together. But the sounds of their departure were yet to be heard when Mr. Dartry stepped from the shadows nearby; and Mr. Dartry was smiling, also it was to be noticed that his wounded arm was no longer in the silken sling where he had borne it so gracefully for this past week and, thus smiling, he spoke murmurous:

“And I, my dear Wilfred, I shall contrive excellent well without you!” Re-entering the inn he enquired for Tranter, and presently found this zealous officer of the law soothing his disappointment with ale and yet showing more woeful than ever.

“The Galloping Parson, sir!” he groaned. “Five hundred guineas and me diddled b’ Bob and a petticut!”

“Tush, man, I’ll show you better sport! Come outside!”

“Well, sir?” enquired Tranter, glancing up at the radiant moon as they stepped into the deserted yard, “what’s better than five hundred golden—”

“Come you and see!” answered Mr. Dartry, and, smiling again, led him to the stables.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME DESCRIPTION OF A WOOING

Honoria rode in silence, for the most part, since and despite her weariness, she kept Dapple to such pace as made conversation difficult, and whenever her companion spoke, answered him shortly as possible or not at all; but now, reaching a steep hill and the road narrowing, old Dapple fell to his usual stately amble, whereat Sir Wilfred, riding near, leaned nearer.

“Honoria”—he began but there she checked him.

“Sir,” said she, reining as far from him as possible, “I have never given you permission to use my name.”

“Then pray do so, child, for, as your brother’s best friend—”

“But you are not, sir, I esteem you his enemy—and mine.”

“And why this cruel injustice, madam, this so harsh and foolish misjudgment of me, pray?”

“Had you been our friend indeed, you had never abetted and encouraged Charles in this . . . this wicked business of Uncle Warrender’s sinful will.”

“How,—in this matter of Jason Wayne?” demanded Sir Wilfred, endeavouring to peer into her averted face, “are you there still, ma’m? You harp on it, I think. ’S life,—one might almost suspect this Wayne was your very dear friend! Is he, Honoria, is he so in fact? Can it be possible you actually—know him,—love him? Come child, confess and if this be so indeed, then I vow—”

“I love no man, thank God!” said she and, so believing, spoke so fervently that his suspicions were allayed.

“Why then, precisely what do you know of the fellow, Honoria? Is he friend or mere acquaintance? Come, what d’ye know of Mr. Jason Wayne?”

“I know that I will die to stay my Charles being the death of this or any other man.”

“And this particular man a rebel, Honoria, a traitor to the king and notorious malefactor besides. I say again, to make an end to such man is loyal and highly meritorious act. Jason Wayne should hang, or die ’neath the axe as did his rascal, thievish sire—”

“That was betrayed to shameful death, poor gentleman, by my wicked uncle, George Warrender, and for his own base and cruel ends. Oh, I’ve heard tell of it!”

“Well, now hear me, Honoria! Squire Wayne, of Waynesmead, here in Sussex, was one of the most inveterate and active of the Jacobites and so forward in the rebel cause that to him was entrusted the vast treasure of money and jewels collected by these same traitors to their wicked purpose. Well, this treasure vanished and none suspected of its theft until Sir George Warrender was bold enough to denounce Squire Wayne. But to no purpose, for Wayne had such potent interests that Warrender fled in peril of his life, renounced the Jacobite Cause, like honest gentleman, and became such loyal subject to King George, ay and took such lawful action, that Wayne was apprehended and died as all traitors should.”

“And what of this treasure?”

“Ah, what indeed? Echo alone answereth. For when the rebellion was finally crushed, Wayne hid it so marvellous well it is quite beyond discovery—so far! And what say you to this?”

“That I’ll never believe such thing of Squire Wayne. I have the word of dear Uncle Robin, that knew him well years ago, how Mr. Wayne was indeed very noble gentleman.”

“And you have mine that he was chousing rogue. Well, Honoria?”

“Well, be very sure that I take my Uncle Robin’s word. And now be so good to keep your distance!”

“Nay, child, why must you show so coy?” he murmured, leaning nearer than ever. “Wherefore seem so prudish cold—with such eyes, such lips, such warm, provoking, luscious—”

“And a whip!” said she, uncoiling the lash of it. “And again, sir, do . . . not . . . make free with my name!”

“And you,” he murmured, “do . . . not . . . make free with your whip again! Never again to me, madam, or by my soul you shall rue it!”

“I wonder—how?” she demanded, scorning him with her eyes though appalled by something in his look.

“Attempt it and see!” he retorted and, speaking, very deliberately set his powerful arm about her. “Come now, strike me . . . if you will . . . if you dare, Honoria, for then—well, if you be not sufficient tamed already, myself shall take you in hand.”

Now meeting his look, boldly as she might, Honoria read in his eyes something of that merciless, wild-beast glare had sickened and shamed her once before to-night and, though her flesh chilled, her wide gaze never wavered, nor did she make any least resistance against the arm that was compelling her slowly nearer.

“Sir Wilfred,” said she, in smooth, passionless tone, “though my poor body panics at the threat of you, my spirit fears you so little that should you misuse or shame me as another beast would have done to-night, I vow to God I’ll kill you whenso I may.”

Slowly he loosed her and recoiled, and as slowly she nodded.

Then, as if half ashamed, he broke into blustering speech:

“Now, on my life . . . upon my immortal soul . . . ha, what . . . what of vileness do you suggest? What under heaven would you now impute to me?” But, instead of answering, she spurred Dapple so sharply that he set off at a lumbering gallop; yet very soon Sir Wilfred was beside her again though attempting no further speech until Dapple’s burst of speed languished to his customary plodding amble. Then Sir Wilfred bent towards her, hat in hand.

“Madam,” said he, humbly, “if I am so misfortunate to have anyways offended, you behold me vastly contrite.”

“Then, sir, I beg you will afflict me with no more words.”

“Ha, damme, but I’m the most luckless dog!” he exclaimed bitterly. “For, since our last meeting, ay and before, at first sight I loved thee, Honoria. Ay, faith, so devoutly that I . . . even I that jibed at love . . . do love! I that scorned and pitied all husbands, I, that mocked at wedlock, would be thy husband . . . to love and honour thee. This I tell thee now, and in such unlucky hour, but to prove how basely you misjudge me. Well, Honoria, will you not deign me even a word?”

Here, once again, she urged Dapple forward, whereat Sir Wilfred followed, cursing beneath his breath.

“I vow and protest you the most tantalizing of creatures!” cried he pettishly. “Come now, be kind . . . at the least tell me I’m forgiven . . . spare me one mere word to my comfort, child.”

But, she still making no response either by word or look, he pleaded, threatened, mocked, laughed at and scowled on her and she heeding not in the least.

And so it was in a silence, scornful on her part and sullen on his, that they came at last into quiet, slumberous Alfriston.

CHAPTER XIX

TELLS OF SISTER AND BROTHER AND A FACE IN THE DARK

Sir Charles Warrender set down his brimming wine glass so abruptly that it slopped over and all unheeded, for his wide eyes, upraised beneath the bandage that swathed his youthful brow, were gazing in startled disbelief at the slimly-elegant, though somewhat dusty young gentleman who, spurred feet wide-planted and arms folded, was frowning down on him in such stern reproof.

“What, Charles, d’ye gape?” laughed Sir Wilfred. “And well you may! The wig, my dear fellow! The breeches! The dare and damme air! Ha, d’ye smoke the lovely cheat?”

“Well, now—le’mme die!” exclaimed the young baronet, a little thick of speech. “Le’mme perish, but . . . am I mad or dreaming?”

“Neither, Charles,” sighed Honoria, wearily. “Alas, you are merely drunk.” And sitting down, she crossed booted legs and, frowning still, shook reproachful head at him.

“Breeches . . . ’pon my soul!” exclaimed Charles, goggling.

“No no!” laughed Sir Wilfred. “Upon your beauteous sister’s bewitching . . . limbs, dear fellow.”

“So dem’d un-fem’nine!” quoth Charles, shaking head in his turn, “Most repr’hensible! Oh, Honoria, rabbit and sink me if I could ha’ believed it o’ thee—no!”

“And is this your greeting, Charles?”

“Stap m’ vitals, but you con-found me—quite!”

“Why then, my poor boy, I do not wear these hateful things in vain, for this is the reason of them.”

“Eh . . . what . . . what reason?” stammered Charles. “Why breeches, damme . . . why?”

“To quite confound your wicked purpose, Charles,—to hold you from dishonour and possible death. This is why I . . . I stoop to ape the man—that I may still protect you as I have done all our days, and as I promised our

dear father years ago. Ah, but you remember, Charles, how I vowed if you lent yourself to Uncle George's cruel design and set out on this venture,—you'll mind how I swore to follow you? Well—here I am!"

"Ay, I see you, ma'm, I see you!" quoth Charles, sitting very upright the better to blink and stare at her. "I behold you very plainly, Honoria, in those curst breeches,—the which, begad, I believe are mine!"

"Of course they are, Charles,—every garment I'm wearing is yours, and fit me very well, I think—"

Sir Wilfred, lounging gracefully on the settle hard by, chuckled softly, whereupon the young baronet began to laugh somewhat stridently, until checked suddenly by passionate stamp of his sister's spurred foot.

"Charles!" said she, eyeing his flushed face disdainfully, "for shame! Remember I am your sister! And hear me declare again that, plot and scheme how you may, go where you will, yet shall I come 'twixt you and this evil you would do—"

"The which evil," Sir Wilfred interposed, gently, "can be no evil since it is the capture of a known rebel and—"

"Be silent, sir!" she commanded, gesturing at the speaker, but with bright gaze upon her brother. "As for you, Charles,—hear me swear again by that God you and I have knelt and prayed to in better days,—you shall not stain your soul . . . I will not permit this . . . somehow, anyhow . . . though I die for it!"

Now at this, Charles, being moved beyond speech by her resolute look and desperate words, reached for the bottle, but her quick hand was upon it first and, before he might prevent, she had dropped it through the open casement to splinter on the cobblestones of the street.

"Well now . . . rot me!" he exclaimed, rising so suddenly that he staggered, "lay me bleeding, le'mme perish if I ever—"

"Oh, cease your silly oathing, my poor, foolish boy!" sighed she, all suddenly tender. "Come now, I'll see thee up to bed." And she set her arm about him in that gentle, motherly fashion that had been wont to comfort and soothe his childish sorrows.

"Why, very well . . . dear soul!" he murmured, and yielding to this tender though compelling arm, turned towards the door.

"And yet so early?" laughed Sir Wilfred. "Well, good night, to thee, dear boy! Petticoat government, eh?" And he wafted a kiss.

“Eh—Will—eh?” demanded Charles frowning suddenly. “No! Ha, damme—no, she’s in—breeches! Loose me, girl,—loose me, I say!” And he freed himself so violently that Honoria reeled, caught her spurs, tripped and fell heavily at his feet.

Now, while her brother, sobering all at once, stared down on her in horrified dismay, Sir Wilfred leapt to aid her, but Charles interposed.

“Now, damn you, Rokeby!” he cried remorsefully, and thrusting Sir Wilfred aside with unexpected strength, stooped to lift his sister in cherishing arms, to hold her to his breast, imploring forgiveness; but she, quick to turn this to advantage, seemed to swoon in his embrace, and let him plead quite vainly a while; then, opening her lovely eyes, she smiled up at him wistfully, touched his cheek with caressing fingers, vowed she knew he had never meant to hurt her, and kissed him, murmuring:

“Come you up to bed, dear boy . . . oh, a bed, ’tis a comfort my weariness yearns to!”

“Dear soul, come then!” said he, kissing her in his turn and as he had been wont to do in those earlier days. “Faith, but I’m glad of thee, Honoria!” said he impulsively. “Sure never was sister like to thee,—’tis purest joy to see thee again! And wert right, girl, wert very absolutely right for I was drunk . . . very nearly—”

“And are so yet, dear fellow,” laughed Sir Wilfred, “or you’d mind how the house is full—”

“Ga-so, thou’rt right, Will, confound me but thou’rt right,—every bedchamber occupied! Now here’s precious coil! Ha,—no matter, shalt ha’ mine, Honoria. I shall do well enough on the settle yonder. Come, my dear, I’ll show thee to my chamber.”

Sir Wilfred opened the door, bowing profoundly; Honoria nodded and followed her brother up creaking stair, along a railed passage and into a chamber with great, cosy-looking bed, (at sight of which she sighed) and wide lattices that opened upon the little, pleasant street.

Closing the door, she tossed off cumbrous wig and seated upon the bed with Charles beside her, took his hand in her own warm, vital clasp to fondle it against her smooth cheek.

“Oh, Charles,” she murmured, “dear boy that I love so much, why will you be friends with that man?”

“Eh, man, my dear? If you mean Rokeby, I swear Will’s a prime fellow, ay he is so, and devilish good friend, and what’s more—mighty well esteemed in the world—”

“Charles,” she murmured, “oh, my dear, why not be my own loved brother again and come back home with me to our own world . . . just you and me—” Freeing his hand, Charles clenched it to passionate fist.

“Now damme but my mind’s set on winning my heritage, girl, come what may,—set, d’ye hear, like any rock, ay faith, like th’ adamantine crag, m’ dear. I’m a curst determined man as you should know, Honoria child, so pray let’s hear no more o’ this. To-morrow shalt kiss me good-bye like sweet, dutiful sister and ride back home.”

“Why so I will, dear boy, and ah, so very gladly if you will go with me.”

“Impossible, girl! Not to be thought on! My duty lieth hereabouts, so here I bide whiles you get back to your duty at home.”

“I know where my duty lieth!” she retorted sharply; then touching his bandaged temple with gentle hand, she murmured as tenderly:

“What of this poor, dear head?”

“No great matter, child,” he answered, loftily, “a merest chance o’ battle, and not worth mention.”

“Yet tell me, Charles, tell me—prithee now!”

“Why, then, ’tis small memento of this rebel Wayne, and rabbit me, but a right desperate fellow we proved him.”

“Ah,—he would have . . . killed thee, my dear?”

“Why, he did his endeavour that way, girl; and small wonder, for we were three to one, and, even so, he blooded Dartry ere his sword broke!”

“Where was this, Charles? Tell me of this Wayne,—tell me all you know.”

“Well, it seems he was twice captured ’twixt here and the Scots Border and twice won free. Then Will Rokeby nigh took him at Sevenoaks, but the dragoons bungled it. They got sight of him again beyond Dallington and shot his horse, so he took to the forest afoot. But we knew he was making South, and so, bidding the soldiers follow, South we rode ahead o’ them and, sure enough, had word of him at Uckfield, and tracked him to a little wood
—”

“Where was Sir Wilfred?”

“Oh, Will had ridden round to cut him off whiles Dartry and I spurred into the wood to drive him into the open. But—”

“Yes, yes—and what then?”

“Why then, ’stead of running as expected, he leaps on us from a thicket, sword in fist and mighty unexpected, pinks Dartry like a flash, breaks his blade i’ the recovery, whips him up a heavy stick and has me out o’ the saddle in a twinkling and, well,—off he goes.”

“Oh! . . . And what of Sir Wilfred?”

“Why, bold Will tackles him single-handed and gets robbed and half killed.”

“Ah!” exclaimed Honoria, clasping her hands. “The murderous, thieving wretch!”

“Well . . . n-o-o, child, no! I should say rather—a poor, tattered, half-starved wretch fighting for his miserable life, one ’gainst the many. I protest, rebel though he be, I could pity the fellow—almost. Hey, what . . . what now?” exclaimed Charles, for his sister had kissed him suddenly and with an extreme fervour.

“For being thine own true self, dear boy, and shewing pity on thine enemy—”

“Nay, not mine, i’ faith,—the King’s enemy—”

“No, Charles, our cruel, wicked Uncle George’s enemy, for ’twas he bribed you to hunt down this poor gentleman, this miserable, hunted fugitive. So why, oh my dear, why stain your soul with this innocent blood? Wherefore will you be—”

“Lord, and there y’are, at it again!” cried Charles, pettishly. “Enough! No more! You do but waste breath—”

“Why so I will, obstinate boy, and my blood too, rather than you shall win such vile heritage so vilely—”

Here they fell to mutual reproaches and fierce disputation (very sister and brotherly) and thus were quite unconscious of the softly opening door behind them and the quick, stealthy fingers that drew key from lock.

“. . . And so, have done!” cried Charles, angrily. “For there’s my final word,—ay, by blood, girl, the word of a man infinitely, stupendously and

most dev'lish determined!"

"Then hear you the word of a more determined woman, thou peevish boy,—rather than have you win this legacy of blood I would see thee dead and die with thee. Howbeit, I'll spend my very life to prevent thee! And there is thy sister's final word!"

"Eh?" gasped Charles. "See me dead, says you?"

"So long as I die with thee."

"Well, Honoria, damme—"

"No!" she cried, a little wildly. "No, Charles! It is to save you from damnation I would lose my life! Oh, kneel down, Charles, kneel you down beside me as you was wont to do in the dear, old days, and let us pray God to save and keep us worthy . . . that we may use the life He hath given us to good purpose. . . . Kneel, Charles, kneel you down, I say!"

But, even as she spoke and while Charles yet stood hesitant, there came a rapping on the door and thereafter the voice of Sir Wilfred:

"Oh, Charles, I've had a bed set for you in my chamber. And it grows late—"

"Thankee, Will! I'm coming now, ay I'll with thee anon!" Then, stooping where Honoria knelt beside the bed, he kissed her shining hair, murmured a good night blessing, and hastening from the room, closed the door very gently and left her yet upon her knees.

So Honoria prayed for her brother and for herself, and lastly and with strange fervency, for that poor, lonely, hunted man, Jason Wayne.

With him thus in mind, she rose and leaned from wide-flung casement to look up at the radiant moon high in a serene heaven. . . .

And she would meet him at daybreak, this poor, lonely one. And in that quiet hour she must contrive somehow to bring him to Uncle Robin, who had never failed her yet . . . to Uncle Robin so strong to aid, so wise to counsel. . . .

A clock chimed eleven; she had then four hours to rest . . . and she ached with weariness. Well, half-an-hour's gallop across the Downs, by ways she knew, would bring her in sight of the parsonage house at break of day. Three and a half hours to rest, and think, and scheme. . . . Though her eyes were closing, heavy with lack of sleep. . . . And this great, deep bed so inviting! But she must not sleep! And yet . . . Oh, for the cool caress of these white

sheets! And even if her tired eyes should close a while, she had always, thank God, possessed the faculty of waking when she would!

So Honoria undressed, or very nearly, and, getting into bed, sighed to its comfort—and was asleep before she knew it.

But in her slumbering she was upon that same desolate road, writhing again to the horror of a brutish, merciless embrace, cruel arms . . . hands that shamed her . . . and no Galloping Parson there to her relief. . . . So she agonized to gasping wakefulness, and started up in bed to see in the dimness a bewigged head downbent above her, a face that was her instant comfort; a whispering voice that banished her sick fears and thrilled her instead to breathless wonderment . . . for this was the face and this the voice of Jason Wayne.

CHAPTER XX

TELLS OF ANOTHER WOOING, AND OF THE LETTER OF A DEAD MAN

“You?” she breathed, while sleepy wonder grew to wakeful amazement.

“Honorina . . . thou loveliness!” he whispered. “Hush thee now! Dress thee and speedily, my Tommy lad, and steal you down to me. And be silent, thou beauteous thing!” Finger to lip, he turned on silent feet and was gone.

For a moment she lay staring at the softly-closed door as if Jason himself had been no more than a vision of dream; then a stair creaked loudly in the pervading stillness and she held her breath, listening in a dreadful suspense. But, hearing no sound except the ticking of a clock somewhere below, she rose and clothed herself hastily by light of the moon, and with riding-boots beneath her arm, stole out and away down the dark stair. The scabbard of her sword tapping sharply against panelled wall, set her heart leaping; the creak of stair beneath her slim, stockinged foot, filled her with an agony of trepidation, but down she crept and down until she saw the inn door stood wide, and framed against the refulgent moonlight an alert figure with hat cocked at familiar angle; then Jason’s hand had found her own with warm, strong clasp, drawing her forth of the darkness out into a hushed, white world. Round sudden corner and along narrow lane he led her at speed until, checking suddenly, he whispered:

“Your boots, comrade, on with ’em!”

“No, no!” she gasped, “Let us run—”

“With all my heart,—but first your boots, Thomas my old fellow, lest these pretty feet be lamed. Sit ye here on this bank, come now!” So, perforce, down she sat to pull on her long riding-boots though what with tremulous haste and dread of pursuit a great business she made of it; but they were on at last, and with her hand fast again in Jason’s compelling grasp, she sped on until in shade of trees they found Wentzelow with the horses. Silently they mounted and, following a grassy track, climbed up and up until they had reached a summit of these rolling, open Downs and were high above the sleeping village. Here the taciturn Wentzelow waved them farewell and, speaking no word, turned his animal and galloped away, riding like a young centaur.

“Come,” said Honoria, glancing down and back anxiously whence they had come, “let us go . . . ride fast, Jason!”

“Ay, ay, Tommy lad,” he answered, cheerily, “do but show me whither, though here’s small need for breakneck haste. The old world’s asleep, and for these few hours we have it to ourselves,—thou and I, Honoria—”

“Oh, ride!” she exclaimed, impatiently. “Why will you dally here so—so fool-like?”

“I but wait your lead, Honoria. This night I see you safe home, no matter where it be. Ay, home, d’ye hear?” he demanded, suddenly grim. “For damme if you shall adventure any more such foul harms as you did this night, according to Parson Rob—”

“Ah, he told you then?” she murmured.

“Ay, he did,—of a poor, terrified she-creature’s shameful peril and a vile rogue’s too-easy dying! By my soul, woman, I can never be sufficiently grateful to the Parson . . . and as for yourself, hang me, but you should pray blessings on him every night henceforth so long as you live! So—home with ye, madam, myself shall see you safe within doors.”

“Yes, Jason!” she answered, and with such unwonted meekness as surprised him. “Let us go!”

“To your home!” he repeated. “To your own folk and—safety!”

“Where else?” she sighed.

“Nay rather where is it, this home o’ yours?”

“Scarce an hour’s ride.”

“Then go leisurely, for ’tis yet three hours to daybreak and with the dawn we part.”

“Do we, Jason?”

“Ay, we do, Tom. To-morrow’s sun shall make us strangers, and should we meet thereafter, which God forbid, I’ll not know you.”

“Pray why not, Jason?”

“Because, my Tommy fool, old Death jogs ever in my shadow, to smite any shall dare befriend me. . . . But, now, whiles we amble thus in a world all our own, let us spend these last, so few hours in talk as friends should. So tell me of thyself, Honoria, for of thee, thy home and family I know nothing.

Come, friend Thomas, tell me why, being Honoria, if Honoria Honoria truly is, thou, Tom, must be so plaguey secretive concerning Honoria.”

“Nay,” she retorted, “do you tell me why you must come so much before the time I named, why thrust into danger here in Alfriston,—so madly reckless?”

“Merely for that you sent for me, child—”

“This I never did, Mr. Wayne. I sent to warn you from Birling Gap to-morrow night—”

“And till the dawn, Tom lad, mayst call me Jason. And for this warning, my grateful thanks, thou dear soul! Howbeit, young Wentzelow comes riding and rouses me with dire tale how the fellow Rokeby hath fought with and disarmed you—he must be something of a swordsman, ha?”

“He is indeed!” she answered, ruefully.

“Wentzelow further tells how Rokeby hath forced you to ride with him to Alfriston, so—well, here you behold your most dutiful, humble servant to command, Jason Wayne!”

“But how should this poor, one-armed Wayne person find me . . . my chamber?”

“Ah, child, this same poor, crippled yet most determined gentleman, being unable to climb, sendeth young Wentzelow to do this for him,—up clammers our gipsy to the first open lattice that offers, the which proveth to be Mistress Warren’s, but finding her door fast locked and the key gone—”

“How,” cried Honoria, indignantly, “was this indeed so?”

“Indeed, child, and had such look o’ villainy that—”

“No, no!” she cried, impulsively, “this would be my brother’s doing—”

“So ho!” exclaimed Jason, as she checked suddenly, “our most secretive Tom, our mysterious Honoria—hath a brother!”

“Well, sir, and wherefore not? But if my door was locked—how came you . . . how then, pray?”

“Why then, Honoria, our Mr. Wayne, this gallant soul, little suspecting such brotherly care, and instantly fearful of evil for thee, incontinent forceth a lower window, and with admirable dexterity, stealeth upstairs and, finding key in lock, openeth this same door in fashion furtive, creepeth bedwards where the tender moon, sweet Luna, made a glory, and . . . ha, Tom! Oh,

Thomas,—Lord love thee, Tommy, then did Jason Wayne gaze entranced, all his soul in the eyes of him to behold there asleep such radiant vision o' beauty, such shape of womanish loveliness as far transcended his warmest expectations! For, on my life, Tom, this bewitching Warren, this so feminine Honoria showeth the loveliest—”

“Pah!” cried she, in her manliest voice. “Damme, Mr. Wayne, but you become very fulsome I think, sir!”

“Madam, you ha’ my permission to call me simply Jason. But, Tommy, ha Tom, hadst thou but glimpsed what I so fairly saw—there revealed to these my raptured eyes by kindly moon,—outstretched Tom, voluptuously chaste in gentle slumber’s sweetly manifest yet innocent abandon—”

“Tush!” cried Honoria. “Let me die, sir, but this is positively nauseous!”

“And thyself, Tom, apest manhood so very indifferent well, showing so purely feminine, that, having seen that I have seen, I could positively—kiss thee!”

“And thou’rt cripple confessed, poor man!”

“Ay, faith, so will we talk instead, Tom, and of Hon—”

“Yet even so, Jason, I think we might travel a little faster.”

“The sooner to be rid o’ me, girl? Well, so thou shalt anon, for good and all—with the dayspring. Ha’ patience then, the night speeds apace and who knoweth if ever shall be such another? So whiles it endure let us make the most on’t. And first prithee, Tom, tell me of Honoria, the precise who, how and why of her, resolve me now the mystery that is thyself.”

“Why so I . . . I will,” said she, somewhat breathlessly, “yet first I . . . I beg you tell me of . . . your father . . . if you will, Jason.”

Now at this, he rode silently some while, his gaze on the sinking moon and when at last he spoke, it was in tone very gentle.

“My father?” he repeated. “Now what shall I tell of him, Honoria, save that he was my father and so lived and so died that I do love and revere his memory and, being his only son, would live to prove myself something worthy of him—an I might.”

“Indeed,” said she and in tone as gentle, “I have heard my dear Uncle Robin pronounce him a very honourable and valiant gentleman.”

“Then may God bless thine Uncle Robin, child!” said Jason, fervently. “And pray who is he?”

"Strange to say, he is another Parson Robin, but oh very other than the Parson Rob that gallops and kills, he is the Reverend Robert Tulliver."

"So?" exclaimed Jason. "Why I knew him once, years ago, and mind him even yet,—a smallish, mighty nimble gentleman, a great scholar but greater swordsman, ay a perfect swordmaster! He was wont to visit my father in the good old days, they being alike lovers of books, though oft-times they would fence together, and this was my joy; I was but mere urchin then, Honoria. . . . So he is thine uncle! Well, now of thyself—"

"And I would have you meet and talk with him ere dawn."

"Ay, but to what purpose, child?"

"To your own good, be sure—"

"And his own risk, girl! Must I warn you again that whoso aids or comforts a rebel is damned for rebel likewise?"

"Nay, who shall ever know? And Uncle Robin is so very wise and able," she answered. "Also, Jason, if you will, I would have you tell me of the treasure that was lost and—"

"Treasure," he repeated, sharply, leaning near the better to see her face. "What know you o' this,—what?"

"It was told me how in your father's care was a great treasure of gold and jewels that vanished. And I heard this from Sir Wilfred Rokeby—"

"This foisting rogue!" exclaimed Jason, scornfully. "Then he'll have told you my father stole it, repeating this black lie, this vile calumny set abroad 'gainst my noble father by his false friend, that damned liar and traitor, George Warrender? You'll have heard this—ha?"

"So now, Jason, I would hear of it all again—from you."

"Ay, so you shall. And a villainous tale it is, for 'twas George Warrender's lust for this same treasure caused my father's death! And Sir George Warrender, this black-hearted villain, prosper'd,—ay, flourished in his iniquity and died in his bed, damn him,—and so is beyond my reach! But,—ha, girl, his foul blood persists! There is a young Warrender, his cursed nephew, Charles, shall yet pay for all,—someday we shall meet and then, by God, he shall answer to me—"

"No!" she cried, "Ah—no, no!"

"Zounds!" exclaimed Jason, turning to scowl. "Now what a plague d'ye mean by your 'no' and 'no'?"

"You—you!" she answered, breathlessly, "You will be out of England . . . you are for France so soon as it be safe and—"

"But I'm not, girl, I'm not. I've changed my mind. Here I am and here I'll bide alive or dead! Ay, here in old England I remain—to clear my father's name and have this young Warrender's foul blood—"

"But he . . . he never wronged your father!"

"Well, he's a Warrender and this is enough! By my soul, I so hate the very name I'd fain see all the villainous brood dead and rotting, ay and—"

"Oh—for shame!" cried she, turning on him with such sudden, wild gesture that he recoiled instinctively. "Such a merciless hate is wicked and dishonours you—"

"Wait!" said he. "First hear my story then judge how you will. True it is my father was chosen to administer this treasure that was to be the very sinews of the war, and well enough he used it until we were beaten at Preston,—then, to save it from this German usurper, he hid it. But Sir George Warrender that had seemed his friend and was then a professed Jacobite, knew of this and when the Cause was lost, his party scattered, slain on the field, captured or flying for their lives,—even as I am now, then—ha, then this Warrender, cursed renegade, turns cat-in-pan, changes his coat, becomes King George's man, betrays his old comrades to prison and bloody death and, among these,—my father,—ay, has him hunted down, taken and searched because he knows my father bears a paper telling where this damned treasure is hid—"

"Oh, but this . . . this was . . . vile!" gasped Honoria. "But the paper was not found, Jason?"

"Part of it only, for my father had writ it like a riddle, and upon two several papers, the one he bore with him and this Warrender stole, but the other he had hidden by the way, and this is yet to find, for except these two papers be set and read together the secret shall never be known. But my father was ironed and shut into prison. He was questioned . . . he was starved to break his spirit and questioned again . . . it is told that he was even . . . ha, God . . . put to the torture! Yet he endured all with a constant mind, resolute and silent . . . to the end. So at last they brought him to execution, his noble head fell 'neath the shameful axe and was . . . spiked on Temple Bar . . . And I, meantime starving and skulking in the Scottish Highlands, knew naught of it all."

"And no last word, thou poor Jason, no line of farewell?"

“Ah yes. For, on the day they killed him, my father writ me a letter . . . the last words he ever penned, and sent it by his secretary, faithful, old Thaddeus Finch. . . . Old Thad that was my playfellow and took me through the Horn Book . . . used to ride me on his shoulders . . . good, faithful Thad. . . .”

“And you have this letter still?”

“Ay,—here upon my heart. . . . So I sent word to Warrender that I would be his death, and rode South to find him and, having endured many harms and miseries, I learned he had died snug abed . . . thus was I cheated! And now . . . well . . .”

“What . . . what now, Jason?”

“Now,” he answered grimly, “come what may, I bide in England, and pray I may live long enough to vindicate my father’s honour and make bloody end of the last Warrender. This done, I’ll die content.”

“Yet you know little or nothing of . . . this Warrender!”

“Indeed, Honoria, I know he is a Warrender and called Charles.”

“You . . . do not even know him by sight.”

“Not as yet, but—”

“But you mean to seek him out . . . to kill him?”

“Ay, I do, Honoria, I do indeed!”

“Though you be well assured he nowise injured your unhappy father by word or deed!”

“Well, but he is a Warrender and therefore damned! . . . And so my tale is ended—”

“Oh, horrible!” she whispered.

“Why then forget it, child! Let us mind only ourselves and this gentle hour, these kindly solitudes. Look around us, Honoria,—the whole creation sleepeth and we, thou and I, have the world to ourselves for a little while. . . . Our lovely Sussex! Faith now in this too fleeting hour it seems a fair, sweet world this of ours, Honoria—”

“No!” cried she, very bitterly. “It is an evil world, full of cruel hate that lusts to bloodshed! It is a world of dreadful darkness where I am lost . . . lost, heartsick and weary of it all.”

“And small wonder, thou sweet soul!” said Jason, very tenderly. “When I think on all you have endured since we met, I can but admire at your high, courageous spirit and marvel upon this wonder that is you.”

They had descended a long, gentle slope and were traversing one of those narrow, grassy denes that make for the gentle, unforgettable beauty of this South Down country; and now as they paced slowly and very close together towards the sinking moon its level beams made such glory all about them that Honoria might view her companion’s lean, stern features quite clearly, and with eyes furtive though more keenly appraising than ever before: this bold line of brow and nose and aggressive chin, these long-lashed, so changeful eyes that could glare so ferociously, twinkle with sly merriment or seem so sadly wistful like the shapely, sensitive mouth below. . . . And, watching him thus, her quick brain was scheming desperately how she might turn him from his vengeful purpose, how best she might interpose between her stubbornly wilful young brother and this grimly determined Jason Wayne.

Well, he was a desperate man, but she, thank God, was a woman—and even more determined.

“Eh?” enquired Jason, turning to look at her in sudden anxiety, for she had sighed very dismally and was swaying in the saddle. “Ha, what now, comrade? What is’t, girl?”

“Alas, Jason!” she murmured plaintively, “I fear thy poor comrade, being merest woman, must rest a while.”

“This moment!” cried he, reaching her his hand. “Fool that I am not to ha’ thought for thee! Halt now and light thee down—”

“Not here,” she sighed, checking him as he made to dismount, “up yonder is a little wood.” So they climbed a grassy steep and coming to this little wood, they alighted, tethered their horses and choosing a place where the moonlight fell, Honoria sank to lean against a tree as though faint with weariness, though her mind had never been more alert, and her eyes were very bright and wakeful beneath the slumberous droop of their lashes.

“Now this,” said Jason seating himself beside her, “this, my Tommy lad, is as I would fain be yet never thought to be again,—thou and I cheek by jowl, Tom, and the moon apeek at us,—in a world all our own—”

“Yes,” sighed she, “but in our world should be nor hate nor bloodshed, Jason!”

“God forbid!” he answered, very fervently. “In our world, Honoria, should be such perfection of joy that I . . . even poor I should be man again . . . to woo fortune, ay—and a sweeter, far better and holier thing . . . were I indeed such happy creature ’stead of the miserable, driven wretch I truly am!”

At this she sighed, looking on him with eyes very pitiful:

“Liveth thy dear mother yet, Jason?”

“No, I thank God she died in happier days, and is but vaguest memory. . . . I would my father had died with her!”

“Was he like to thee, Jason, thy father?”

“Nay, taller, stronger—a nobler sort than I shall ever be. A scholar he and lover of books, a man very kindly gentle that could yet be terrible. A great-hearted gentleman, very magnanimous . . . nay, faith, Honoria, he is so far beyond my poor describing, shalt hear him for thyself. Hearkee to the last words he ever wrote, the letter I have carried with me ever since and shall, to the end, for it is beyond all things precious to me.” From his breast Jason drew a small wallet that hung from his neck by a cord, and opening this wallet, took thence a folded paper and glanced from this to frown at the falling moon and shake his head, saying:

“I doubt you can decipher it by this light, but I will read it with you, for I know every word by heart. Here, first then, the superscription that says: ‘These to my very dear and only son, Jason Wayne, by the hand of my last and faithful servitor, Thaddeus Finch.’ And now for the letter,” said Jason, unfolding the paper with fingers very gently reverent.

Then, leaning shoulder to shoulder and their heads bowed together over this fateful missive, Honoria looked and hearkened while Jason pointed out and read each written word:

“‘From my prison in The Tower, September the Third, Seventeen Hundred and Sixteen. Jason, dear my son, I write at point of death and in haste since I am to die sooner than methought, within the hour the headsman at one stroke (let us hope) shall set me above all troubles and bodily afflictions and resolve my every difficulty. Therefore I go to meet him, when I must, with a serene and assured mind, yielding back my soul to that merciful God whence it came. Now in this, my last hour, my thoughts are all for thee, Jason, and first because you are my so dear son, and secondly because I hear you have taken oath to

harass and kill George Warrender for his treachery and usage of myself. Jason, you are a man very bold and determined but I am your father and, standing as I do now upon the threshold of death, these dying eyes see all things with clearer vision and in true perspective, the Cause and Effect, the marvellous working of God's Providence, and therefore I do most solemnly conjure you to forgo all action against Warrender, leaving his punishment to that all wise God before whom I must presently appear. Now briefly of this treasure that hath proved for me such mortal burden that to-day I die. I have hidden it where none shall ever discover except he possess my written instructions set forth upon two several papers and so artfully writ that neither is good without the other, each alone being no more than meaningless jumble of words. But on my journey South, fearing to be taken, I hid one of these papers, and how this may be found I have set in these lines of doggerel verse lest this letter miscarry. Here then for thy direction viz:

'Bove thy head at stricken hind
Eke in dolphin hid,
All ye seek ye here shall find
Merest crack amid.

“ “As for this same treasure, that is properly of a lost cause and therefore belongeth to no man, I do think it accursed and thus better left unfound. And now, my Jason, here in the gloom of my prison, I humbly pray God to preserve thee to better purpose than vengeance on our enemies, so that thou shalt hereafter meet thy Maker with clean hands, my son, in that heaven where, God willing, I thy father, with the sweet soul that mothered thee, shall greet thee, our son, in His Holy Presence and make thee right loving welcome. Thaddeus, this faithful friend that hath watched with me in this my death hour, warns me how the warders and soldiers be mustering, and indeed I hear a tramp of feet, so now again with my last breath I implore God's blessing on thee, Jason my son. Should they take thee and thou must die like me, why death shall but lift thee to God and a better living (I am persuaded). So be comforted, for to the valiant heart, strong in faith, to die is very easy. But if thou art to live, this shall be harder, for life is troublous. Yet howbeit, I thy father, knowing thee

worthy, love thee now and shall hereafter. So, Jason, my son, hail to thee and, for a while, farewell.' ”

The reader's hoarse voice broke on the last word and, folding up this letter with the same gentle care, he hid it in his breast and sat with face averted, gazing away dumbly on the sinking moon; nor might Honoria speak awhile for the tears that choked her.

“Oh . . . Jason . . .” she murmured, at last, but, striving for further speech, sobbed and covered her face; then his arm was about her suddenly, a strong arm that drew her close yet held her very tenderly, and when he spoke, his voice, though still hoarse, was cheery:

“What, Tommy lad, can ye weep for one you never saw? God love thee for it, comrade, since indeed he was worth a tear! Ha, my sweet soul, never grieve so! Come now, wipe me these dear, lovely eyes since myself cannot. Honoria, thou gentle loveliness, comfort thee for, an God indeed be just, this father o' mine is a glorious saint in heaven.”

“And . . . oh, Jason, then perchance he is looking down on us even now!”

“And here is mighty comforting thought, Tom!”

“And, Jason, he doth most earnestly conjure thee to seek no revenge for past wrongs, leaving this to God His own judgment!”

“Ay, but then my father was more angel than man, but as for me,” quoth Jason, at his grimmest, “I am merest man and hunted, desperate wretch with nought in the world to live for save to right his cruel wrong and avenge his cruel death!”

“No! No!” cried she, taking and clasping his hand that had clenched itself to passionate fist. “Have you naught better. . . Oh, is there no woman to love and live for, Jason?”

“Not one!” he answered, bitterly. “I have never loved any woman beyond a kiss or so.”

“Why, then,” said she, kneeling that she might look deep into his frowning eyes, “live for the woman you have never kissed,—this woman that was and is and will be your faithful comrade to the end if you . . . will have her, Jason.”

“Yourself?” he demanded, in strange, hushed tone, and viewing her like one greatly amazed. “You mean . . . marriage . . . my wife?”

“Yes, Jason.”

“You’d wed poor wretch in such dismal plight as I?”

“I . . . will!” she murmured.

“God forbid!” he muttered. “You must love me . . . passing well? Do you indeed?”

“More . . .” she answered, stammering and breathless, “more than . . . than I . . . I thought. . . .”

“And would you take this beggar to your arms . . . share his perils . . . cherish him in exile . . . sordid poverty and hardship.”

“In this dawn . . . Uncle Robin shall . . . marry us. . . .”

Now at this, Jason was dumb, confounded beyond speech, staring on vacancy with troubled eyes, and so long that she turned at last, viewing him askance, but she, resolute in her purpose, leaned to him, bowing her head against him while her hands, tremulous, unready yet obedient to her fierce will, crept about his neck. Then with movement sudden and almost fierce, he took off her hat and wig, to look down at the close-wreathed coils of her bright hair and made as if to touch it, yet did not.

“Honorias,” said he, at last, harshly, “such marriage would be your misery, so do not tempt me, for I am . . . very human. . . .” Now in spite of his gruffness, or because of it, her clinging hands became more compelling, and she nestled closer. Then, heedless of his wound and all else save her warm loveliness, he clasped both arms fast about her and with his cheek upon her soft, shining hair,—laughed, though very unsteadily.

“Here’s folly!” he muttered. “Here’s madness and worse. Yet for this one little hour—”

“No!” said she. “This dawn Uncle Robin shall . . . marry us if . . . you will it so—”

“And . . . by God,” gasped Jason, loosing her almost savagely, “this I never will! Ask me why and thou’rt very fool!”

“Why, Jason?” she demanded, instantly.

“Because, fool, Death is my shadow. Because, fool, mine is traitor’s carcase for shameful butchery . . . with like ghastly death for any that befriend or shelter me. So am I death in frightful shape, a blasting pestilence to flee from . . . the sooner you are rid o’ me, the better. Come, let’s away! Up with ye now, up and to horse! Home with thee, girl, I’ll see thee safe ere

day catch thee in my damning company. Come, mount—mount, I say! 'Twill be dawn ere the moon's down, and I must to earth like hunted fox but first—damme, but I'll see ye home!"

So they mounted and rode on again, on and up, until far before them showed a dim, vague immensity of ocean, behind them the sinking moon and below, a tree-shaded, misty lane, a leafy grove, the chimneys and gables of a house; and with her troubled, musing gaze on this, Honoria checked her horse.

"Yonder," said she, pointing, "yonder, Jason, is my Uncle Robin's home, where you may be safe and—"

"Ay, ay—I see!" he answered, impatiently. "And yonder, across the sea, peeps dawn. Ride, girl,—push on! I'm fain to be done with thee ere another cursed day afflict me."

"Come then," she nodded, "for in my uncle's house shall be kind welcome for you, Jason."

"Never in the world!" said he, waving her on with fierce gesture.

"But I say there will!" she cried, between anger and pleading anxiety.

"And I say—no!" he retorted, so savagely that she started, then leaned to peer at him in growing wonderment.

"Why will you so amaze me?" she questioned.

"Why must you so persist?" he demanded. "Ride on, I say."

"And I say that with my good, wise uncle you shall find comfort, Jason, with peace and safe harbourage—for a time at least."

"Not for a moment, damme!"

"Nay, wherefore speak me so harshly, Jason Wayne? I that am . . . so weary! I that would do all I might to—" her voice broke to a choking sob. . . . Then his hand was upon her drooping shoulder.

"Why then never heed me, girl! Ah, never heed me, Tommy lad! I am but furtive shade flitting through world o' dread,—a spectre that fears the day, a misery that, fleeing his foes, brings destruction on his friends,—so friends are not for me. . . . Come then, let me see and know thee safe and so be away ere the damned sun betray me,—come!"

Speechless both, they descended the steep and followed the winding lane until it brought them where, bowered in trees, stood the house, its lattices

blank and dark all, for the moon was down.

“Here,” said Jason, drawing rein and fronting her in the misty gloom, “here endeth our sweet companionship. Here Friendship dies, for here we part. Should we ever meet again I’ll seem thy bitterest foe . . . But now,—farewell to thee, Tommy lad! Good-bye . . . my Honoria.”

“No, wait—wait!” she panted, and seizing his bridle, stared on him with eyes of terror. “You must not go . . . you shall not. . . . Death waits for you . . . hiding . . . up yonder in . . . this ghastly mist. See, the day breaks on us pale as a dead face and . . . as cold! Look how I shiver . . . ’tis like warning of danger . . . creeping nearer. . . . Oh, Jason!”

“Nay, child,” he answered, viewing her anxiously, “where can be danger other than I know? What dost mean, Honoria, what?”

“Oh, Jason, I . . . I know not . . . ’tis but what I feel . . . horror . . . such as I never knew. . . .”

“Ay, but wherefore, girl? Why this sudden panic, what d’ye fear?” Shuddering violently, she glanced about them and up at the little wood that seemed to frown upon her from the steep above them and, with her wide gaze fixed there, whispered:

“Thy death!”

“So?” he murmured, glancing up also at this little wood, “Well, if it be quick, so much the better—”

“No!” she gasped and, loosing his bridle, covered her eyes as to shut out some frightful vision. “Oh, Jason, come with me . . . now!”

“Never!” he answered, between shut teeth; then seizing her hand he pressed it to his lips, saying gently: “Ah, my dear, thou’rt all distraught . . . this ghostly hour, thy lack o’ sleep,—’tis this ails thee.”

“Ay, belike it is, Jason, for I’m weary to death. And yet my heart bids me warn thee, nor suffer thy going. . . . Oh Jason, go with me to my good Uncle Robin—”

“No!” he answered, and loosed her. “Away now, get thee to bed, and so farewell, my Honoria.”

“Jason,” she gasped. “Oh, Jason Wayne, I . . . I am indeed thy Honoria, thy friend ever and always, because I am also . . . sister to the boy you would kill. I am Honoria Warrender, and thy loving friend, to save thee from this evil for—his sake, thine own sake and mine, Jason—mine!”

Motionless sat Jason, staring on her in the half light, and so very still that she leaned nearer, whispering his name, then recoiled as from a blow, for Jason was smiling. He lifted clenched fist and let it fall, he made as if to speak, but laughed instead; then his horse reared to goading spur, whirled and was away at a gallop.

CHAPTER XXI

TELLS OF CAPTURE, ESCAPE AND BITTER DISILLUSIONMENT

‘So she, she herself was an accursed Warrender!’ Driven by this certainty, headlong rode Jason heedless of direction until his labouring animal floundered suddenly and, roused by this, he found himself climbing that same steep, grassy slope crowned by the little darkling coppice. Within its shadow he paused to breathe his panting horse, and had turned to frown back and down at the gables and chimneys of the house that now sheltered her, when, and almost without a sound, he was beset right and left, and flinched to the pistol-muzzle thrust so viciously beneath his ribs, and saw it was grasped by a faintly-smiling person whose modish attire and affected languor proclaimed him a very fine person indeed.

“Ah, Mr. Wayne, a fair capture, I think? Pray sit still whiles we disarm you—so! Tranter, you have his other pistol? Good! So, Mr. Wayne, we meet once more, for you behold in me Francis Dartry, whom you pinked in the arm on a certain occasion and entirely owing to my own clumsiness, which hurt, sir, you may be rejoiced to see is pretty well again. And, this time, Mr. Wayne—you are my prisoner,—mine, sir—”

“Ay, but what o’ me?” demanded Tranter, hoarsely. “Ain’t I helped take him? What o’ that forty guineas reward, sir, and me,—what o’ me?”

“You, my zealous soul, shall ha’ your share o’ the blood-money anon, never doubt. But this prisoner is—mine! Meantime you may pinion him.”

“Why, so I will, sir. And him being such cursed violent, such slippery and dangerous customer, I’m for roping of him precious tight, sir!”

“My excellent Tranter, tight is the word!”

“Why then, sir, cover him wi’ your barker, for he looks on me very bloodily.”

“He does, Tranter, he does indeed, and no wonder! Let me suggest, sir,” continued Mr. Dartry with airy flourish of the pistol he held, “that you were wiser to submit yourself to these somewhat irksome but so necessary precautions, Mr. Wayne.” And, glancing from this threatening weapon to the smooth, merciless complacency of the face behind it, Jason submitted perforce; but, while this painful business was doing, he recalled how exactly Honoria had foretold this very thing . . . as if she had known,—ha, as

perhaps she had indeed known, nay, as she must certainly have known! Stirred by this bitterly hateful thought, he turned to glare back at that distant house with scowl so fierce that Mr. Dartry, as if reading his mind, looked thither also and wafting a kiss with his pistol-hand, sighed affectedly and murmured:

“A bewitching creature, our lovely Honoria! And of a wit to match her beauty,—eh, Mr. Wayne? And, oh Venus—a shape! Ah, such bodily perfections as glorify the thrice happy manly garments that hiding yet betray the splendour of her to such deliciously provoking effect, luring a man on and on to—shall we say?—the indignity of bonds and a pistol ’neath his chin.”

Despite the painful cords that now held him rigid and helpless in the saddle, Jason contrived to turn and nod at the speaker, saying:

“Mr. Dartry, I begin to detest myself that upon our last meeting I did not exterminate the noxious thing you are, ’tis oversight shall be remedied hereafter, if chance offer.” Mr. Dartry tittered almost joyously.

“If, sir, ‘if’!” he nodded. “So small a word and yet how potent!” Jason, being greatly overwrought for lack of sleep, cursed him savagely; Mr. Dartry, complacently self-possessed, bowed gracefully.

“Tranter,” said he, “you may go mount, and bring me my horse. You, Mr. Wayne, are perhaps a little peevish, and very naturally, for to find yourself so duped, befooled, deceived and deluded by our peerless fair one,—our beauty,—and she in breeches, this should vex any man, ay even myself, who seldom indulge in anger as too fatiguing. As for our Warrender, I protest she hath played her part to admiration and beyond expectation—almost! And so now to thee, delectable Honoria,” sighed he, wafting another kiss towards that distant house, “receive now this pledge o’ love and gratitude, and thyself all sweetly fragrant in thy bed . . . my thoughts are with thee and here, thanks to thy warm seductiveness, our elusive Mr. Wayne is secure and safe with me. Ah, my horse, good Tranter . . . watch me our gentleman whiles I mount. . . . So! Now ride you on before us, brave fellow, and leisurely, no need is there for unseemly haste.”

So they went at easy pace; and Mr. Dartry’s smile was bland, his speech kindly, his tone gentle, though the eyes that watched his captive’s features so pallid in the waxing dawn-light, were extremely alert and keen.

“Nay now, Mr. Wayne,” he murmured, “grieve not that a woman should so betray you, for to be so beguiled, and by such warm beauty, but proves

your manhood. And you are not alone, Mr. Wayne, no, there was poor Adam, there was miserable Samson,—there were others besides, and will be more while there are such simple gentlemen of natures so ardent and confiding as yourself and designing fair ones in such tempting shapes as Eve, Delilah and our Honoria. To the which last I shall joyfully hereafter express my fervent gratitude. To yourself, sir, I now extend my sympathy and, with this, my warm and hearty congratulations that Beauty should have beguiled you into the hands of such extremely reasonable person as Francis Dartry. For, sir, he is no blind zealot, he is neither for runaway James nor German George, he serves but one master and this one—the Francis Dartry aforesaid.”

“Sir,” retorted Jason, bitterly scornful, “I can well believe it!”

“I hoped you would, sir,” smiled Mr. Dartry, “because this bring us to the point, Mr. Wayne, namely and to wit: You have a secret, but I have you! Very well, let us make exchange one for other, give your secret to me and I give yourself back to you. Show me how I may come by a certain hoard we wot of and you are free as a bird and may fly—with my blessing. And what sayeth Mr. Wayne to this so very reasonable offer?”

“We-e-ll,” quoth Jason as if pondering the matter, “first, being such extreme talkative person, you must prattle a little more . . . and first of Mistress Honoria, since you are so well acquaint . . . you are, I think?”

“So well, sir, that I’m fain, and fondly expect to be, even more so.”

“She is, I think, devoted to her brother Charles?”

“Infinitely, sir—”

“Excellent!” nodded Jason grimly. “Now of yourself, sir,—it was for this treasure you hunted me so persistently and raised the hue and cry against me, you and Rokeby?”

“Nay, Mr. Wayne, you are forgetting Charles Warrender and his so devoted sister, they have as great and indeed an added inducement to your capture.”

“How so, pray?”

“As thus, sir, for whereas Rokeby and I desire merely to lay you by the heels that we may bargain for the secret of this treasure,—the Warrenders, to inherit the noble fortune left by their uncle, Sir George, must by his will, contrive not only your capture, but execution also. Thus for Rokeby and

myself you must be alive,—to the Warrenders you are of no least value except you be thoroughly dead. Am I clear, sir?”

“Extremely!” answered Jason, at his grimmest.

“Why then, Mr. Wayne, here and now, be as clear with me concerning this treasure, believe me you were wiser, for your own sake.”

“ ’Twould appear so,” nodded Jason.

“Then speak!” said Mr. Dartry, leaning near and sinking his voice. “Give me the paper we know you bear about you, describe how I must use it, and I will contrive your escape before . . . ay, before we reach the sunken road yonder. Speak, sir!”

“Then hearkee, Mr. Dartry! I now take joy to tell you this most accursed treasure may rot and yourself with it, sir,—and so be infinitely damned t’ ye!”

Mr. Dartry actually scowled, then, smoothing his handsome features to their habitual expressionless calm, tittered instead:

“A fool and his folly,” he nodded, “which shall certainly fall on fool’s head! Must I remind you again there are others, less complaisant than I, lusting for your capture? There is friend Rokeby fiercely indignant for his ravished garments, the which I see become you none so ill; friend Rokeby will have you stripped of ’em and searched! There are the Warrenders will have your body to the block! I protest you had far better deal thus alone with my reasonable self. So prithee think again, sir, and speak.”

But Jason, in his irksome bonds, teeth clenched against the pain of his wound, did not even trouble to glance towards the speaker, but lifted haggard gaze to the sky flushing now to the glory of dawn, while Mr. Dartry hummed, softly melodious.

“Sir,” said he, at last, “I grope vainly for reason why any man should permit himself to suffer needlessly, why any in this very troublous world should trouble himself with aught beside himself. Here’s yourself, for instance, must fight, suffer, and risk peculiarly hideous death, indeed most shameful and odious, and all for one James, a muddle-headed monarch you may scarce have seen! And now—here’s yourself forcing yourself to chance further hazard of more calamities and certain death, ’stead of accepting my offer and with a becoming gratitude. Astounding!”

They had reached and were now traversing a sunken road, the track worn deep in the chalk by the long-forgotten traffics of a long-vanished and

forgotten people; a narrow way this, between high, bush-crowned banks and abrim with pearly mist wherein Tranter, riding on before them, now showed like the vague spectre of himself, and wherein, like spectre, he suddenly vanished but with cry extremely human. Then other ghostly forms seemed all about them, dim-seen faces closed in upon them. Mr. Dartry, reaching for holstered pistols, was wrenched from saddle, Jason's painful bonds seemed to melt and fall away—and beside him loomed a form gigantic and familiar.

“Jockabed!” he muttered.

“Myself, brother,” answered the tall Romany, as Jason sat rubbing cramped limbs, “and glad am I to sarve ee so fort’nate,—though what’s luck for ee, sir, be bad for us wi’ arl they tubs to run,—eh, Jarge?”

“Why as to that,” answered Potter appearing at this moment, and somewhat breathless, “I rackon we ’ad them two blindfold and trussed afore they could see wot was wot or oo was oo. As for you, sir, off with ee, ride afore sun gets up and keep ee wide o’ the roads, there be sojers and Preventives, dang ’em! So don’t ee nowise make for Parson’s earth, ride for Pemsey woods, sir, ride and good luck to ee!”

“Friends,” said Jason, reaching his hand to each, “here is a grateful man’s thanks.” Then settling feet in stirrups, he turned his powerful animal and spurred for the safety of that age-old haven to all distressed and hunted creatures, the leafy shadows of the sheltering greenwood.

CHAPTER XXII

CONCERNING WOMAN

He was hungry, thirsty, troubled with pain of his wound and desperately weary, but all this was as nothing to the torment of his rageful grief.

So on he drove, thrusting ever deeper into these close, leafy solitudes and riding like a madman, for sometimes he laughed and sometimes he cursed, while, like very madman, he sought to flee the thought that goaded him:

‘She had tricked, deceived him from the first and now would have lured him to capture and death!’

Thus, by reason of sleeplessness, pain of body, fever of mind and bitter disillusionment, he became again the hunted, desperate wretch, fierce with despair, now spurring headlong, now halting to listen for the pursuing terror of the hue and cry, a frantic, wild-eyed man who alternately laughed at and cursed himself, his betraying garments and horse, the mounting sun, but oftenest and most bitterly—Honorio Warrender. But by degrees this frenzy gave place to a growing faintness, with great passion of thirst so that, blinking weary eyes, he began to look about for that necessity and blessed solace—running water. And after some while his drowsy ears caught the softly pleasant sound of it and, thus guided, he came on a little stream, a shy rill that wound devious course amid mazy thickets until it led him to a grassy level shut in by underbrush and lofty trees. Here he dismounted and stumbling, tossed off hat and cumbrous peruke and sank down to drink and, thereafter, bathe face and head and hands in this pellucid, life-giving water.

Thus refreshed, he arose and stood dismayed to see his horse blown and distressed, his heaving flanks bloody from fierce rowelling; wherefore he cursed himself again, and very fervently, the while he did all he might to soothe and comfort the poor creature.

This done and the animal securely tethered and cropping contentedly nearby, Jason spread cloak beneath the nearest tree and, lying down, set his weapons close within reach, closed his weary eyes, and, despite throbbing wound, sank to slumber of exhaustion.

He woke with sense of ravenous hunger and, sitting up, blinked to a fugitive sunbeam, then, noting the direction of this mellow ray, drew out his

watch (or rather Sir Wilfred's) and was amazed to see it told the hour of half-past six.

"So then, Nicodemus," quoth he, apostrophising the horse still chewing contentedly nearby, "our slumbers have been long and dreamless, our wound is eased and our body, refreshed and invigorate, clamours for food, so will we feed it eftsoons."

Loosing haversack from saddle he explored the contents, sighing mournfully to find them so meagre; therefore he ate slowly that his meal should last the longer, pausing now and then to speak his thoughts aloud, addressing them, for lack of better listener, to his four-legged companion, thus:

"Thou, Nick, though good horse, art yet but mere brute, with naught but brutish instinct to guide thee yet, none the less, do show vastly content and happy with thy brutish lot, whiles I, being a man, do esteem myself the nobler animal since, though possessing but two legs, I am blessed and endowed with the god-like faculty of reason! And yet, Nicodemus, here sit I the veriest, merest wretch o' misery to be taken and made cruel end on by whoso may. Moreover, and despite my said god-like faculty, I have been most perfectly tricked and shamefully befooled, cheated, flammed and damnably deceived by two-legged creature feminine that, 'neath tender guise o' love and friendship, would have been my ruin! So much for us humans, Nick! Ay, better be horse, as thou, or yelping cur than such as wicked she or my most miserable self. Thus here is notable good reason to be done wi' reason! For, mark this, Nick,—I am not the first poor man fool to be so befooled, beguiled and cursedly hoaxed by subtle she-roguery! No, faith,—there hath been afore me a countless host o' men fools so befooled whereby came bloodshed, murders, wars, ay—sin in every shape and all by reason of such like other two-legged she-creatures, fair-seeming, smiling evils called women! So, Nicodemus be thankful thou'rt but unreasoning horse and thy females mere mares."

Here, having made an end of his scanty repast, Jason sighed very dismally and continued:

"Woman, Nick, is man's subtle menace,—a perambulating plague, and none more damnably so than—one, she thou wottest of, this sly hoyden in breeches, this cockatrice . . . that could yet seem so sweetly maid-like, so womanly tender . . . ha, but so is her cursed deceit the more vile! . . . Eh, Nick? She saved my life, you'll mind me? But I demand, to what purpose? Hearkee! She plucks me from swift, clean death merely to win from me the

secret of this accursed treasure and so deliver me to death slow and shameful! How, you doubt this, fool Nick? Well, thou’rt mere horse, but reason tells me that she, being a vile Warrender, for this reason would lure the secret out o’ me and me to my grisly doom. . . . Howbeit and despite her so black treachery, I live yet. . . . And to what end, say’st thou? I answer: To checkmate villainy and make sure end of brother Warrender, her ‘Charles’—damn him! ‘Well and good’ says you, with right horse sense, ‘but how?’ I answer, Nick, that wretch so desperate as I, whose life is forfeit to be killed in fashion most horrid, shall leap to meet a death more clean, and right gladly if, so dying, he may take his enemy with him. . . . Well, ‘brother Charles’ lieth at Alfriston with Rokeby and Dartry, seeking Jason Wayne, so then to Alfriston I’ll go, but—not as Jason Wayne. . . . This night, Nicodemus, thou and I and these betraying garments part company. To-night, by hook or crook, poor Jason shall vanish, to reappear as—whom, I wonder, and in what guise? Well, this shall Chance decide.”

Sweetly mellowed by distance a church clock chimed the hour.

“Aha, prick up thine ears, Nicodemus, for yon is call to action,—thither lieth our way, yonder is some village and a road—the high pad, Nick, where thou and I must play our roguish part and in roguery part. Come then! Nay first, I, as the greater rogue, must go masked,—a strip o’ lining from our cloak shall serve. Now, a slit here, another there—so! Come then, Nick, let’s to it!”

CHAPTER XXIII

DESCRIBES A TRANSFORMATION

Thus it befell that as Jason, a masked and sinister figure, rode the woodland's deepening gloom, Tom Truscott, yeoman-farmer, seated with divers boon companions in that inn called 'The Angel', glanced at the clock, emptied his tankard and, being very newly-wed, rose to be gone despite the company's loud expostulations, for young Tom was a cheery soul.

"Why, then, ef ee will goo," quoth the landlord, "tek 'eed o' The Parson. Killed again, 'e did, tother night, so watch out for 'The Galloper', Tom, ee wunt be no manner o' good to thy pretty wife wi' a ball through thy nob, lad, not no'ow!"

Tom Truscott winked at his comely, young image in the looking-glass, settled his neat bobwig, shook out the wide skirts of his trim, snuff-coloured coat, saluted the company and stepping into the yard, was soon astride his stout cob, trotting homewards to his cosy farmstead.

The moon was but low as yet, and the road a white glimmer between shadowy hedgerows and now, mindful of the landlord's words concerning 'The Galloper', this bloodthirsty rogue, he urged his plump, shaggy steed to faster gait; he had reached a place made darker by reason of high bank on one side and lofty trees on the other, when a harsh voice bade him 'Stand!' Then before him loomed a tall horse with masked rider who levelled a pistol between his horrified, staring eyes.

"Into the wood here!" growled the voice. "And sharp's the word,—come!"

Tom Truscott's obedience was instant and speechless.

It was after no great lapse of time that yeoman Tom reappeared—a greatly altered and vastly astonished man who galloped for home astride a splendid black steed, himself so magnificently transfigured, in great peruke, laces, velvet and brocade, as was to be the wonder of himself, his wife, and neighbourhood for many a day to come; while in the opposite direction ambled Tom Truscott's stout cob bearing one who, so far as garments went, might have been Yeoman Tom himself save for the lean face that, beneath Tom's hat and bobwig, showed so fiercely alert as Jason, thus transformed,

jogged steadily towards Alfriston, like the remorseless, oncoming vengeance he meant to be.

The moon was rising in large splendour when he became aware of movement in the shadows before him, but, bold in his disguise, on he rode until was sudden rattle of accoutrements, flash and flicker of bayonets, gleam of white cross-belts and a hoarse challenge:

“A friend!” he cried, in the country idiom. “A friend I be.”

“Halt, friend, advance and let’s look at ye,—here into the moonlight.” Jason obeyed and slouching in the saddle, gaped down at the grim-faced sergeant who eyed him from heel to head as only a sergeant might.

“Who are ye?” he demanded. “What’s your name?”

“Oo? Me?” enquired Jason, goggling.

“Ah—you! Where are ye from and where going?”

“A yeoman I be, Cap’n. Jeremy Oaks be my name and I—”

“Have ye seen ever a man, a gentleman in blue and silver, rides a tall, black hoss wi’ silver blaze?”

“Eh? A blue coat would it be, Cap’n, wi’ blazin’ silver buttons, says you ___”

“No, fool, the blaze is on the hoss, the buttons is on the man, blue coat, black periwig—”

“Nay, ’twere his hoss were black, says you, and ay to that, says I, as to his wig I dunno.”

“Well, blast your eyes have you seen or heard o’ such man?”

“Ar!” nodded Jason.

“What d’ye mean by ‘ar’?”

“As I have, sure-ly.”

“What ’ave ye?” demanded the sergeant, fiercely.

“Seed un, Cap’n, plain as your face, black hoss, blazin’ buttons an’ arl, I ’ave.”

“Well, where—whereaway, numps?”

“At Lewes fair las’ week—”

“Oh, ride on and rot ye for thick-witted chaw-bacon!” roared the indignant sergeant. “Out o’ my sight, burn ye!”

So Jason went jogging on again, striving to look as much the dull-witted yokel as he had sounded. He rode at such leisured amble that the moon was high and very bright when he came where the ways divided and here beheld a solitary individual perched on a stile in shade of trees, yet a form he thought to recognize; wherefore he pulled up, touched Tom Truscott’s hat, grinned vacuously and spoke with hoarse and extreme rusticity.

“Evenin’ to ee, friend. Be I right fer Alfriston neow?”

“Ar!”

“Be it fur loike?”

“Arf a moile, rackon.”

“Eh but—dannel me ef it beant Jarge Potter! Doan’t ee know I, Jarge?”

“No,” answered Potter, never stirring. “I doan’t!”

“Ay but,” said Jason, urging his cob a little nearer, “I do know ee, so ee should know I, seein’ as us talked together ’s marnin’ as ever was. So know me ye must. Look at I.”

“I be!” answered Potter, still motionless. “Ay, I’m a-lookin’.”

“Well?”

“Well, I can’t nowise see as I mind ee no’ow and no when.”

“Then look closer,” said Jason and rode yet nearer. “Moon be bright enough . . . come ee nigher. And no need for them barkers in your pockets, Jarge, ’tis friend I be. Come ee neow.”

Descending from the stile, Potter approached to stare up at Jason, grimly suspicious.

“If,” said he, rubbing square, dimpled chin, “ef you was to doff your ’at, p’raps—”

Jason did so, discovering Tom Truscott’s bobwig and, below this, a lean face subtly altered and now contorted by wide, leering smile.

“Well, Jarge,” he chuckled hoarsely, “doan’t ee know I even neow, lad?”

“Why,” answered Potter staring, “I do, and then again, I aren’t nowise sure—”

“Good!” exclaimed Jason, in his natural voice, “I’m better than I hoped. So now, God love thee, friend, how do ye?” and he reached forth his hand in greeting.

“Well . . . dog bite me!” quoth Potter, seizing this hand in hearty grip. “Scupper and sink me but . . . be this your own self, sir? Why here now be marvel and wonder, magic black or white, sure-ly!”

“No, George, merely change o’ raiment and scrape or so of razor to thin out and alter the slope of my eyebrows. With rub of walnut juice and stubble of whisker, I’ll be better yet.”

“But, sir, your talk—?”

“Lord, love ee, Jarge, I be Sussex barn an’ bred. But what do you here alone, George man?”

“Waitin’, sir, to save a friend o’ mine from murder.”

“How so, George? Tell me of it.”

“It be arl along on account o’ Sam Orchis and his darter Cecily. A rare booty she be, sir, a sweet lass and good—so fur! But her mother’s dead and there be two fine gen’lemen arter her for no good,—been mekking up to ’er on the sly ever since they came,—turnin’ ’er poor, pretty ’ead wi’ their sinful love-talk. She’m dairy maid to Exford’s farm yonder and, come evenin’, one or t’other o’ these yere fine gen’lemen meets ’er goin’ ’ome. Poor Sam’s pleaded and threatted arl to no purpose, so to-night ’e do mean to come and shoot ’em—”

“When do you expect him, George?”

“Why, Cecily be workin’ late to-night, wunt be leavin’ much afore ’arf past nine, I rackon.”

“And,” said Jason, peering at his watch, “it lacks some twenty minutes. We must do what we may to prevent murder, George.”

“Ay. Though Sam be mighty determined . . . though, if you’ll stand by, sir?”

“I will, George, and more. Who are these two gentlemen?”

“Them as bides at ‘Star.’ Dartry be one and t’other’s the young un as be generally-allus drunk, Sir Charles Warrender.”

“Why now here’s luck! What’s your plan, George?”

“Well, sir, I’ve bid Joe Dumbrell come and warn me when Sam be a-comin’. So I’ll meet Sam and argle-bargle wi’ him, and ef so be ’e don’t see reason, I’ll drop ’e wi’ the butt o’ my barker,—better a broke ’ead than noose and gibbet, for Sam be my friend, d’ye see—”

“And someone comes yonder!” said Jason, keen eyes intent.

“Ay, it be Joe. I’ll go speak him.” So away sped Potter to stand awhile in murmurous talk, then back he came to smile and nod.

“’Tis arl right, sir, leastways for to-night; Cecily stole away early and be safe indoors, and Sam be away to Newhaven wi’ Sharkey Nye.”

“Why then, George, can you find me a place where I may lie to-night,—a bed with sheets, if possible,—ha, a bed! Can you, friend George?”

“Ay, sir, I can so,—and a feather bed.”

“Lord!” sighed Jason, in muted ecstasy. “Lord love thee, George, my bones ache with yearning.”

“Ay, sir, and how will I name ee to folks?”

“Oaks,” answered Jason; “Jeremy Oaks, yeoman of Sussex.”

“Why then, sir, goo along o’ me.”

CHAPTER XXIV

TELLS OF A BREAKFAST TABLE AND A CHALLENGE

Young Sir Charles Warrender shuddered from the breakfast table, glanced at Mr. Dartry eating the excellent viands before him with such evident relish, stared at the wide lattice, open to the morning sunlight, and drew a breath so very much like a groan that Mr. Dartry troubled to become aware of him; and though, when he spoke, Mr. Dartry's voice was gently modulated as ever, his expression was scarcely pleasant.

"Off your feed, my poor Charles,—again!"

"Yes," answered Charles, shortly, his shapely lips firm set. "And why 'again'? I eat when hungry."

"Ay, but then you might be hungry oftener and eat more of a morning if you—drank less o' nights."

"The devil! Are you suggesting I am a sot?"

"I am saying, m' dear Charles, that you breakfast too seldom."

"Well, and I say I eat when I will. Though I do not feed with the too evident voracity of—some—"

Mr. Dartry laid down knife and fork with a studied deliberation and opened his pale blue eyes rather wider than usual.

"Voracity?" he enquired, gently.

"This was the word!" nodded Charles.

"And I see none eats but myself."

"Precisely!"

"This being so," murmured Mr. Dartry, smiling bleakly, "I must take exception, very strong exception to the word 'voracity'." With youthful, petulant gesture, Charles crossed to the window-seat and throwing himself thereon, glanced out into the sunny street and thus beheld a man, slouched on bench below, closely engaged with a tankard of ale, a brown-faced, rustical-seeming fellow in snuff-coloured coat of country tailoring, a thirsty man who quaffed deep, sighed, wiped mouth on the back of brown hand then, happening to glance up, met the sombre, downbent gaze of gloomy, young Charles to whom he lifted tankard saying with vacuous leering smile:

“Y’r lordship’s good ’ealth!”

Charles merely nodded and, turning to scowl on Mr. Dartry, beheld this languid gentleman scowling at him, or very nearly, since Mr. Dartry, priding himself on a modish debility, seldom permitted himself to manifest passion of any sort or kind soever; therefore such look and the new note in his voice when he spoke should have warned Charles.

“This word ‘voracity’, its application, quite displeases me, Charles! I must therefore demand that you withdraw it.”

“‘Withdraw’ be damned!” retorted Charles, hot with youth, and heedless. “And the word puts me in mind to tell you, once and for all, Dartry, that I demand, and she herself desires, you shall withdraw your most unwelcome attentions from . . . from Mistress Cecily Ortis. Is it understood?”

“So well, Charles, that your youthful effrontery amazes me beyond anger—”

“Then be amazed, damn you, but take warning!” Mr. Dartry, being extremely angry, tittered; Charles, being furious, scowled and raised his voice:

“Laugh, devil take you, laugh—but have a care! I’ll not suffer your persecution of her any more—”

“Persecution?”

“That was the word!” cried Charles.

“Alack!” sighed his tormentor. “My poor, maid-struck youth, I perceive that what with the bottle and the undoubted charms of this village beauty, thou’rt quite distraught. But as for Cecily I do protest ’tis a warm, bewitching rusticity tickles my fancy and pleases me so well that please me she must—and shall—”

“And I,” cried Charles fiercely, “I protest you woo like ruttish beast, that your mere damned presence frights and shames her, and now I, as her humble servant, forbid you so troubling her again. Do I speak plainly enough, sir? If not I shall be happy to put it more bluntly.”

Mr. Dartry nearly choked, his long, white hands clenched till they quivered . . . but, mastering this emotion, he rose with a languid grace, he even smiled, though his narrowed eyes held a deadly menace as, flicking crumbs from his elegant person, he answered:

“Now, my bellowing, lovesick calf, hear this! I find our rustical Venus of a beauty worthy my attention, for the present, so—I shall woo her. I shall pursue her and, having won her, thereafter leave her to the tender care and ardent comfort of—” Mr. Dartry leapt aside only just in time to avoid the heavy rummer that splintered against the wall behind him.

“Dastard . . . loose-tongued villain . . . beastly wretch!” gasped Charles, and out flashed his sword. “Draw!” he cried. “Draw, I say, and defend your vile carcass!”

“Impossible!” answered Mr. Dartry, fronting the menace of flourished steel with admirable calm. “My sword is above stairs in my chamber—”

“Then go fetch it!”

“Oh no!”

“Ha, d’you refuse to fight?”

“Oh no again, Sir Charles! You shall receive your chastisement to-night at eight o’ the clock . . . let us say—behind Dumbrell’s barn, it should be quiet there—”

“No!” cried Charles, wildly. “No, let’s have it here and now and be done —”

“To-night. At eight o’clock. Behind Dumbrell’s barn!” Mr. Dartry repeated and, bowing, went out, closing the door behind him, and thus left young Charles to curse, stamp, and rave himself breathless.

Meanwhile Jason finished his ale and rising from the bench, paced thoughtfully away and round about until at last in a small, neglected garden, seated beneath an unpruned apple tree he beheld George Potter in murmurous confab with the mighty Jockabed who, beholding Jason in his yeoman’s garb, rose with surprising nimbleness to touch his eyebrow in smiling salutation and stare.

“Kooshti, prala!” said he. “Ef Jarge ’adn’t told I’d never a knowed ee.”

“Good!” nodded Jason. “Whereaway doth Mistress Sinfia camp these days?”

“I the wesh, brother, ’twixt Tenterden and Dallington, a wideish country. Be ee for travellin’ that way?”

“Yes belike—in a day or so.”

“D’ye ken the Romany patrin, brother?”

“No, Jockabed.”

“Then lookee!” So saying the big gipsy plucked two twigs, one larger than the other and laid them upon the grass forming a rough T. “See now, sir, this little un, as lays so, don’t mean naught, but this long un, athwart little un, do p’int your road.”

“Thanks, Jockabed, I shall remember. And now,” Jason continued, sitting down between them, “listen, friends, and I’ll show how you shall rid Sam Ortis and his Cecily of these two fine gentlemen for good and all, an wi’ no danger to yourselves. For, George, to shame a gentleman is better far than killing. . . . Hearkee then.”

CHAPTER XXV

TELLS HOW JASON RODE AWAY WITH HIS ENEMY

Shadows were lengthening and four very silent men sat cheek by jowl in the fragrant dimness of Dumbrell's barn; watchful men who spoke but seldom and then in hoarse undertones.

"Must be purty nigh eight o'clock, I rackon!" muttered Sam Ortis.

"Patience, Sam, patience!" murmured George Potter.

"Will they come, think ee?" questioned Jockabed.

"Never doubt it!" answered Jason.

Ensued another season of silent waiting, and then Jason spoke again, whispering:

"Yonder they come! Now let no man of you stir until I give the sign!"

Thus at last through this peaceful evening came these two gentlemen, walking with a leisured dignity and bowing most punctiliously to give each other precedence at every stile or where the way narrowed, as such fine gentlemen were wont to do when intent on maiming or slaying each other.

"This shall do!" said hot, impatient Youth, halting suddenly.

"As you say," answered cool Experience, pausing also. "The ground seems fairly even and the light very well. Though, I protest again, we should have witnesses—"

"What matter?"

"This, I take it, is your first meeting?"

"It is."

"And probably your last. Howbeit, you should know such affair as this, minus seconds, is highly irregular. Should you, by some miraculous chance, give me my quietus, how awkward for you to prove 'twas done in honourable rencontre and not a murderer's craven stroke,—and vice versa, for that matter. I suggest we had best wait fitter occasion—"

"No!" cried Charles. "Damme—no!"

“Ah then, if fight you will, off with our coats and wigs . . . and for what will be—blame your rash self.”

Gleam of ruffled shirts, glitter and wink of bright, narrow blades; then as they faced each other, forth of the barn, to their startled and indignant vision, stepped a man who chuckled, a loutish, bucolic-seeming fellow in bobwig and wide-skirted snuff-coloured coat who leered on them very inanely but grasped a brace of pistols most purposefully.

“Gen’lemen both,” said he, hoarsely, “drop them sharps or tek a ball through a leg of each of ee!”

The swords fell; the man gestured with his pistols and instantly from that gloomy barn stepped two other men, an oldish fellow who scowled and a very tall fellow who smiled, and each of these bore two stout cudgels. And now the elderly man spoke:

“Oh, gen’lemen, ye as should ought to know better, I be Sam Ortis, father o’ Cecily, the lass ee be come to fight for, ay the good lass as ee would ruin! Well neow, the both on ee tek one o’ these yere bastons and fight we . . . and may the Lord ha’ mercy on ye, for I wunt!” So saying, he tossed one of the cudgels at Mr. Dartry, who recoiled as from something unclean.

“Come ee neow,” Sam pleaded, “ef ee’d kiss the darter, fight the feyther like a man, come ee!”

“Not I!” answered Mr. Dartry, haughtily. “Your daughter is no whit the worse for me, no nor ever will be and this I swear—”

“Bible oath, my fine gen’leman, never to speak wi’ or look at my lass again?”

“No, never!”

“Then, dennel ee, say it!” growled Sam. “Say them words or the Lord strike ee dead, say ’em or I’ll strike ee likewise.”

“I . . . promise,” said Mr. Dartry, in strangled voice, “never to . . . see or speak with her again or . . . may God . . . strike me . . . dead.”

“Now on top o’ that, y’r Bible oath.”

“You have it and . . . my word of honour beside.” Having said all of which as if invisible fingers were choking him, Mr. Dartry took up his sword, sheathed it awkwardly, caught up his garments, and staying not to put them on, glanced furtively at scornful young Charles, abased his haggard

eyes and departed much more hastily than he had come, and with no dignity at all.

“Well,” demanded Sam, now fronting the young baronet, “it be your turn—ah, you, as bein’ sech fine gen’leman, should act more honourable, do ee vow and swear to leave my lass be,—and walk like your friend—”

“No!” cried Charles. “I’m no runaway cur! I love Cecily, and damme but I’ll fight for her—now and any time, one or all of you,—come on!” And snatching the bludgeon Jockabed proffered, he turned to meet Sam’s furious onset.

So, for brief space, was crack and clatter and thud of fierce blows, but though Charles was young and utterly reckless, Sam was active, powerful and far more expert with such weapon. . . .

Charles gasped, groaned and staggering, went down headlong; then before the outraged father could smite again, Jockabed interposed.

Now came Jason to look down upon this slender shape that lay so dreadfully still, to kneel and roll it upon its back, and thus beholding this face that, showing almost too beautiful for a man was so like . . . Hers . . . Jason checked a sigh, to frown instead, and rising from his knees, spurned this unconscious, helpless body with his foot, saying:

“He’ll do!”

“Lord! Do ee mean as he’m . . . dead?”

“No, George, merely stunned. But ’twas notable shrewd rap shall keep him quiet awhile.”

“Ay but,” quoth Potter, rubbing square chin, “what’ll us do wi’ un? Us can’t nowise leave un yere . . . and yet I rackon us might.”

“No!” answered Jason. “He goes with me. Bring hither my horse.”

So presently Jason mounted and taking leave of the three, rode away as night came down, making for the distant woods. And behind his saddle a large haversack extremely well filled, before him the drooping, inert body of his enemy, Charles Warrender.

CHAPTER XXVI

TELLS HOW ARROGANCE WAS LED UPON A STRING

Waking to pain of sundry bruises, Sir Charles Warrender blinked dazed eyes at a crackling fire, then turned aching head to see, first of all, leaves that roofed and shut him in, and, secondly a man unshaven and extremely sinister (thought Charles) eating frizzled bacon from a pewter platter with murderous-looking knife.

“Where . . . where am I?” faltered the young baronet.

“You got eyes.”

A coarse yokel, this (thought Charles), a devilish surly fellow, who scarce troubled to glance from the food he devoured so brutishly and that gave forth such delectable, mouth-watering fragrance.

“I asked you,” said Charles sitting up and stifling a groan as he did so, “I ask you, and demand to know, precisely where I am.”

“And I says since you got eyes, look and see.”

Sir Charles looked disdainfully, squared his bruised shoulders haughtily, threw back his handsome head and frowned disdainfully, saying:

“Fellow, d’you know who I am?”

“Ar!” nodded the fellow, masticating disgustingly (thought Charles).

“Then tell me how came I into this accursed desolation.”

“Like sack o’ horsefeed, m’ noble sir, and as graceful.”

“Now stretch me bleeding,” exclaimed Sir Charles peering across the fire, “but I mind you now! Ha, you were with those ruffians attacked us to-night! So . . . you brought me here unconscious, helpless—why?”

“Reasons, sir,—three on ’em.”

“Then . . . then damn you!”

“Ay, ay, m’lud! And curse you wi’ arl my heart! Now, if ee be hungry, here be crust and hunk o’ cheese.”

“Devil burn them! I’ll go.” Here, finding hat and periwig beside him, Sir Charles put them on and rose, somewhat painfully, to bruised and shaky

legs.

“Sit down!”

The young baronet, turning in scornful defiance, found himself looking down the muzzle of pistol levelled across the speaker’s knee.

“Ah!” sighed Charles, recoiling despite his dignity. “So you . . . you’d murder me?”

“Ay, wi’ j’y no tellin’!”

“By God, I . . . I believe you would.”

“Then sit, fool, nor tempt me! Down with ee!”

So murderous seemed the eyes now glaring up at him that, forgetting awhile his youthful arrogance, Charles sat down very suddenly and, thus crouched, surveyed this threatening figure with growing apprehension and a fearful speculation.

This fellow (thought Charles) was either mad or drunk, and must be humoured. Thus when next he spoke it was in tone altered as his bearing.

“Will you, at the least, pray be so obliging to explain the . . . the reason for all this,—why I am here and—where?”

“Ar!” nodded the man, talking as he ate—a revolting spectacle (thought Charles). “First reason: Being here you can’t be fuzzling yourself besotted at ‘The Star’ as usual, nor nowheres else! Second reason: No more you can’t be leading no poor fool lass astray—”

“Now curse you!” cried Sir Charles, forgetting all caution in hot indignation, “For this you should bleed—had I my sword.”

“Which you ha’n’t, m’lud, so bide quiet. Third reason: You be brother to a sister, and Warrenders both!” Having said which, the speaker nodded, leered, and went on eating.

Yes indeed (thought Charles) this frightful fellow was stark, staring mad! So was silence, and once again Charles, eyeing this man askance and in no little dread, schooled himself to manner that was almost meek.

“May I beg to know what you can possibly think or imagine against me? How or in what manner I can ever, and quite unwitting, have any way offended you?”

“You be Sir Charles Warrender, baronet, bean’t you?”

“Yes. Oh yes, I am, but—”

“That be ‘what’ and likewise ‘how’!”

Sir Charles having deliberated upon this cryptic utterance, clasped furrowed brow, shook puzzled head, sighed, and enquired:

“Can it be that my name offends you?”

“Ar! Couple it wi’ the name o’ Master Jason Wayne, and there’s your ‘how’ again.”

“What, the Jacobite fugitive! The mystery begins to resolve itself if he chance to be friend of yours. Is he so indeed?”

“More or less, and something less than more.”

“’Slife!” sighed Charles, “you relieve me vastly! For let me die if I didn’t fear you were mad, indeed perfectly demented! But now, since Mr. Wayne is your friend, I can perceive some reason in your conduct since you may feel that . . . that you have some small cause for animus against me, though—”

“Cause sufficient, I rackon!”

“Good fellow, pray suffer me to explain . . . nay first, of yourself? Are you, by chance, a follower, a servant to Mr. Wayne?”

“Both!” nodded Jason, beginning to cram tobacco into a very short, clay pipe.

“Well then, first pray believe I bear no personal animosity or the least ill-will against your master, none in the world, no! My only reason for . . . for —”

“Hunting him to death, Charlie?”

“For . . . seeking his capture is . . . is purely by force of circumstance and a . . . a devilish compelling necessity. You’ll understand that except I fulfil certain conditions laid on me—”

“Ay, y’r nunky’s will and testament, I’ve heard tell on’t—”

“Oh? And how should you?” Charles demanded.

“No matter. But for lust o’ your nunky’s gold you’d give a man to shameful death, his shrinking body to mutilation,—rope, axe and bowelling knife, eh, Charlie? But then—you are a Warrender!” So saying, Jason drew a

flaming twig from the fire and began to light his pipe, while young Charles surveyed his grim features very much askance.

“Indeed,” said he, “you make it all sound very cursedly damnable, but ___”

“I make it sound,” retorted Jason, puffing at his pipe, “no worse than ’tis in fact, and such fact as should be shame to any but a Warrender! Thus, should Wayne meet and kill you one day, ’twill be no more than you merit as a mercenary, bloody-minded young wastrel—”

“Hold . . . hold there!” cried Charles angrily. “Damn you, listen and try to see the matter from my side! This Wayne is a proved rebel and traitor and as such, justly doomed to die. The King desires the arrest of all such villains, therefore Wayne is to be lawfully taken by whoso may. He is also murderer of the King’s loyal subjects and a highway robber besides,—thus, to capture such desperate rogue were heroical act and notable good service to His Majesty and the country in general. And so it is I would take this Wayne since by serving King and country I serve myself also. Well, surely here is exceeding good reason for my actions?”

“And yet shall such reason anyways comfort Jason Wayne when the executioner lays bloody hands on him?”

At this, forgetting his bruises, Charles arose and began to pace to and fro in the firelight as one in some distress of mind.

“Truly,” said he, halting suddenly to stare down into the fire, “here is aspect o’ the matter hath troubled me, I’ll confess, and more often of late. . . . Ha, but—if a man deliberately hazards such ghastly death whom should he blame beyond himself? As for Wayne . . . someone will take him, soon or late and . . . it may as well be myself, or my contriving, since so very much depends on’t.”

“How much?”

“Everything—almost! Except I win this heritage, that should be justly mine, I am scarce better than miserable beggar.”

“Lor’!” exclaimed Jason, becoming extremely bucolic. “Now to think o’ you a beggar and arl becos Wayne refuses to be took and killed, do wring my ’eart to that degree as I be minded for to aid ee—”

“Be done with your ribald mockery, fellow!”

“Howbeit, m’lud, if you be minded for to tek or kill this yere Wayne, I be a-goin’ for to give ee the chance.”

“Now what,” Charles demanded, stooping to peer at the speaker, “what the devil do you mean?”

“I means as you be on your road to said Wayne this moment. Ay, ’twas why I troubled to bring ee herealong. Y’see, m’lud, Must’ Wayne be mighty wishful for to meet ee face to face.”

“The devil he is!” muttered Charles, staring into the fire again.

“Ar! And when ee do meet, how then, I wonder?”

“I shall, at the least, comport myself as becomes a gentleman,” answered Charles, straightening hat and flowing peruke to strike an attitude, “I shall, and at all hazards, do my loyal duty to the King or . . . perish in the endeavour.”

“Then, m’lud, I think you’ll perish, sure-ly! Yet better so than—t’other way!”

“What way?” demanded Charles, sternly resolute of pose.

“Guzzling y’self to death, m’lud, like debauched, young toss-pot. They do say as you be a rare fuzzer forever asoaking, a tipling sot scare ever sober.”

Sir Charles seemed to gasp, his smooth, young brows (so very like his sister’s) knit themselves above long-lashed eyes that (also like his sister’s) glared with fire of indignation, but, being so furiously eager for adequate words, he merely contrived inarticulate noises while Jason, puffing his pipe, watched him, curiously.

“Infamous!” gasped Sir Charles, at last. “Ha, will you dare so traduce me, fellow?”

“Will ee deny it, m’lud?”

“Who says so lies in his vile throat!”

“Well, ’tis sure ee be main sober now—not having the wherewithal to fuddle ee, and sober ee shall remain till I bring ee to Must’ Wayne—”

“And sooner the better!” quoth Sir Charles, folding his arms with superb gesture. “I’ve no least fear of this Wayne—ay, or of you or any other man, for that matter,—not I, damme!”

“And the young cock crieth: doodle-doo!”

“Ah!” exclaimed Sir Charles, between white teeth. “Had I my sword now—”

“ ’Tis yere behind me, m’lud.”

“Then if you be man enough give it to me, drop your pistol and front me point to point,—if you be man enough!”

“No no, I bean’t your man! Ye can’t nowise fight wi’ I,—try eating instead,—here be cheese, bread and plenty o’ sweet water i’ brook yonder. Eh—not hungry?”

“No!”

“Well, grass be nice and dry. Art sleepy?”

“No!”

“Why, then, us’ll move on a piece,” and knocking out his pipe very tenderly, Jason slipped it into pocket, reached a hank of stout cord from the shadows behind him and rose, saying:

“Come ee yere, Charlie m’lud, and be tied up.”

“What the devil—” cried Charles, staring amazement.

“Well, I be going on, and you be agoing wi’ me—on a string, this! So come ee and be tied—”

“I . . . I’ll see you in hell first!”

“So you won’t come—hey?”

“No, damn you—no!”

“Then, Warrender, by the Lord, I’ll put a ball through you and leave you to rot. . . . Come!”

For a moment Sir Charles stood defiant, then, seeming to quail before the speaker’s ferocity, he bit his lip, hung his arrogant young head and submitted; yet even as Jason dropped pistol back into pocket, he closed, striking wildly. But Jason, his instincts sharpened by a life of constant peril, avoided this expected blow and answered with fist so instant and powerful that Charles dropped heavily and, lying half stunned, he was knelt upon, his nerveless arms wrenched back, drawn together and lashed securely:

“And there’s for ye, my snapping puppy-dog!” gasped Jason, the more fiercely because of the pain this exertion had caused him. “Now up and march!” Dumbly obedient, Charles stumbled to his feet; and thus when Jason had collected his gear and stamped out the fire, he got to saddle and off they went through this leafy wilderness, its rustling gloom pierced here and there by fugitive beams of the rising moon.

Haphazard rode Jason and careless of direction, leaving his plodding animal to find a way through this mazy wilderness while he cherished his hurt as well as he might, cursing beneath his breath at the pain of it, and scowled at the silent, heavy-trudging form of his prisoner, driving him on relentlessly through moonlight and shadow until that bowed head drooped lower yet and those tramping feet began to falter and stumble for very weariness whilst the moon, high-risen now, shining down on them through a fret of leaves and branches showed the welcome gleam of water; wherefore Jason halted at last and broke the long silence:

“Well, my dog, shall us camp hereabouts?”

“Be damned . . . t’you!” gasped Charles, without lifting head.

“Bean’t ee for supper and sleep neow?”

“Curse you!” panted Charles, fiercely, and yet with sound very like a sob. So on they went again until Jason found a place to his liking close beside the stream; here he dismounted and here Sir Charles, faint and spent with weariness, sank down, lying full length to the blessed relief of his bruised and aching body, while Jason, coming to the stream, drank, watered his horse and thereafter did what he might to ease the pain of his wound, and returning after some while, saw his prisoner lying fast asleep, despite the cord that pinioned him, and showing in the radiant moonlight more like his beautiful sister than ever.

And when he had eased the sleeper’s bonds somewhat, Jason sat with sombre gaze upon this unconscious face, musing unhappily on all that had been and pondering as gloomily what the future must bring,—a desolate, hopeless future that could hold for him naught but revenge, more suffering, untimely death. . . . And revenge was but poor thing for which to live. . . . ‘Vengeance is mine . . .’ said the Lord. Jason took forth a pistol, balanced it in practised hand: he opened the pan, he blew, laid the weapon beside him, drew cloak about him, sighed wearily and closed his eyes. . . .

CHAPTER XXVII

WHICH TELLS OF A COMPACT

Roused by sense of peril and growing discomfort, Jason awoke at peep of day to find the cause of this unease was the muzzle of his own pistol beneath his ear, and to behold a fierce, haggard young face bent close above him.

“Fool . . . fool . . . ha, damned villain!” said Charles, between chattering teeth, “did you think to keep me?”

“Ay, I did!” sighed Jason, lying very still.

“Because,” cried Charles, fiercely scornful, “besides being rogue and knave you are but clumsy, loutish rascal! So now plead my pardon before I tie you up and more securely than you bound me, ay I’ll warrant—sue my pardon, fool!”

But Jason, looking beyond this desperate, young face, laughed suddenly, crying:

“Ha, Jockabed, at him—quick lad!” Instinctively Charles glanced round . . . the weapon was wrested from him and Jason afoot, all in a moment, with Charles crouched before him on his knees. And now up came the kindly sun to make a glory all about them.

“So!” quoth Jason, fleering, “here’s poor, simple younker to be flammed by such old trick! And yet ’tis’ curst, bloodsome boy would ha’ murdered me!”

“No!” panted Charles, scowling up with fearless eyes. “No—”

“No,” repeated Jason, “ye couldn’t because—lookee!” And he snapped the weapon, that merely sparked harmlessly, “Ay,” he nodded, “suspecting you’d attempt such play I left this popper in your reach for to tempt ye, but—I blew out the priming first! And who’s the fool now, my slayer o’ sleepy men?”

“I tell you I’m no such murderer.”

“And I say you’d ha’ shot me!”

“So I would, had you forced me, but in the leg.”

“Now for this yere,” quoth Jason, becoming his most bucolic self, “I should ought for to tie ee up again and trounce ee right soundly, howbeit I’ll feed ee instead. Go fetch me the budget,—the saddle-bag yonder.” Sir Charles scowled, hesitated, but obeyed.

And now, sitting in the young sun’s level beams, Jason set forth their breakfast,—a crusty loaf, butter, a flagon of ale and a noble ham, at sight of which the young baronet’s eyes glistened avidly, though he affected such supremely haughty indifference that Jason’s unshaven, mobile lips twitched.

“What,” quoth he, “still disdainful o’ food, m’lud? A mighty proud-stomached lad you be, b’goles! Well, well, ef ye wunt eat—watch me now!” Sir Charles instantly turned his back and sat thus, plucking fiercely at the grass until feeling a touch, he turned to see within an inch of his arrogant nose a hunk of buttered bread crowned most alluringly by a slice of pink ham.

Charles glanced at it sullenly and averted his eyes, looked at it again and away resolutely, but stifled a sigh, gazed at it a third time and accepted it with mutter of thanks, and so began to eat very deliberately lest he show too voracious.

Thus in the genial comfort of the rising sun they broke their fast together while a myriad birds, above and around them near and far, piped such glad welcome to the new day that what with all this (and themselves presently comfortably replete) they began to regard one another with less hostility.

Quoth Charles at last, stretching luxuriously:

“You’ve a devilish heavy fist!”

Answered Jason, beginning to fill his precious tobacco pipe:

“And you’ve a plaguey hard skull.”

“But the ham!” sighed Charles. “Let me perish if I ever enjoyed meal the like of this!”

“For that you’ve never been properly hungry afore, I reckon.”

“You are, I think, a needy fellow, homeless and solitary?” enquired Charles eyeing his hearer appraisingly and with new interest. “A roving man with no friends and very little money?”

“Ay, I be. And what then?”

“Are you by chance another of these Jacobite fugitives, I wonder?” Jason took out his tinder-box and frowned at it, answering:

“Were I so, indeed, shall I be such doddlish fool to say so and have ye inform against me?”

“Now devil smite you for such damnable suspicion! You affront me, fellow, you affront me very cursedly!”

“Impossible, you being a Warrender! Moreover yourself tells me you’d capture or lay an information ’gainst Wayne—”

“Ha, but don’t you see how this . . . this is different quite? At first Wayne’s capture was but mere matter of business, but lately, ah, lately, ’tis become of far greater moment, indeed a matter of life and death—”

“Ay, to Jason Wayne.”

“No no, it affects the happiness, the welfare or miserable ruin of one . . . very dear to me, as I’m now minded to tell you—”

“I’d liefer hark to the birds.”

“Then hark and be damned.”

So was silence while Sir Charles scowled on creation and Jason lit his pipe. But when the birds had carolled and Jason had puffed awhile, the impetuous young baronet spoke again, albeit in more dulcet tones:

“Of ourselves now . . . but have I permission to interrupt these feathered warblers?”

“Ar,—if ee must,” growled Jason, spitting into the fire so very convincingly that Charles recoiled and shuddered abhorrence ere he continued:

“Yourself now,—having dragged me into this wilderness, shamed me with bonds, brutalized me with your fist and fed me such excellent meal—may further favour me with your name.”

“It was Oaks last time, I mind me, Jeremy Oaks.”

“Then, Oaks, despite all your brutality aforesaid, I find myself so vastly well this morning it amazes me.”

“No guzzling last night, so here’s no wonder!”

“Tush! I drink no more than gentleman should. Howbeit, on such glad morning as this all Nature hath a pleasant seeming,—even yourself shows so nearly human, that despite your hang-dog visage, I would earnestly seek your advice.”

“As to what?”

“On how best to win my jailor, that is yourself, to better liking of me, for if ever poor gentleman needed a friend ’tis myself.”

Jason stared; lolling against the tree behind him he puffed thoughtfully and surveyed the speaker beneath wrinkling brow.

“How should I be your friend?” he demanded, at last.

“This depends on how much or how little friendship you bear for Wayne and he for you, Oaks. Is he indeed truly your friend?”

“Faith,” answered Jason, smiling rather grimly, “I’ve sometimes suspected him for my worst enemy,—ay, but for him I should be other and better than I am.”

“Then hold this thought, Jeremy,—treasure it. Lend me your aid and you shall be better than you ever were!”

“Well, but how may I help ee?”

“In the capture of Jason Wayne.”

Jason seemed to choke; he took out his pipe to shake his head at it while young Charles snorted disdainfully:

“Pah! ’Tis vile, filthy habit this drinking of tobacco smoke!”

“Yet comforts a man!” muttered Jason. “But regarding Wayne, his capture—what o’ your two fine gentlemen friends?”

“Devil take them!” quoth Charles, pettishly. “For Dartry I perfectly detest and Will Rokeby talks much and does little. But you, Jeremy, you are man of action, as well I know, a very reckless, daredevil fellow and determined as myself! For with your aid or without, be rid of Wayne I must and will, ’tis become my bounden duty now—if only for sake of one very dear, very precious to me—my sister, Jeremy, my loved but devilish headstrong sister.”

“Ay,” nodded Jason, “I’ll warrant ye she’ll be right joyful to see him dragged in fetters to—”

“She will, Jeremy, she will and, damme—there’s my trouble, for the fetters she’d clap on the fellow are matrimonial, she’s for wedding and wifing him! Ay, you may stare, yet ’tis veriest fact.”

Jason’s pipe fell, to lie forgotten, and when he spoke it was in voice strangely altered:

“How . . . d’you . . . know this?”

“By her word o’ mouth. I rode to East Bourne two or three days since and found her curst mopish and full of questions concerning Wayne.”

“She knew he’d been taken?”

“No, she but feared it. And may I bleed if she didn’t amaze and confound me by vowing she loved this fellow and swore she’d marry him or none—and this to me, and our uncle, in manner very passionate and shameless.”

“Marry? What fellow?”

“Why, as I tell you, this outlaw Jason Wayne. So when I found speech I rated her as loving brother should, whereat—let me die if she didn’t so flare and flame at me that we parted in a fury—”

“She . . . loves Wayne? Your sister?”

“So she vows, split me if she don’t!”

“Ah, she’s . . . determined on it then?”

“She is so, or strike me stiff and dumb!”

“She’ll not be ruled or persuaded—?”

“By no means! She’s firm set on it as any accursed adamantine crag! Swears she’ll be his wife or die a maid and that soon—of a broken heart . . . and he a damned rebel, an outcast, a beggar!”

“But . . . how could she fall to . . . such madness? Tell me.”

“Why, then, she was ’gainst this enterprise from the very first. No sooner is my uncle’s will read forth than she instantly damns it and forbids me the attempt. Then, seeing me determined on’t, she plagues me with persuasion, she pleads, prays, reproaches, rages—she even weeps and, finding all equally vain, all but curses me! But I never faltered in my resolve, not I, for by nature I am of mighty resolution. But then, damme, so is Honoria! She vows to follow and prevent me at all and any hazard. And, Oaks, by heaven, so she did in very fact! For may I die and perish if she didn’t pursue me and—dressed like a man in suit of my clothes! Thus disguised, she chances to meet Wayne, he makes love to her . . . and now, stretch me in my blood if she isn’t for foisting this proscribed rogue and rebel on me for brother-in-law! The which I protest is plaguey and perfectly damnable situation for any loyal gentleman and brother. And how say you?”

Jason took up his pipe, and finding it extinguished, tapped out the ash very tenderly and put it into his pocket.

“You think she truly loves . . . and would indeed marry Wayne?”

“Now don’t I tell you ’tis past all doubting?”

“ ’Tis something hard to believe.”

“Howbeit, except I can prevent . . . Honoria is ruined, her life and future wrecked beyond redemption.”

“So I think!” nodded Jason, rising. “And so . . . prevent it we must!”

“We?” cried Charles eagerly. “Then you . . . you’ll help me?”

“I shall help . . . her!”

“Then, Jeremy Oaks, take my hand, I name you my friend, so take my hand and hear me swear that should we succeed, as we needs must, you shall never want again!”

“Yet I know,” retorted Jason, stifling a sigh, “I shall want until I die.”

“Tush for that, Jeremy! Give me thy hand.”

“Why?”

“Well, to . . . to seal our compact, as ’twere!”

“Nay, let it wait till it shall achieve that it may. Come now, aid me with Pegasus. We’ll march.”

Now, though Jason’s brow was sombre, his eyes held a brightness glad as this joyous morning.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHICH, IT IS HOPED, MAY PROVE A CHAPTER OF SOME LITTLE INTEREST

The cob being saddled and bridled, Jason mounted and away they went at easy, ambling pace, following the winding stream as best they might; and Jason's eyes were shining still, his powerful shoulders squared, his head erect, and, though very conscious of his unshaven chin, he rode almost jauntily while Charles strode beside him so portentously dignified, so gloomily silent, that Jason, becoming aware of this at last, questioned him cheerily bucolic:

"What be amiss wi' ee, Charlie lad?"

"'Tis no matter, Oaks. And take heed to this,—I am no lad! Also I strongly object to your coarse misuse of my name,—Charles I am and Charles I must, and will be or . . . or nothing!"

"Lor'!" exclaimed Jason. "So now 'tis plain that nothing is sulking by reason o' something. Now, if nothing will explain this something, something shall be made right to the satisfaction of nothing. So, nothing—speak and let's hear."

Charles merely cocked dimpled chin and became so much the haughty aristocrat, and so supremely heedless of all lesser things, that he tripped over some unseen obstacle, swore pettishly and, seizing the cob's bridle, halted Jason to frown at him.

"Mr. Oaks," he began, rather breathlessly. "Mr. Oaks—"

"Nay, 'Jeremy' shall do, lad. Jerem or Jerry—"

"Mr. . . . Oaks," Charles repeated more deliberately, "when I proffer my hand to a . . . a person, I expect that person to take it. Were you of my own condition I should esteem myself very heinously affronted, as it is I . . . I suffer it to pass. This being so, I would now have you seriously consider how best we may accomplish our purpose touching Jason Wayne. And, in the first place, you will pray understand I would spare the poor wretch any . . . needless suffering and . . . so forth."

"Then," answered Jason, as they moved on again, "I hope he will be duly grateful to ye when he sees glitter the executioner's knife that is to split

him—”

“No no!” cried Charles, recoiling. “Spare me the abominable details!”

“Ay, but who shall spare him the abominable fact?”

“Well . . . ’twas himself brought such ghastly fate upon himself!”

“And ’tis ourselves mean to make sure he shall by no means escape it!”

“Indeed,” sighed Charles, unhappily. “’Tis vile business, and troubles me that we needs must. Yet should we not—others will . . . and rather than suffer him ruin my sister’s life I . . . I must be resolute, Oaks! You see this?”

“No question.”

“Such wedding could mean naught but hardship for Honoria, exile and sordid poverty,—so prevent this I must by any means for her sake! When are we like to meet Wayne? You know where he is?”

“Why, I’ve an idea . . . leastways I know they captured him ’tother day in the dawn . . . above East Bourne—”

“Captured, d’ ye say?” cried Charles in sudden dismay. “How . . . who . . .?”

“I’ve heard he was surprised and taken by your friend Mr. Dartry—”

“By Dartry? I’ll not believe it!”

“Well, but I had it from one should know.”

“Yet I’ll not believe it . . . Dartry—no! Besides he made no mention of it to me, not a word! So, if he did take the fellow—where is the fellow?”

“Well, I do hear as the fellow gets away again. . . . And I reckon your friend, Mr. Dartry, be something of a liar concerning your lady sister—”

“Then Satan smite him! What dared the fellow say of her?”

“Boasts ’twas she lured Wayne into his clutches—and all for love of him.”

“Of Dartry? The insufferable coxcomb! She abominates the fellow extremely, as well he knows, for she’s made it sufficiently evident! And now you tell me he dares to suggest . . . ha, let me perish but he shall bleed to me for this! I’ll call him out and—”

“Nay,” said Jason, glancing round about them, glad-eyed, “away with such thoughts on such morning! Here’s world made for heart’s delight and boundless joy—”

“Tush!” exclaimed Charles, scornfully. “’Tis plaguey troublesome world! And, Jeremy Oaks, I prove you devilish odd fellow, for you speak broader than any Sussex yokel one moment and like person of condition the next. And, pray believe I’m no fool—”

“No?” enquired Jason, as though faintly surprised.

Sir Charles merely glared, and strode on stiffer in the back than ever until, happening to glance in certain direction, he halted again.

“Master Oaks,” said he, “I perceive you have my sword rolled in the cloak behind your saddle, dare you trust me with it?”

“By and by,” answered Jason. “’Tis very well for the present. Now tell me more o’ thy noble self, prithee.”

“Willingly, Oaks. I’ve naught to hide. What would you know?”

“Why, o’ thy poor head, thy so battered sconce. I mind as Sam Ortis fetched it a woundy rap, no question!”

“Is this most hellish ruffian a friend of yours?”

“Well, I do know he hath a daughter—”

“And far, far too good, too purely sweet and lovely to be fathered by such brutish, smuggling rogue, let me die—”

“Die? Ay truly. Sam meant ee to, meant to kill ee, did Sam. And no wonder! says I.”

“The devil you do? What precisely may you mean, Oaks?”

“Why, that if I chanced to have handsome daughter and a guzzling young spark leading her astray to her shame, her ruin and despair, then I’d ___”

“Silence!” cried Charles, in sudden, hot fury. “Hold your curst, vile tongue! Be dumb, damn you! Don’t dare breathe your foulness ’gainst her sweet purity or . . . or take the consequences!”

“Lord! Now here’s Ferocity wi’ blood in its eye, by Goles!”

“Ha, you!” gasped Charles. “You and your base kind must vent your beastly lewdness ’gainst her, spit your black venom on the . . . the holiest love that ever blessed unworthy wretch . . . you must blast her fair fame till . . . till the air is rank of it! But I’ll have no more . . . no more, I say! And you, being one o’ these vile dastards, shall pay for all, and pay—now!”

Uttering the word, Charles leapt and snatched sword from scabbard and cloak.

“Down . . . down with you!” he cried, threatening Jason with levelled point. “Down with you, I say, and foot to foot! And don’t reach for your pistols or by Heaven I’ll be through you! Fight, curse you—fight!”

Now seeing words were of none avail, Jason dismounted perforce and stepping aside where the ground was clear, drew his sword, and instantly the narrow, glittering blades clicked and rasped together in furious thrust and lightning parry.

Speechless they fought,—hotly reckless youth, cool and wary man,—heedless valour against experienced judgment. . . .

Suddenly Jason’s blade wavered out of the line, and Charles, quick to spy this opening, lunged full-length, but, avoiding this invited attack with nimble volte, Jason closed, gripped the shell of his antagonist’s sword, twisted, wrenched—and Charles reeled aside, breathless and disarmed.

“Mad . . . young fool!” panted Jason, a sword now in either hand; but his old wound so troubled him that he propped himself against the nearest tree and so for a long moment they fronted each other frowning and breathless. Then with an effort that racked him, Jason stooped and broke the swords across his knee one after the other and tossed them away.

“So!” said he. “Next time if fight we must it shall be with fists or bludgeons.”

Sir Charles drew himself up with superb dignity, he folded his arms, he smiled.

“And now,” said he, majestically, “all doubts are entirely resolved! At last, sir, I am perfectly assured of your true identity!”

“The which,” sighed Jason, “shall complicate matters quite damnably!”

“On the contrary, sir, it shall, I hope, ensure a new and better understanding betwixt us as persons of condition, sir, gentlemen both and therefore men of an impeccable honour. For now I salute you as . . . Sir Gervase Calverly—”

“Z-ounds!” exclaimed Jason, in such evident amazement and seeming discomfiture that Charles, smiling with a self-complacency, bowed with sweep and flourish of hat, saying:

“Yes, indeed despite your country guise and speech, I pierced the cheat, you perceive, and knew you for that same Sir Gervase Calverley named with Wayne in the indictment, and who escaped but lately from the soldiery at Horsham. Thus, sir, there is no need you should play me the yokel any longer.”

“Faith,” answered Jason, “ ’tis as well, for I’m apt to overplay the part, I fear.”

“A little, sir, a little,—but ’tis evident you are Sussex bred, though I’m not aware of any Calverley family in Sussex.”

“They are of the North!” answered Jason.

“Well now, in the first place, Sir Gervase—”

“No no, call me Jerry Oaks!”

“Be sure I will. And pray believe, sir, you need have no least fear I shall betray you, no no! Just so soon as my own very hateful business achieves I pledge myself to protect, to comfort and aid you howso I may—”

“At peril of your life, Sir Charles—”

“I know it, sir, I’m fully aware of the dangers I must incur, but this shall make me but the more zealous to serve and save you. And this I swear upon my honour! You believe me, sir?”

“Ay—I—do!”

“Then here is the hand you refused a while since, perhaps you will accept it now?”

So, having shaken hands, they went on again, and Charles now extremely talkative chiefly concerning this most important personage Sir Charles Warrender, his hopes, his many tribulations because, until lately, his soaring ambitions had been constantly baulked by lack of money.

“For you must know,” said he, waxing eloquent upon himself (this inspiring subject), “I was meant to achieve! I was formed for success, and predestined to cut no mean figure in the world! All I need is scope, opportunity, space and freedom,—stead of the prisoning walls of a poor, country parsonage house, once I were free of all this I should soar!”

“Ay, but where to? And what of your—sister?”

“Honorias is—well—a girl, and so devoted to me that my success shall be her success. For succeed I shall, Gervase—I mean Jeremy—all I need is

to—”

“Work!” said Jason.

Sir Charles recoiled, the better to stare his amazement.

“Work?” he repeated. “Work how—what for, pray?”

“Anyhow, and to win yourself scope, to make your opportunities.”

“Can you possibly mean—bodily labour?”

“Ay, I do,—labour of body or brain or both.”

“Labour of brain I grant you, Oaks, but labour of body—never! For, damme—how may gentlemen stoop to such meanness?”

“Gentlemen ha’ stooped to doing far worse ere now, and—Hark! What’s doing yonder?” For, all at once, the peaceful stillness was troubled by clamour of harsh voices, the furious barking of a dog and a woman’s shrill scream.

Instantly Charles began to run, Jason spurred the sleepy cob and soon they were looking down into a sunken road, or rather grassy track, an ancient, long-forgotten way that ran athwart the forest, and thus beheld a woman backed against a tree and facing five scowling men, rustics all, one of whom held a powerful, shaggy dog in leash.

“Hey, neighbours!” cried Jason, in the vernacular, reining his animal down the sloping bank, “what be trouble y-ere?”

“Witched me sow, she ’ave!” answered the man with the dog, a hairy fellow and large except for eyes and nose, “witched me sow as be about to farrer!”

“Ay, a black witch ’er be!” cried a second man, as fiercely. “Overlooked my mare tother day, ’er did, and mare’s been off ’n ’er feed ever since!”

“She likewise throwed a spell on my best cow an’ sp’iled ’er milk!” cried a third.

“Lord!” exclaimed Jason, eyeing the terrified woman askance. “An’ what be agoin’ to do wi’ ’er neow, I be wonderin’?”

“Tek an’ throw she into Ammer-pond, that be wot!”

“I seed ’em burn a witch once, I did!” piped an ancient man, flourishing knotted stick.

“No, master, no!” cried the woman, appealing wildly to Jason, “I bean’t no witch . . . I pens dukkerins . . . tells fortun’s like, but I bean’t no witch.”

“Howbeit, neighbours,” quoth Jason, riding forward, “witch or no, there be none of ee anyways a-goin’ for to play rough wi’ this woman, nohow, nowise and nowhen.”

“An’ oo,” piped the ferocious ancient, “oo be ee for to so deny we,—oo?”

“Sussex I be, gaffer, ah—Sussex as you be I be, only I bean’t sich doddlish fool as ee be.”

“Loose yer dog on ’e, Joe, loose dog!”

“Ar—do!” nodded Jason, drawing and cocking pistol, “Loose your brute and see him shot.”

Heedless of this warning, the raving animal was freed, but the long-barrelled pistol flamed and roared . . . the great, savage creature checked in mid career, snarled, rolled over, kicked and was still.

“Well,” quoth Jason, drawing his second pistol, “so much for one brute, now what o’ the rest o’ ye?”

The five stood lusting for vengeance, they glanced at each other, they glared on Jason, but, checked by that ready weapon, hesitated and were dumb,—all except the ancient who, ferocious as ever, flourished his stick, crying fiercely:

“Come ee on, lads,—’e wunt never durst fire on we, ’twould be red murder, ’e wunt dare, not ’im,—foller me neow!”

But now, even as this Aged One piped shrill encouragement, down from the bank above leapt Charles, had possessed himself of the knotted stick and was beside Jason—all in a moment. . . .

Ensued an instant of breathless stillness then, having beheld Jason’s deadly shooting and seeing Charles so joyously eager for combat, the four turned sullenly away and made off, dragging the still warlike ancient with them.

“That,” sighed Charles, glancing at the dead dog; “let me bleed but that was truly marvellous shot!” But now came the woman to kick that helpless carcass and then to lift her still trembling hands and clasp them to Jason in passionate fervour of gratitude, but all she said was:

“He bites me once—yon beast, so I do thankee, master, for killing of ’im ah, and saving from the cruel water one as wunt never forget!”

“You are a Romany, I think?” enquired Jason, dropping pistol into deep side-pocket.

“Ay, Master.”

“Then mayhap you know Mistress Sinfia Beshaley?”

“Yea, Master. Though she be’s o’ the High Proud Ones.”

“Then pray see that she gets this message: that so soon as maybe Mr. Warren’s friend will come seeking her wise counsel. Remember,—Mr. Warren’s friend!”

“Verily, Master, I will so.” Then, with gesture of farewell, the woman took up her heavy bundle, turned aside into the underwood and was gone.

“Think you she is witch indeed?” enquired Charles, looking after her.

“Like as not,” answered Jason, “though a Romany’s magic means drugs, I guess.”

“Well, that of yours was right marvellous shot, Jeremy!”

“And I am beholden to you, Sir Charles!”

“How so, Jeremy? And pray call me ‘Charles’.”

“For checking yon hoary paladin when you did,—had they charged me I should have been hard put to it.”

“Which makes me to wonder, Jeremy, why you must adventure the least hazard for—such woman?”

“Because all womanhood is sacred to me by reason of—one!”

“So—you too are a lover, Jeremy?”

“Heart and soul, Charles!” Saying which, Jason rode on again, following now this grassy, age-old track. But they had gone but very little distance when Jason’s quick eyes, ever alert for danger, espied a sudden flicker in the green, and he reined up as out from the neighbouring thickets stepped a very heated corporal with face red as his coat and behind him three perspiring men.

“Halt—now what’s to do ’ere?” demanded the corporal, glancing from round-eyed, rustical Jason to dignified, haughty, young Charles, “Who’s been a-shooting? And why for?”

“Me!” answered Jason, stabbing himself with indicatory thumb, “I shoots me a dog yonder. Young Sir Squire y-ere shall tell ee why an’ wherefore, better nor me. Tell ’im, Sir Charles, me lord.” The which Charles did forthwith very fully, yet with all the aloof condescension of “quality” for the mere “rank and file”.

“Why then, sir,” quoth the corporal, suitably impressed, “I must beg to know who y’are, both o’ ye,—dooty so compellin’.”

“My good fellow,” answered Charles, affably, “this is understood. For myself I am Sir Charles Warrender, of Warrenscourt, in the country, and here you behold my friend, Master Jeremy Oaks.”

“Thankee, sir! Now may I ask if by hap’ you’ve seen or heard aught o’ them there Jacobite rebels b’leeved to be ’ereabouts? Bide a minute, sir!” So saying the corporal, after some contortions succeeded in extracting from his tight regimental coat a somewhat crumpled and twisted paper at the which, having smoothed it out, he scowled terrifically and from which he read a sufficiently accurate description of Sir Wilfred Rokeby’s stolen horse and garments and thereafter a further description of the late Sir Gervase Calverley.

“Do you ’appen to ha’ seen such at any time or in any place, sir?”

“Never in my life!” answered Charles.

Now when the soldiers had departed and all sound of them died away, Jason looked down on his companion with eyes wistful and troubled, murmuring:

“Whoso aids or comforts the King’s enemy—!”

“Precisely!” said Charles, folding his arms dramatically and nodding his youthful head with the utmost resolution. “The die is now cast! From this moment your perils are mine! And thus, Jeremy, I prove my friendship for Gervase by here and now willfully and with perfect deliberation setting my own life in jeopardy dire,—myself being, as I say, a man of the most unshakeable determination, the which you are instant to perceive. Thus, peril of a ghastly death shall be an added bond betwixt us, knitting us unswerving to our purpose. Come then, my friend, let us on thereto, thou and I together, Jeremy, and let Jason Wayne, this poor wretch, beware of us!”

CHAPTER XXIX

DESCRIBES A MATTER OF ELIMINATION

“M’ dear Will,” murmured Mr. Dartry, dallying languidly with his snuffbox, “I repeat I ha’ no more idea as to how, why, or whither our precious, young fool hath betaken himself than—yourself.”

“And,” retorted Sir Wilfred, “I repeat that ’tis devilish odd!”

“Where, pray, lieth the oddity, my Wilfred?”

“I hear that he was last seen in your company, Frank. On certain evening you and he—took a walk together.”

“Ay, to be sure we did. And why not?”

“And wherefore, Francis, and to what purpose?”

“What but to drink the air, Will,—glimpse the beauty o’ sunset, enjoy the scenery rustical—trees, hedgerows and—so forth.”

“Bah!” exclaimed Sir Wilfred fretfully. “Say cards, the bottle or a wench and I’ll believe you.”

“Thou’rt crude, Wilfred. I suggest thou’rt inclined to be a little coarse, and so—”

“Did Charles affront you? Did the young hot-head force a quarrel . . . a fight? Did you bare steel?”

“My . . . dear . . . f’low,” yawned Mr. Dartry, behind white hand, “since thou’rt so dev’lish persistent, I’ll confess Young Impertinence was—so very much so and became so fighting mad that he compelled me to ’t. But scarce had our blades crossed than we were rudely interrupted by a rascal with a pistol in each fist and other rogues armed with bludgeons—”

“Who were these fellows?”

“What matter? Suffice it to say, our affair being thus prevented, and very happy for our fool Charles, I took my departure.”

“And what of Charles?”

“Stayed to argue with these ruffians, like the heedless young fool he is.”

“But what’s become of him? All these days elapsed! Damme, where is he?”

“My Wilfred I know not, nor care. The devil may have him for me.”

“But—Good God, Frank, he may be dead . . . hurt . . . a prisoner!”

“Per-fectly!” murmured Mr. Dartry, yawning again. “Ha’ the goodness to pass the wine.” Sir Wilfred rose instead and began to pace back and forth while Mr. Dartry reaching the bottle for himself, filled glass and sipped with leisured gusto.

“Here’s a damned business!” exclaimed Sir Wilfred, sinking into his chair again.

“Not for our precious young fool, let’s hope, Will.”

“For me, Frank, for me—curse it!”

“How so, my Wilfred?”

“His sister! Honoria! How the devil . . . what explanation can I give her? How excuse his disappearance? What am I to say to her?”

“Nothing, m’ dear f’low, not a word! Leave all this to your very devoted Dartry.”

“To . . . you?” Sir Wilfred gasped: he sat up with such a sudden violence that his wineglass went flying to splinter on the floor quite unnoticed. “Ha—you, Francis?” he repeated.

“Even so!” smiled Mr. Dartry. “I propose to ride and acquaint our too bewitching Honoria of her brother’s vanishment, very presently!”

“And what,” demanded Sir Wilfred, thick brows close-knit, “what may this mean—exactly?”

“The Eternal Triangle, m’ dear Will,—one adorable feminine with two male creatures determined to adore,—yourself and yours—and hers—most devotedly, myself.”

“Dartry, you’re not . . . jesting?”

“Ah, dear me—no! I am, for once and at last, so extremely serious that, forgetting all worldly considerations and my usual prudence, I am quite determined to espouse her, money or no.”

Sir Wilfred laughed, bitterly ironic; Mr. Dartry sipped his wine, placidly regnant.

“A married man—you, Dartry? A husband,—the domestic hearth, no, no, you’re not the cut for a Benedick—”

“Howbeit, Rokeby, I propose to essay the part, for a time at least,—until it wearies me.”

Sir Wilfred’s comely face grew suddenly red and as swiftly pale and, when he spoke, his tone was threatening as his look.

“Dartry, you become offensive!”

“And you,” retorted Mr. Dartry, smiling, “forget yourself. Thus I take joy to remind you of—a lady’s horsewhip. You remember it? Ah, I see you do, and I can but marvel at your persistence in a suit so patently hopeless.”

Sir Wilfred uttered a passionate oath; Mr. Dartry tittered and continued:

“Now having regard to this same whip and its beauteous owner’s consistent treatment of you, I cannot help but feel the more assured she shall choose or accept me—with perchance some little persuasion more or less tenderly compelling—” Sir Wilfred rose and thrust aside his chair, saying thickly:

“Then, Dartry, for sake of her future happiness, and my own present satisfaction, I must render you totally incapable of such mischief.” So saying, he snatched his sword from nearby corner and unsheathed it, while Mr. Dartry reached his own whence it lay on the settle and placed there his empty scabbard.

Now as they stood poised, the menacing steel aglitter between them; said Mr. Dartry:

“A matter this of elimination, eh, Rokeby?”

“One or other!” answered Sir Wilfred; and their blades met. Each was master of his weapon, and both were experienced in such murderous business and equally determined; thus for some while they feinted, thrust and parried with an assured dexterity until chance decided the matter, for, in making quick recovery, Sir Wilfred tripped upon his fallen wineglass and Mr. Dartry, taking instant and merciless advantage of this stumble, lunged gracefully and stabbed him deep.

Sir Wilfred gasped, dropped sword and clapping both hands upon his hurt, sank to his knees, and presently lay convulsed at the feet of his conqueror.

“Will this suffice, I wonder?” mused Mr. Dartry, looking down upon him. “Indeed, I think it may. And so—farewell t’ you, Rokeby!” Then wiping his weapon very carefully, he returned it to its scabbard, put on his hat and departed humming melodiously as he went. Meeting a chambermaid upon his way he paused to acknowledge her bobbing curtsey.

“My pretty one,” said he, chucking her beneath the chin with a languid gallantry, “the gentleman above stairs hath some need of a surgeon . . . see to’t, child, and be speedy.”

CHAPTER XXX

WHEREIN IS MATTER CONCERNING THE VIRTUE OF MEEKNESS

It was a place of beauty this old rectory garden, sheltered by noble trees on the one side and the green, swelling Downs on the other; a place of smooth-shaven lawns and trim walks bordered by flowers that made a glory and filled the warm, soft air with their blended sweetness; here were tall, old hedges neatly clipped and quaintly trimmed, beyond which was a small orchard and, beyond this again, broad, well tended beds where herbs and vegetables waxed and flourished. A very sunny garden this morning, a fragrant, peaceful haven where bees hummed, butterflies hovered, and birds chirped in a drowsy hush that seemed only the more peaceful and homely for the soft murmur of voices in occasional friendly converse with click of spade or mattock where the Reverend Robert Tulliver, bare-armed and wigless, laboured beside his henchman, clerk, sexton and chief bell-ringer—this one-time Sergeant of the Buffs, Joshua Binns.

“But, your reverence and sir,” quoth Sergeant Joshua, pausing to wipe perspiring brow on hairy arm, “what I humbly begs to aff-firm is as there be times, sir, as no human man can’t nowise be humble nor yet meek, none whatever and no question, sir!”

“Agreed, Joshua,” answered the Reverend Robin, pausing also to wipe brow, and in like manner, “for man, being indeed but human, is prone to err, giving way to pride o’ passion, alack! Yet pray remember, ’twas read in the lesson only last Sunday, Joshua, the third of the Beatitudes,—‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’ ”

“Ay, sir, but oo wants for to in-herit so much? Not me. And, as for your reverend self, sir, I humbly begs to p’int out,—and this very respectful and meek, sir,—as yourself is inclined for to come the vartue o’ meekness too strong, and, sir—too frequent.”

“Impossible, Joshua!”

“Sir,” quoth the Sergeant, sighing gustily, “there was a time,—afore I took to sojering and you to the Church and Christian meekness, when, being a gentleman, you wore sword, ay and could use it famous too—and did,—frequent! This here!” Speaking, the Sergeant turned and from behind a certain gnarled, old apple tree nearby, took a small sword, its silver hilt and

scabbard mountings bright with his care. Unsheathing its glittering blade the Sergeant wielded it in practised hand, sighed again heavily and shook his head.

“Ah, here, sir,” said he, “was thing o’ power once as few men dared face, a power for good, a righter o’ wrongs, a defence for the weak, a weapon, reverend sir, as won for yourself a respect amounting to h-awe! But to-day . . . ’tis no better than a ornymment for to hang ’pon your study wall and be cleaned by me once per month—unfailing! Look ’pon it, your worship, look and remember!”

The little Parson glanced at this weapon, frowning and askance,—this that in his younger days he had indeed made so terrible; this most deadly type of duelling sword called ‘colichemarde,’ its triangular blade, broad in the forte as its double shell, tapering to needle point, with edges ground to razor sharpness. The Reverend Robin glanced at it frowning, stifled a sigh, and spoke:

“Put it up, Joshua! Put the thing away! Hide it! Your spade is nobler tool, so—dig, man, dig!” Sergeant Joshua slowly sheathed the bright steel, laid it tenderly by and sighed again, saying:

“To-day, sir, being my day app’nted for furbishing same, I couldn’t but call to mind when you was gentleman as no man never dared to cross nohow,—and to-day, sir, a reverend dee-vine as everybody be for ever a-crossing, anywhere and all too frequent!”

“Nay, Joshua, I am the glad and very humble servant of One who was ever meek and lowly. One who was despised and rejected. For His sake I strive to be humble and zealous in all things . . . a loving guide to my something errant flock, these so wayward children of mine that, so clean-souled and simple-hearted in many ways, are in one particular so lawless, alas!”

“Tubs!” nodded the Sergeant. “Your reverence be thinking o’ they tubs and bales as do find their way into our belfry now and then. But I be thinking o’ young Chris Parkin o’ the Preventive, this noo, young, sucking officer as forces hisself on your honour, t’other day, so outrageous bold, and demands the belfry key—”

“Which—I refused to give him, Joshua.”

“But which you might have, sir, seeing as they tubs, and sich like, was safe away. But, sir, you takes young Parkin’s shameful, disrespectful talk

and conduct to yourself so remarkable meek and humble as me blood reg'lar fizzed, sir, and b'iled in me veins!"

"Yet this was no reason you should kick him, Joshua, so soon as my back was turned."

"No, his back, your honour, his back! Which it helped him forrard, sir, and done me a power o' good—on the spot, sir!"

Here the Reverend Robin bent to his labour again, as much to hide the smile that curved his gentle, sensitive mouth as for anything other; whereupon the Sergeant likewise fell to work and so was a silence yet by no means lengthy, for presently, straightening his tall, powerful form, Sergeant Joshua gazed on the little Parson with eyes that, beneath fierce jut of beetling brows, held the light of a very deep affection as, shaking greying head, he spoke again:

"Then, sir, there be . . . Squire Brampton as . . . threatened to . . . have your honour . . . set into . . . the stocks, 'od rot him!"

"Sergeant, fie on thee, man! And how should you know of this, Joshua?"

"Why, from Gammer Yaxley her ownself, sir. She tells me how Squire was for having her poor old bones into they shameous stocks and all for grubbing a few simples out o' his woods,—and how yourself pleads for her very humble, and, him never heeding, how you offers to sit in they stocks 'stead of her, marvellous meek,—ah, and how in he'd have had ee, sir, but that all cried shame on him!"

"He is indeed a something hard man," sighed the little Parson. "Yet I refuse to despair of him, his hard heart may still be touched—"

"Heart, sir?" growled the Sergeant, with a hushed ferocity. "I'd like to touch him up—in his rear—wi' one o' your honour's swords—yon sweet 'colichemarde,' say!"

"Heaven forbid, Joshua!"

"Which, sir," quoth the Sergeant, drawing a large silver watch, much as if it had been a weapon of offence, "do mind me as how in twenty odd minutes' time us be doo to play three bouts wi' the blunts, sir, as per usual. I've got 'em a-laying ready yonder. But, Lord, there be Mrs. Hannah advancing 'pon us!"

Mrs. Hannah, small though dignified and rosily trim from small, neat, buckled shoe to small, neat cap, was indeed crossing the wide lawn towards them with a decorous haste; and a very pleasant sight to see, or so thought

the burly Sergeant, eyeing her somewhat askance. She curtsied to the little Parson, she glanced sideways at the big Sergeant, she shook her very comely head and sighed.

“Pray what is it, Mrs. Hannah?”

“My sweet lamb!” she answered, sighing deeper yet.

“Eh?” exclaimed the Reverend Robin, starting.

“ ’Tis my sweet chuck, sir, ’tis our Honoria as, with brother Charles, I’ve so loved and tended since their poor father passed away and you, sir, took these sweet orphans to your tender care. Ah, Mr. Robin, the day expected hath dawned! Nature, sir, is calling! Ay, your reverence, it hath come at last!”

“Dear me, Hannah! What—”

“Our tender lamb, sir! Scarce bite or sup this day! Languishing she be! And so pale! And do so heave pretty bosom and sigh so piteous plaintive! Won’t eat, poor sweeting! And what she do eat wouldn’t keep a bird from famishment!”

“How,—is she ill, Hannah?”

“ ’Tis as may be. Wherefore I ask of you, Master Robin, being gentleman and reverend divine, and you, Sergeant Joshua, as man wise with years and wars and experience o’ life and death,—why and wherefore is this, can ye tell me?”

The little Parson ran sinewy fingers through his cropped, grey hair, his wig (second best) dangled from twig of the apple tree,—and looked at Sergeant Joshua, who, rubbing smooth-shaven chin, looked back at him.

“Well, Joshua, how sayst thou?” The Sergeant cleared his throat, squared his shoulders, rubbed his chin a little harder and made answer:

“In my experience, sir and ma’m, when them as should ought to eat—don’t eat, it hath argufied trouble inside,—wherefore, ma’m, you may depend as there be summat amiss with Mistress Honoria’s young, ladylike innards, ma’m and sir.”

“Fie and no, Sergeant!” retorted Mrs. Hannah, with the utmost finality. “She do be sweet inside as out. And pray what says you, Master Robin?”

“Well, Hannah, my belief is our dear child is grieving for her brother Charles.”

“Truly, sir. Yet ’tis not this doth so pale her pretty cheek, nor fetch such sighs, so fain and fond, from her tender heart, ah no,—’tis a man!”

“Man?” echoed the Parson, staring. “Who? How? What man?”

“Some man, sir, a man,—the man as she yearns to! The One! The Only!”

“God bless us, Hannah! Can you possibly . . . do you mean she is—in love? Are you sure?”

“Indeed, Master Robin, I do. And I am!”

“Hath she then told you?”

“Never a word and not a syllable!”

“Then how shall you be so sure?”

“La, sir! How should I not, being a woman as hath loved her all her days?”

“It is so . . . so very sudden!” sighed the little Parson.

“Ah, ’tis ever so, Master Robin! Nature calleth, sir, and our ewe lamb hath heard! Though who, or how, or when, or why is for your discovery. As for me, I’ll back to my maids, for, this day, sir, we be turning out your Reverence’s study.” The Parson winced:

“My papers, Hannah,” he protested, feebly, “the volumes on my desk,—I trust—”

“Shall be perfectly dusted, sir, and all put back in the same, identical, shocking disorder.” So saying, with another curtsey for master and sidelong glance for man, Mrs. Hannah departed; whereupon Parson Robin made as if to follow, then sighed and took up his spade instead, the Sergeant instantly following suit. But presently, chancing to glance up, Sergeant Joshua peered under his hand, saying:

“Visitors, sir, ap-proaches.”

So Parson Robin glanced up also and thus beheld two horsemen on the Down above them.

“Do we know them, Joshua?” he enquired anxiously.

“Ay, one sir,—’tis gentleman as was here wi’ Master Charles. Which do give me for to wonder if said gentleman can be—him? The One as Mistis Honoria be fell in love with, eh sir?”

“No, Joshua,—ah, surely not!” answered Parson Robin, almost fiercely, and then: “God forbid it!” he murmured softly, and yet so fervently it might have been a prayer; for in one of these riders he had recognized Mr. Dartry.

“How s’ever, sir, they ’m a-coming here.”

“I fear they are, Joshua. Let us—dig.”

So Mr. Francis Dartry came riding into the peace of this fragrant garden, so perfectly confident and assured of himself that he began by making two errors of judgment: Firstly he cantered his horse across that smooth expanse of velvety lawn, whereat the Sergeant’s glaring eyes almost vanished beneath ferocity of bushy eyebrows, and Secondly he beckoned imperiously to the little bare-armed, crop-headed Parson, calling arrogantly:

“Ha, my man, don’t gape and stare when I summon you! Go, and instantly, to your Mistress Honoria Warrender and say Mr. Francis Dartry desires speech with her. D’you hear me?”

“Oh yes,” sighed the little cleric, “yes, sir, I hear.”

“And them hoss-huffs,” groaned the Sergeant, “a-tearing of our turf so cruel!”

“Then, if you hear,” cried Mr. Dartry, impatiently, “begone with my order, my message, this moment.”

“Mr. Dartry, I . . . I fear you do not remember me.”

“How should I, pray? And for—what?”

“I am Robert Tulliver, sir, vicar of this parish.”

“What, the little Parson, Honoria’s uncle, is it possible? Then, sir, I ask your pardon, though my mistake was but natural—under the circumstances, as I protest you must own.” Here the speaker’s languid gaze roved over the vicar’s person so very superciliously that the Reverend Robin glanced wistfully at his wig adroop in the apple tree and answered gently:

“It was, sir, it was indeed. And now, Mr. Dartry, pray favour me with your departure.” Mr. Dartry actually started.

“Departure?” he repeated, as if doubting his ears.

“And—them hoss-huffs, sir—”

“Ah, yes,” nodded Mr. Tulliver, “I must ask you, sir, to be good enough to keep your horse from trampling my lawn.”

"I'll remember this, sir," Mr. Dartry retorted, "when I have spoken with Honoria."

"May I ask to what purpose?"

"To deliver news shall interest her, reverend sir, tidings of moment."

"Then, sir, you may tell me."

"Not so, Mr. Tulliver! Oh dear no!"

"Then you may depart."

"Nor this neither, sir. I bear tidings of her brother, if you will know, poor Charles."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Parson, anxiously. "Pray what of him?"

"This, sir, is for—her pretty ear alone."

The little Parson sighed distressfully, his keen eyes, by long experience, so wise in humanity, surveyed Mr. Dartry, noting his immaculate person, graceful languor and placid countenance feature by feature; and the Parson's own face seemed to lose something of its habitual benignity and his voice something of its gentle kindness:

"Then, sir, your news must remain untold."

"But, most reverend gentleman, suppose I inform you that poor Charles is in desperate, evil plight, sick and languishing, how then?"

"Then, sir, I shall ride to his immediate aid and comfort."

"Ah, but—whither, sir? Where is he?"

"Mr. Dartry," pleaded the little Parson. "Surely you will tell me this, if only for mere mercy's sake?"

"This, sir, I shall disclose only to Honoria. Well now, had you not better bring me to her?"

"On no account, sir."

"So poor Charles must then yearn for her presence in vain!" Parson Robin clasped and wrung his hands, these strangely muscular hands, with gesture so like despair that Mr. Dartry tittered.

"Ah, reverend sir," he murmured, "for our poor Charles's sake bring me to Honoria, or—Honoria to me."

"No!"

“But why, Master Tulliver? In Confusion’s name—why not?”

“Suffice it, sir, I—will not.”

“But this is preposterous!”

“Then again I bid you depart. Go, sir!”

“Oh, I will, sir, and instantly—to discover our bewitching Honoria for myself.” So saying, Mr. Dartry wheeled his horse, only to find the little Parson fronting him again.

“Mr. Dartry,” said he, in great agitation, “you are trespassing on my land, but attempt to set your foot across the threshold of my house, my home and . . . you do it at . . . your peril!”

“What, do you actually threaten me now?” smiled Mr. Dartry. “This becomes ridiculous as futile. I am here for a purpose and achieve it I will, come what may. So stand from my path. Malediction, sir! Am I a plague or pestilence to be thus denied her presence?”

“I esteem you little better, sir.”

Something in the indomitable persistence of this so mild little gentleman seemed to play sudden havoc with Mr. Dartry’s cynical assurance, to sweep away his icy self-control and goad him to such unreasoning frenzy that he flashed out his sword,—and his voice so choked with fury he might hardly speak:

“You . . . have threatened . . . me! I . . . do the same! Stand aside or . . . take the consequences!”

Now as Mr. Dartry swung down from saddle, in this same moment the Sergeant moved as swiftly to the apple tree and back again; something rapped, gently insistent, at the knuckles of the little Parson’s quivering right fist until his clenched fingers opened, closed again and he was fronting the threat of Mr. Dartry with the colichemarde glittering in his hand.

Then, with no least ceremony, steel met steel in vicious thrust and instant parry, to whirl and flash in close engagement, to flicker and dart with stamp of feet and lithe sway of bodies in advance or retreat; eyes stared into eyes as, with hands, feet and every sense opposed, they felt out each other’s strength, tested each other’s skill, while Sergeant Joshua watched, joyous and grim.

Mr. Dartry thrust fiercely, but was met by a lightning riposte, and, as he recoiled,—away fluttered an inch or so of lace from his cravat.

“One!” quoth the Sergeant.

Mr. Dartry smiled contemptuous, but became the more cautious and deadly while, little by little, the opposing blade seemed less strong and sure . . . he attempted another thrust, felt his own weapon jar to the parry and leapt back . . . and a long curl from his peruke floated to the ground.

“Two!” quoth the Sergeant.

Mr. Dartry smiled no more; his eyes glared, upon his furrowed brow sweat trickled, but he fought resolute as ever, and the more desperately, until his small opponent began to give ground slowly, back and yet back. . . . Mr. Dartry’s assurance returning, he pressed the fiercer, his glittering point a ceaseless menace, until came at last the opening he had played and watched for—a wide parade. Mr. Dartry, boldly venturing, lunged full length . . . felt the shock of answering stroke, gasped to the agony of stricken wrist, dropped his sword and reeled back, clutching at his hurt.

“Three!” quoth Sergeant Joshua, picking up the fallen weapon. “And, reverend sir, by my count you might ha’ been through him five times.”

“Seven!” said the little Parson, breathing rather hurriedly. “Seven times, Joshua, but the Lord gave me strength to resist the temptation! Hallelujah!”

“A-men!” quoth the Sergeant, dutifully. “Though, sir, I didn’t exactly observe how your Reverence disarmed him. Was it time or a riposte, sir?”

“’Twas the cutover after the disengagement, Joshua,” answered another voice, unexpectedly near, as, with flutter of petticoats, Honoria came speeding to them, and showing all the lovelier for these sweetly tempestuous garments, or by reason of her wistful eyes, romantic pallor, or all three. So thought Mr. Dartry, as he leaned against the apple tree cherishing his bruised wrist and entirely unnoticed.

“But,” said she, kissing the little Parson with the prettiest fervour, “I’m here, my pet, ah, my own dear Uncle Robin—thou small, mighty gentleman, to take thee a-riding—in quest of Charles.”

“My sweeting, so I will and joyfully,—but whither?”

“To those shall tell us how to find him. So prithee, Joshua, saddle our horses while I get me into my habit.”

“Ah, thy habit, sweetheart?”

“Indeed, Uncle Robin! I’m done with aping masculinity! No need is there for such odious guise with thee to my protection, thou dear, loved

paladin. Come!" So to the house they went with arms entwined while Sergeant Joshua, finding himself cumbered with Mr. Dartry's sword, tossed it lightly over hedge into the lane and strode off to the stables, leaving Mr. Dartry still wholly unregarded.

And when he had comforted his swollen wrist, Mr. Dartry got himself astride his horse and rode away, a by no means placid gentleman; so much the reverse indeed that when the watchful Tranter, joining him in the lane, returned his sword and ventured question, Mr. Dartry not only cursed him but actually scowled until, remembering such facial contortions were apt to induce wrinkles, he schooled himself to an outer calm; and presently spoke in tone languidly soft as usual.

"Yon house, Tranter, mark it well, most zealous officer, for some day I think we shall return, and others with us! Meantime,—it shall bear watching. See to't, Tranter, see to't, good fellow."

CHAPTER XXXI

WHICH TELLS OF DOUBTS AND FEARS

“And so,” said the little Parson, rather wistfully, as they rode the sunny ways, slowly and close together, “so love hath found thee at last, my Honoria?”

“So I heard Hannah declare, my dear one, for I was listening to every word, of course; and very pitiful love-lorn wretch she made me.”

“And what sayst thou, my child?”

“So much, Uncle, pet, that should I begin I might go on . . . and on. . . . And I shall begin by confessing, and with no coy, maiden mock modesty but with a woman’s pride, that I do indeed love, with every part of me, body and soul, a most valiant, sweet-souled gentleman—and his name is Jason Wayne!”

Parson Robin reined up so suddenly as almost to unseat himself.

“God bless . . . my immortal . . . soul!” he exclaimed.

“Indeed, dear Uncle,—and poor Jason’s, and poor, woeful, loving mine!” she added. “For his life is forfeit, as you know, but I do so love him that, if he must die, life shall be hateful, and if he must to poverty and exile, these shall be my joy to share with him!”

“But,” quavered the Parson, “pray how . . . when . . . why—”

“Listen, my beloved, my wise and mighty one, and I will tell thee most fully all the wherefore and the why of it. . . .” So now indeed she did, and with such elaboration of detail that they were close upon Alfriston and her story far from ended when, turning a sudden, leafy corner, they espied Mr. Potter perched solitary upon a stile and apparently lost in pensive contemplation of nothing in particular; but, glancing up at sound of them, he opened his eyes very wide, and in some consternation to behold the gracious, stately lady who, wheeling her horse, came riding at him so suddenly.

“Oh, George—George Potter,” she cried gladly, “I was hoping to meet you!”

Mr. Potter rose from the stile a man abashed who could but stare amazed beyond speech.

"I was on my way to find you, George, or my other good friends Jockabed and Wentzelow. Won't you shake hands, George?"

Mr. Potter, being unable to open his eyes any wider, now opened his mouth, yet was dumb; but here, perceiving the cause of his perplexity, Honoria laughed and clapping him on the shoulder,—as Jason might have done,—she uttered Jason's oath and in her most manly voice:

"Zounds, man! I was forgetting,—last time we met I was Mr. Wayne's friend Tom Warren. You'll mind me now, damme?"

Here it was the Reverend Robin's turn to open his eyes while Mr. Potter smiled and knuckled an eyebrow.

"Eh—b'goles!" he murmured, "I do mind ee now, sure-ly!"

"Well, what's your news of him—of Mr. Wayne? Is all well? For, George, though I show now so different yet am I still his friend, so how is he, pray?"

"Why first . . . ma'm, I must tell ee as how he were took prisoner and tied up—"

"Oh merciful heaven! How . . . where . . . when?"

"'T'other marning in the dawn, East Bourne way."

"Oh, dreadful . . . dreadful!"

"Ah, ma'm, it were. And 'e were took by this yere Mr. Dartry—"

"This hateful wretch—"

"Ay, that same, ma'm! But—he gets away again—"

"Now . . . thank God! And how then? Where is he—?"

"Well, ma'm, I bean't nowise sure. Jockabed may know. I be awaiting for 'e now."

"Then I'll wait,—we'll both wait! Uncle Robin, this is my good friend, George Potter, who—ah!" she exclaimed. "I see you know each other?"

"More or less," answered the little Parson, his eyes twinkling. "Tubs, my dear!"

"Off and on like!" murmured Mr. Potter, touching his hat.

"Howbeit," said the Parson, riding nearer, "if you have anyways befriended my dear niece, George Potter, give me your hand."

It was now that Honoria caught sight of a gigantic figure approaching and instantly rode thither, calling his name; whereat the tall Romany, checking in the middle of a stride, took off his hat with an embarrassed courtesy while he viewed her vivid loveliness from braided hat to the slim boot below her habit, and with never a word.

“Oh, Jockabed,” she laughed, “never show so fearful of my woman’s habit. Come, take the hand of one shall ever be most grateful to you.” And when she had explained and Jockabed was somewhat recovered from his surprise, she questioned him of all that had transpired since their last meeting.

“So Mr. Wayne stopped this wicked duel, and so cleverly, bless him! And what thereafter?”

“Then, m’lady, Sam Ortis presently raps this young gen’leman and drops ’im onconscious like.”

“Ah, the cruel brute! And what did Mr. Wayne?”

“Why then Mr. Wayne kicks ’e, like—”

“Kicked Ortis? Ay, ’twas well done—”

“No, m’lady. ’Twere this yere same young gen’leman as ’e kicked like.”

“Shameful! And how then?”

“Then, Must’ Wayne has this yere young gen’leman slung acrost saddle and rides off wi’ he a-dangle like.”

“Oh!” gasped Honoria; and then again, in growing horror. “Oh! You mean Mr. Wayne carried him away—unconscious and wounded?”

“Yea, m’lady, ’e did.”

“And where . . .? Oh, Jockabed, where did he take him, and why—for what dreadful purpose, think you?”

“To the wesh, lady, the forest. Must’ Wayne do be on ’s way to Mistees Sinfia Beshaley her camp, lady.”

“Then you must guide me there at once and by the quickest ways. Oh, at once, Jockabed! Now . . . this moment!”

“Nay but, lady, it be a day’s journey and more, and I—”

“No matter, Jockabed, no matter! Take me you must, it may be matter of . . . life and death! Oh, Uncle Robin . . . George Potter!” she called and so

distressfully that they came hasting forthwith.

To them she spoke, and with them took such counsel that it was finally agreed Jockabed should call for them to-morrow at dawn, guiding them through the forest country by ways most direct and known only to the Wandering Folk.

With this, Honoria had to be satisfied; and yet showed so ill content, so anxious and woefully troubled that now, as they rode homewards, the little Parson essayed to comfort her as best he might and in his own wise and gentle manner.

“Grieve not, dear child, nor be troubled until trouble cometh—”

“Nay but . . . Oh, Uncle Robin, I . . . I do . . . so fear—”

“Verily, my Honoria, you fear this most valiant, sweet-souled gentleman shall do foul murder on thy brother. Then shame on thy heart for loving man so evil, or upon thy head for doubting gentleman so noble!”

“But . . . oh, my dear,” she sighed, “poor Jason hath endured so much of bitter wrong and, ere he knew me, vowed such dire vengeance on Charles,—what wonder I am so fearful?”

“Nay, doth he truly love thee, child, thy Jason Wayne?”

“Yes!” she murmured. “Ah, yes indeed!”

“Then, Honoria, by this love be assured Charles is safe from all harm at thy lover’s hands. For, oh my dear, True Love conquereth hate and is stronger than cruel vengeance, since such love truly is of God and may lift us above mere self—ay, up to the very glory of our Heavenly Father at last, I am persuaded. So, by his love for thee, Jason Wayne shall be lift up nor stoop to such poor, empty thing as vengeance,—for whithersoever he goeth, Honoria, Love, this bright, strong angel of God, goeth ever beside him, therefore now, dear child, in this thy love that is holy angel and very miracle of our all merciful God, find sure comfort, sweet soul.”

“Oh, Uncle Robin,” said she, leaning near to catch his hand, kissing it ere he might prevent, “indeed ’tis no wonder all folk do so love and honour thee—in especial thine own Honoria!”

CHAPTER XXXII

WHICH TELLS HOW SIR CHARLES WAS HIS OWN ASTONISHMENT

“Damme!” panted Charles, splashing thigh-deep in the pool, “Stiffen and perish me, Jeremy, if he hasn’t got away—and with my hook!”

“And a vasty fellow, eh, Charles?”

“Ay, he was, sink me,—the biggest yet!”

“He always is!” chuckled Jason, loosing line from his hazel sapling that had been his fishing rod. “But no matter, we’ve enough, lad, we’ve enough.”

“Ay but,” quoth Charles, scrambling from the water, “I’m something dampish, indeed most cursedly clammily moist!”

“Then make fire and dry you.”

“Then,” said Charles, beginning to collect dry sticks, “we may as well bide the night here, Jerry man, ’tis likely place.”

“Ay, but too early.”

“No matter, Jeremy.”

“We might push on another mile or so, eh lad?”

“Yet to what purpose?”

“Thy purpose, surely, Charles,—to come up with these gipsy folk and track down Wayne.”

“Why . . . as to this,” answered Charles, building his fire with an unwonted deliberation, “as to this . . . well, there’s no particular hurry.”

“Eh? No, Charles, lad?”

“None in the world!” answered Charles, balancing a twig with extremest care upon the pyramid he had constructed. “For, should we never find these gipsies, and they seem devilish elusive, ’twill be just as well . . . so far as I am concerned.”

“Oho?” enquired Jason, cocking an eye at him. “And what then of—Wayne?”

“Why, as to that . . . Throw me thy tinder-box, Jerry.”

Now it is to be noted that the once highly obnoxious word 'lad' now passes unchallenged; there are other things to be noticed also, for time has flown apace and these many days of wandering to and fro and round about this wild forest country, these nights of dreamless slumber and long, sunny, carefree days of close companionship and ever-growing goodfellowship have indeed wrought their changes. For instance: Jason's hat (or rather Farmer Truscott's), atilt on wigless head against the sun, shades a brown visage a-sprout with hair, and the hurt in his shoulder seems mending apace; as for Charles his modish languor and fine-gentleman affectations have vanished with his grand peruke which, like Jason's, has been laid by days ago; his face is tanned, his eyes quick and bright, his splendour of attire, though somewhat marred by thorny ways and hard usage, now covers a body instinct with new life and joyous vigour. . . . Just at present, having set the fire crackling merrily, he is whistling as blithely.

A distant clock, faint and yet clearly distinct upon the warm, still air, chimed the hour of five.

"Now where," enquired Charles, kicking off his sodden shoes, "where should you suppose that is and what, Jerry,—town or village?"

"Well," answered Jason, busied preparing their fish, like the experienced campaigner he is, "if my bearings are anyways right, yonder should be Lewes Town."

"Why then it becomes evident," said Charles, as he stripped off his wet garments, "I say 'tis quite manifest, Jerry, that all this time we have been wandering in circles and thou'rt devilish bad woodsman!"

"Ay, I fear so!" nodded Jason.

"And I know it!" quoth Charles, propping his garments to dry before the fire. "And, what's more, Jerry, 'tis so much the better. In such fair country and glorious weather a wandering life hath much to commend it!"

"Why so I think," answered Jason, eyeing his companion in growing surprise. "But you, Charles,—and what of your quest?"

"Nay what I'm most needing at this moment is yon old cloak o' thine,—throw it hither!" Now folding this travel-worn garment about him, Charles sat down against a tree and waiting until he caught Jason's eye, nodded portentously and spoke:

"Jeremy—hearkee!"

"I am."

“Good! For I’m about to astound you marvellously! Yes, I’m about to surprise and amaze you most incredibly,—for damme but I astonish myself! Let me die if I don’t!”

“Well?”

“Well,—I have come to another, a final and perfectly confounding decision, Jeremy! I am determined to—remain poor! I shall make no further attempt to apprehend Wayne and thus fulfil the conditions of my uncle’s will, holding it no better than incitement to murder, as indeed my sister described it. Damn my uncle’s money, and him with it! I’ll be no man’s death, not I. So here, my Jeremy, endeth our hunt for Jason Wayne, the poor wretch shall have his life, so far as I’m concerned, and win to safety, rebel though he be. And what say’st thou to this, Jerry man?”

Jason looked at this vivid, handsome, young face and, thinking of another so very like it, answered impulsively:

“She . . . your sister may be glad, I dare to think. And yet, lad, if she . . . truly loves this poor wretch, well . . . how then?”

“Why then he must be in some sense worthy, be sure of this, Jerry, for my sister is no green-sick fool to choose amiss. Howbeit, I’ll bring no such vile death on him, or any man! Well,—have I astounded thee, Jeremy?”

“Beyond the telling!”

“Indeed,” nodded Charles, “it is an abiding amazement—considering how extremely I detest poverty,—and poor I needs must be. And yet meseemeth that wealth so gained might come to be my own shame and damnation hereafter. So, better poverty and a serene mind than—what the devil!” he exclaimed as out upon them from neighbouring thicket stepped a man, and with scarcely a sound, a powerful fellow of truculent aspect who flourished a formidable staff.

“So—I’ve caught ye at last!” quoth he, fiercely jubilant.

“Indeed?” demanded Charles, instantly all dignified arrogance, despite his bare legs. “Who may you be? And, when you answer, speak your betters more respectfully, fellow.”

“I be ’ead keeper o’ these ’ere woods, that’s oo I be. And I’ve caught ye in the act! Them fish, that stream, these woods be private property and—”

“Pray you, whose property?” enquired Jason still busied with the fish in question.

“Me master’s—that’s oo’s!”

“Yes, chucklehead,” quoth Charles, “but who is your master?”

“Sir John Mordaunt, that’s oo!”

“Well, I’ve known Jack Mordaunt all my life,—you may tell him I’ve borrowed five of his trout—”

“ ‘Steal’ be the word!” growled the keeper.

“Be silent, fellow, and know that I am Sir Charles Warrender, of Warrens Court!”

The keeper, leaning on his staff, surveyed the haughty young speaker from touzled head to naked feet and, speaking no word, spat very contemptuously,—in which same moment Charles arose . . . a flash of white legs, of nimble feet and the burly keeper, gasping with surprise, reeled back to cower beneath the threat of his own staff wielded now by his so instant and indignant assailant.

“Now stretch me bleeding,” cried Charles, “be off or I’ll crack your foul, thick skull! Off with you for an insolent rogue and very nasty cur—go!” The keeper scowled threateningly but departed forthwith.

“So much for him, Jerry! Now what o’ this?” said Charles, eyeing the captured bludgeon disdainfully.

“Keep it, comrade. I’m guessing it may prove useful anon,” answered Jason, and taking the hazel sapling that had been his fishing rod he snapped it to suitable length and twirled it in sinewy fist. “For d’you see, Charles, being poachers indeed, we are liable to capture, and yon fellow is not alone, I judge,—so we must either be taken or beat ’em off.”

“And damme,” cried Charles, “myself without breeches!” So saying, he began to clothe himself speedily as he might. Hardly had he done so, cursing pettishly at his garments’ clinging dampness, than was rustle and stir of movement all about them and the keeper reappeared but now accompanied by four others.

“Stand off!” cried Charles, flourishing staff. “Keep back or we’ll make it devilish grim for some of you!”

“Keep together!” said Jason. “Back to back, Charles!”

“At ’em for danged poachers!” cried the keeper. “Get ’em, me lads,—come on!”

And now in this sunny forest-glade was rush and stamp of heavy feet, shouts, fierce cries with the splintering crack of wood on wood,—such sounds as must often have waked the echoes in those distant times when oaken quarterstaves were plied so lustily though never more so than now. For, ringed about by their assailants, the two fought the five, back to back and blow for blow, a desperate affray stoutly maintained a while and yet one that could have but the one end; for Jason's weapon breaking short, left him defenceless, and smitten upon wounded shoulder, he gasped in blinding agony and went down—to be kicked, trampled . . . was dimly aware that Charles was bestriding him, shielding him as best might be; then was a hoarse bellow,—he glimpsed a mighty form in swift action, saw their assailants smitten backward, scattered in flight, and then was staring up into the sweat-streaked, smiling face of Jockabed, heard his breathless voice:

“What pal . . . and is it . . . you? Now here's luck . . . I says!”

“Yes,” answered Jason, stifling a groan, “luck indeed for my friend and me . . . that you should come at such moment . . . is truly marvellous, Jockabed!”

“Well, no, pal, no!” answered the tall Romany, helping Jason afoot. “Tidn't naun so wonderful seeing as how I were a-seekin' for ee like. Eh, but you ketched one on that yere hurted shoulder o' yourn, eh pal?”

“Somewhat, friend. Charles, this is Jockabed, a Romany chal and mighty good friend, as you see.”

“Yes, faith!” cried Charles, dashing blood from scratched cheek. “Mr. Jockabed, here's my hand in gratitude and joy—for I never saw such admirable stick-play! Let me die, Jerry, but he'd have downed them all if they hadn't run.”

“And, Charles lad, they'd have had me—but for you.”

“And both of us, Jeremy, but for friend Jockabed here.”

“Why, sirs,” Jockabed chuckled, wiping moist brow, “'tis j'yful I be to ha' served ye, though all unbeknowest when I basted them varmint, for I never sees plastramengros—keepers and sich, but I clouts 'em hearty—it being nat'ral-like for me so to do.”

“And devil take them,” cried Charles, “they've kicked out our fire and trampled our fishes! And damme, I'm ravenous!”

“Well, we've plenty to eat, lad; get to it whiles Jockabed tends my cursed shoulder at the brook.”

“Is’t so bad, Jerry man?”

“Nay, it could be worse. I shall eat hearty as any when you’ve set forth our supper.” Then down went Jason to the stream and there while he flinched to Jockabed’s rough surgery:

“Good friend,” said he, “remember, if you must name me, I am Jeremy Oaks.”

“Ay, I will, pal. Though I thinks names is best nowise never mentioned.”

Jason’s pain being somewhat eased, back they went, to find Charles seated cross-legged with everything they possessed that was eatable set forth round about him.

Now when their hunger was a little appeased, quoth Charles, viewing this gigantic, soft-spoken Romany with a kindly interest:

“You said, I think, that you were in the forest looking for us; may I ask why?”

“Sir, ’twere arl along on account o’ Passon Tulliver and a lady.”

“’Slife!” exclaimed Charles. “My uncle Robin and Honoria! But how, Jockabed, and why . . . where are they?”

“Home, sir,—or on their road. Y’see, sir, they gets me for to guide ’em to Mistus Beshaley, lookin’ for the two of ee, having heered as you’ve rid off together like. So when us didn’t find ee wi’ Mistus Sinfia Beshaley, then my lady axes of me so pretty for to go find ee out, that—well, yere I be.”

“Why then,” said Charles, thrusting hand into pocket, “you will vastly oblige me and earn this guinea—nay, take it, man, I insist—if you will bear me this message to the lady. Say that I am well, indeed so very well that I shall not return until I must.”

“And I suggest,” said Jason, “you mention also your latest determination, lad.”

“Yes, truly! Say to her, Jockabed, that, choosing poverty rather than blood, I have abandoned my quest. I would have you to remember these words exactly: ‘I have chosen poverty rather than blood.’ ’Tis phrase neat as brief, extremely apt and not to be bettered. You’ll remember this precisely, good fellow?”

“Ay, I will, sir!” answered Jockabed, rising. “But the sooner I be away the better, for I must to Lewes yonder by six o’clock . . . y’see there be soldiers in the town—”

“Soldiers?” repeated Jason, “Now what should bring them thereabouts?”

“’Tis what I be agoing to find out, pal.” So saying the tall Romany nodded his farewell and vanished amid the thickets with hardly a sound to mark his going.

“Yonder goeth right good fellow!” quoth Charles, beginning to gather up the remains of their meal.

“He is!” nodded Jason, as he got wearily to his feet. “But we, lad, we must be away and speedily!”

“Eh? What now, Jerry? You’re never going?”

“This moment, Charles!”

“Ha,—is it the soldiers?”

“Also, ’tis in my mind those other fellows may come back, and I’m in no state to withstand them. So pack, Charles, pack whiles I go saddle Pegasus.” But now as Jason turned, and too hastily, he caught foot in some obstacle, tripped, plunged into a tree and, crying out, fell heavily.

“What, Jerry, art hurt—again?” cried Charles, kneeling above him.

“My . . . shoulder!” gasped Jason. Then, for a while, sharp agony was forgotten in a blessed unconsciousness passing all too soon. . . .

Cool water that solaced him, that lured him back to life and growing sense of pain. . . . A face bent over him. . . . The face of Charles, pale and stern, with eyes that stared down on him beneath drawn brows. . . . A voice stern as this face:

“Are you better?”

“And . . . wet, lad! Zounds! Did I . . . faint, then?”

“And no wonder with that hole in your shoulder!”

“Ay, I . . . fell on it . . . this tree. . . .”

“How are you now?”

“Able enough to . . . go on . . . in little while.”

“No! Come what may, to-night we remain here.”

Brows that scowled even blacker now, lips set grimly, eyes that seemed to menace him so fiercely that Jason sat up, though with painful effort, and propped himself feebly against the tree behind him, the better to peer into this face, for his eyes were dim.

“Charles, what’s . . . your trouble?” he questioned, wondering.

“Nay, take heed lest you shift that bandage, for I’m no surgeon.”

“What ails thee, Charles lad?”

“Ay what? What but yourself!” he cried bitterly, in quick breathless manner. “You, Jason Wayne, for I know you at last! You that have deceived and made such a fool of me, cheating me with your every word and look, winning my . . . my friendship by your damned deceits!”

Lifting feeble hand to his bared throat, Jason fumbled for what should have been there, and feeling it gone, sank back against the tree, frowning in his turn.

“Where is it . . . my letter?”

“Here! I took it off the better to come at your wound.”

“And you . . . read it!”

“No! I confess I . . . looked, but read no more than the superscription, yet this was enough. Here,—take your letter! Now what have you to say, Jason Wayne?”

“That I’m here . . . to be taken at . . . your will. There are soldiers in Lewes . . . as you know.”

“Now be damned for such suggestion!” cried Charles, fiercely indignant. “You are quite aware I have changed my mind!”

“Ay, but . . . you may change it . . . again, and I fain would know and be assured . . . one way or other, for . . . they shall never . . . drag me alive to their . . . butchery!”

“Then be assured. You are safe now as ever you were, nay—safer! For, spite your trickery, you were my friend and as such I must and will protect you. My honour so demands, and I insist upon it, Mr. Wayne.”

“Well . . . now, Sir Charles, pray be . . . so obliging to bring me my pistols, nay . . . one shall suffice! And so . . . farewell!”

“Wayne, what the devil do you mean?”

“That the sooner you are . . . quit of me and my neighbourhood . . . the better for you. So bring me the pistol and begone.”

“The pistol being for yourself, I think,—a final exit for Mr. Wayne, I take it?”

“The last resource, yes. Better such than the . . . ghastly obscenities of a rebel’s end . . . such death as you may share if . . . taken with me! So bring the pistol and go.”

“Leaving you here in the wilderness, sick and well nigh helpless?”

“You leave me, sir, to go my way alone, for the rebel’s way must be a lonely road . . . and very presently, for I am . . . better than I seem.”

“Not I!” quoth Charles, folding his arms with air of finality. “No, sir! Not if you were a dog, Mr. Wayne!”

“Then, Warrender, you’re . . . merest fool!”

“Howbeit, sir, my mind is made up! I am resolved! And being a man of the very sternest resolution—”

“Damn your resolution! Think . . . of your sister!”

“Mr. Wayne, I am, sir. And, knowing what I do, sure am I that ’tis here she would have me—Ha, Jerry man, what now? Jason, lie still,—” But, with effort that racked him, Jason arose and leaning against the tree, turned with such look that Charles recoiled.

“Young . . . fool!” quoth Jason, between teeth clenched in pain, “I want neither you nor your . . . protection! Leave me, sir, leave me to rest here till my strength recover somewhat. Go you now . . . or I must.”

“Nay, Jerry . . . Jason, I know why you would be rid of me, and this but compels me to you the more! I cannot, I will not desert you—”

Jason cursed him savagely, made three faltering paces and would have fallen but that Charles leapt to his support,—to lay him back upon kindly mother earth, so faint and spent, so frightfully pale that now Charles viewed him in panic of helplessness.

“Lord God!” he whispered. “Is this death?”

“’Twould be a . . . crowning mercy!” gasped Jason. “But ’tis not yet, lad!”

“Ah, Jason, ’tis thou art the fool, yet such fool as I am proud to name friend! For indeed thou art my friend and I thine, most truly.”

“Which is well . . . for me, Charles, but for thyself . . . very ill . . . for I am death! So leave me now . . . lest they take thee too, and she . . . Honoria lose her brother for sake . . . of damned Wayne. Fetch me the pistol and go . . . for her sake, man. . . . Take Pegasus and . . . ride!”

“No, Jason, my mind is irrevocably—”

“So is mine, Charles! Besides, in Lewes you’ll get me lint, new bandages, comforting ointments.”

“Why this is true enough, but—”

“As I say, lad, and . . . with a . . . ’poth’cary’s draught to soothe this . . . raging fever.”

“Ay, fool that I am, I never thought of this! Go I will and this moment with all haste. Though, now hearkee, Jason, you will bide here; ’tis understood, you’ll wait me on this spot!”

“I hear thee, Charles lad.” So off strode Charles forthwith where the cob grazed nearby to saddle and bridle him.

“You’re forgetting . . . the pistol!” cried Jason in febrile agitation. “The pistol!”

“No no,” answered Charles, mounting to saddle, “I’m remembering the danger of it.” Jason pleaded humbly, cursed bitterly, commanded fiercely; Charles did no more than view him anxiously, bidding him wait and be patient, and so rode away with what speed he might.

Being alone, Jason sighed fretfully and lay motionless a while to gain strength for what was to be; staring up at the motionless leaves above him tinted by the glow of sunset, a rosy light that shifted, faded and was gone. He heard the distant clock toll seven and now, lying thus in loneliness and pain, watched the shadows creeping about him; and his shoulder a throbbing, burning torment. None the less he struggled to his feet at last, took up the oaken staff, and with this to aid his weakness, set off, making for the denser woods, his failing body upborne and driven on by relentless purpose and indomitable will.

On he went, forcing painful way through the tangled undergrowth,—a man who must be lost. On and forward until his breath grew short and his feet stumbled with a sick weariness; on through deepening shadows that moved upon his fevered sight like haunting, stealthy shapes closing about him with frightful menace; on and yet on until the pulsing agony in his shoulder seemed now in his brain . . . beating . . . beating . . . like the tramp of marching feet. Soldiers! Yes, there were soldiers in the town yonder! Soldiers! They were in the threatening darkness all about him . . . marching . . . marching to drag him to bloody death!

Fevered with pain, faint and sick, but goaded now by his fearful certainty, Jason became yet again the wild and desperate fugitive close pursued by dreadful death—and fled in a blind panic that, for the time, robbed him of sanity, and blotted out all lesser evils. So he fled, heedless of direction, like the wretched fear-maddened creature he was.

Reeling, panting, crashing headlong through brake and briar, he stumbled on until . . . before and around him steel glittered . . . red coats . . . white cross-belts.

And so he stopped at last,—he gasped, he laughed:

“Yes . . . yes . . . I’m Jason Wayne . . . take me . . . for God’s sake take me and . . . be done. . . .”

The soldiers closed in upon him. And presently they bore him away like a dead thing.

CHAPTER XXXIII

OF WHAT BEFELL IN LEWES TOWN

“Oh, Uncle my dear, what—what can it mean?” sighed Honoria, drooping despondent in her saddle. “Three times now we have ridden for news of them to Sinfia Beshaley and not a word, no least sign! And Sinfia and her people know of everything that chances in the forest country, yet they can tell us nothing! Oh, why this dreadful silence, think you?”

“Because, as I judge, child, nothing dreadful is there to tell. Had aught of evil befallen we must have heard ere this, since ill news travels apace. So comfort thee, sweeting! Now as to your Mistress Beshaley, the oftener I meet her the greater is my wonder, for, though Gipsy, yet truly noble woman is she. What know you of her, my dear?”

“That she hath suffered grief. Her poor husband was killed, as I told you,—it was then Mr. Wayne took his wound.”

“Ay, to be sure, I mind me now. Here was sorrow indeed! Yet whoso is made the wiser and more merciful by sorrow and ennobled by adversity, must be truly great of soul. Thus, by God’s merciful Providence, that which seems evil may be made a means to nobler living and ultimate salvation. No tear is ever shed in vain, no grief endured or pain suffered without avail, all are, ay and must be, to the chastening and predestined good of the imperishable soul. . . . And lo, my sweeting, here is Parson Tulliver preaching thee as this saddle were his pulpit!”

“Yet, my dear Reverend Robin and loved uncle, how better shorten weary road than by such? For here is greatly comforting thought—that such hateful evils as pain and sorrow may yet be to our future good. And yet—how, prithee how shall this ever be?”

Now as their horses plodded slowly side by side, the little Parson, folding those mighty hands of his very meekly on the pommel of his saddle, smiled tenderly into the lovely, earnest face beside him and made answer:

“Honoria, my dear, no truly great good thing ever cometh except by pain of body or trouble of mind. In pain we begin this our earthly pilgrimage and in pain doth it end. By pain of mind and body or both we learn life’s many lessons. ’Twas only by pain through the long ages that man hath lifted himself so far above the brutes that he can, sometimes, esteem love,

sympathy and unselfish service for the truest and noblest things in life. So, dear child, my belief is this,—that nobler is he, and stronger in his seeming weakness, who shall courageously suffer harms,—than he that, in his seeming might, inflicteth them. So, in some far distant day, Love shall conquer Hate and Death be lost in glorious Life; for then, ah then,—wise at last by suffering, this undying soul of ours shall be crowned by God’s own perfection. . . . And yonder is Lewes at last, and there will we sup and bide this night.”

Thus, as evening slowly deepened to night, they rode across bridge and up hill into ancient Lewes town and were close upon ‘The White Hart’ Inn when they halted and turned to a vague clamour, an approaching uproar, shouts, hooting cries, pattering footsteps, with the roll and ruffle of a drum and rhythmic tramp.

“Soldiers!” exclaimed Honoria, and caught her breath.

“And with a noisy rabblement, child! Come, let us go in—”

“Nay . . . wait!” she cried. “I must see. . . . Oh wait!”

And thus presently she beheld a motley concourse that hooted and jeered; a glitter of bayonets that hedged in a limping captive, a miserable creature pale as death, bearded, haggard, bedraggled and torn,—yet, in this moment, she knew him. . . . Old Dapple snorted to goad of spur, reared and was away, with clatter of echoing hoofs, to scatter reeling mob and astonished escort, like a whirlwind.

“Jason! Oh . . . my Jason!”

She had leaned down and clasped this poor, hopeless wretch in the mercy of her protecting arms.

“Jason . . . my beloved . . . !” she sobbed, heedless of all else in the world. His hands were fast bound, but now, lifting pallid face, he kissed her.

“Angel . . . of mercy . . . valiant soul . . . loved woman!” he gasped. Then they were torn apart, the soldiers reformed and marched their prisoner away amid a howling throng that hooted and jeered louder than ever; and none to see the tears of her dumb agony save the little Parson and one other that now came striding like the giant he was.

“Jockabed! Oh . . . you saw? So worn and faint . . . his dear face so pale. . . !”

“Ay, lady, but he aren’t nowise dead yet—”

“Ah no, God forbid! We must act, Jockabed! We must plot and scheme to his deliverance!”

“And pray God aid us!” said the little Parson, fervently.

“Ay!” nodded Jockabed. “Us’ll do summat, I rackon, so soon as it be dark. Now come ’long o’ me, Lady and Sir, and I’ll show ye one as ye’ll be main glad for to see.”

“Yes,” sighed Honoria, head bowed in thought, as she turned old Dapple. “Yes . . . this night . . . so soon as it be dark . . . we must act! But . . . how? Ah, Merciful God, let me think . . . teach me how to save him!” And now, as she rode, her quick woman’s brain was so busied with this problem and she so lost to all beside, that Dapple had borne her through shadowy, echoing arch and into the wide stable-yard of this goodly White Hart Inn, and she yet all unheeding until, roused by a well-known voice, she looked up, to see Charles hurrying to meet her.

“Ah—then you know!” said she, quick to see and understand the anxious trouble of his look. “You know they’ve taken Jason Wayne?”

“And I know also,” he answered, reaching up to lift her from the saddle, “I know thou wer’t right, Honoria,—he is gentleman so worthy and so much my friend that I shall win him free or share his—ghastly doom!”

“Oh, my dear!” sighed she, looking down into this resolute young face. “Now I see ’tis my own Charles come back to me, though stronger, hardier now, a very man!” Then, as he lifted her, she ruffled his hair and kissed him fervently, saying: “And I love thy wigless head!”

“Well now,” said he, “let us go indoors and—”

“Nay—first,” she murmured, glancing round about the empty yard and drawing them close, “hearken to me! You are three men devoted and very resolute, I am only a woman, and yet just as determined . . . and . . . I have thought of a plan, a scheme shall succeed, I pray God! Hush now and . . . listen!”

CHAPTER XXXIV

TELLS, AND WITH ADMIRABLE BREVITY, HOW THEY WON JASON TO FREEDOM

In those more primitive days of narrow streets, of thatched roofs and half-timbered houses, no word that human lips might utter carried more dread and instant terror than the scream of 'Fire!' By day it was awful, but, in the pitchy gloom of night, made the darker by few, dim lights, it was a word to inspire panic and a horrified dismay.

It was then to this dreadful summons that the folk of Lewes started up from slumber,—to hear the echoes ringing with this cry of fear; to behold chimney and gable stark and black against an awful glare shot by leaping sparks and tongues of flame.

"Fire! Oh God—the town's afire!"

So came panic,—shouts, cries, bewilderment, with an aimless running to and fro, until cried a voice:

"The soldiers! Let the soldiers help us!"

And cheerily they answered the call, these sons of discipline, who, laying by musket and bayonet, fought now with more homely weapons and with the greater joy to find it nothing deadlier than ricks ablaze.

It was about now that Jason, lying fast bound in the darkness of his prison, heard, first of all, a vague and growing hubbub all about him, and secondly, sounds somewhere in the air above him, and looking thitherward, glimpsed a widening patch of fire-lit sky; something fell to thud nearby, something that dangled . . . swaying. Then in the darkness groping hands found him, quick hands that wrought desperately with his bonds; a panting voice whispered encouragement,—the hands and voice of Charles Warrender. Then Jason was free to rub and chafe at cramped and painful limbs.

"Can you climb, Jason, can you?"

"No . . . not yet."

"You must! The fire did it . . . place is deserted . . . ha, damme that shall hold 'em, yet not for long. Up with you now and climb for your life . . . and mine, damme, and mine!"

Jason rose, stumbling in the darkness; he clutched the rope.

“You first, Charles—”

“No no, curse it! Climb man, climb! Jockabed’s up there to help you—so climb!”

Setting his teeth, Jason made the attempt, groaned and fell back. Charles cursed and swore while, in very passion of haste, he knotted the rope beneath Jason’s powerless arms, then called aloft in harsh whisper:

“Oh, Jockabed, pull, man! He’s helpless . . . you must pull him out o’ this, so—ha, damme—pull!” And Jockabed, perched aloft, bowed mighty shoulders, gripped with powerful hands and hove amain. . . . Jason felt himself dragged up from his feet, higher, higher yet, with jerks that racked him with agony; he closed his eyes in dizzy sickness . . . when he opened them he was in the air, supported by a great arm, and Jockabed’s gusty whisper in his ear.

“I be a-goin’ for to let ee down, pal, and when you’m down, lay close, lay quiet and don’t ee move! Now!”

He was aswing in a red dimness shot with fire . . . he was sinking down and down into a world of stir and vague clamour . . . he was lying amid dewy grass, outstretched on kindly mother earth whence came wondrous comfort with new life and growing strength . . . he was up and moving between Charles and Jockabed, their arms about him . . . he was running, with legs that began to feel more like his own . . . down a narrow, precipitous lane . . . between dim houses.

“How . . . are you?” panted Charles.

“Well . . . enough!” he gasped, stumbling weakly.

“Another hundred yards or so . . . can’t do it, Jason?”

“I . . . will!”

He was down again, breathless, in a spicy gloom that he knew must mean stables, and in a blessedness of ease; but hands plucked at him, strong arms lifted, hove him astride a horse. Instinctively his hands found the reins, his feet the stirrups . . . he was out in a red glow . . . he glimpsed a rising moon . . . he was riding at a walk, an amble, a trot.

“How are you now?”

“Very well . . . Charles.”

“Then spur . . . gallop, for, stretch me bleeding, but we’ve done it! We’re away! Ride, Jason, ride!”

And after some while of painful going, he glanced back and saw lights that winked faintly in the night behind them, the lights of Lewes town that danced wildly even as he looked and so—vanished upon his swooning vision.

CHAPTER XXXV

TELLS HOW JASON DESPAIRED AND WHEREFORE

Waking to sense of luxurious comfort, Jason gazed sleepily beyond silken bed-hangings, then, startled from drowsiness, propped himself on an elbow to gaze, somewhat apprehensively, at the small though extremely dignified personage who sat by the open lattice, plying needle so industriously.

“Zounds!” he murmured.

The needle was instantly arrested.

“Sir!” said the personage, viewing him very kindly, “you uttered word, I think?”

“Yes, madam,” he answered, his apprehension growing as he glanced about this dainty chamber. “Pray, where am I?”

“I trust, sir, your bodily anguishment is something abated?”

“Thank you, I am very well, and—”

“Nay, sir, this were out o’ nature,—no poor, human creature may be anyways well with such dreadful, great, grisly gash, and so inflamed, in’s shoulder. My senses swam at mere sight on’t and Honoria wept—”

“Hon-oria—!” he exclaimed.

“Indeed, sir. We dressed and did our best for’t, she and I, until came Doctor Rumbold, and yourself like a dead man these two days—”

“Two—days?” gasped Jason. “Pray, madam, where am I?”

“Sir, you are ’neath the roof and protection of our most excellent gentleman and divine, the Reverend Robert Tulliver—”

“Now, God forbid—”

“Sir!! You are also habited in the Reverend Robin’s own night-rail, your person disposed in the child Honoria’s own bed, and there you will bide until—”

“No!” cried Jason, wildly. “This must not—this shall not be! Where are my clothes? I must up and away this instant!”

“Oh quite, quite impossible, sir! Dearie me—no, not to be thought on, nor yet even faintly imagined! You are a poor, languishing invalid—”

“I am quite strong enough to straddle a horse. My clothes, pray bring them. . . . I must ride at once.”

“Hoity-toity! Hush thee now! There, there—be calm—”

“Calm?” cried Jason, glaring fearfully about him. “Woman, I am death! I am destruction! Go I must . . . and will! My clothes, I say, bring me my clothes!”

“Dear! Dear!” murmured Mrs. Hannah, rising. “This is the fever again!”

“No, this is sanity! I must be gone lest I bring ruin on this house. So fetch me my clothes, I beg!”

“Nay, now compose yourself, I plead—”

“Then by my soul,” cried Jason, desperately, “I’ll go seek them—” And out of bed came a very muscular and somewhat hairy leg, glimpsing which, Mrs. Hannah uttered a faint and extremely decorous scream; then, drawing up her small person with the utmost determination, she crossed her arms.

“Attempt it, sir,” quoth she, nodding small, neat head at him, “and though you afflict my sight in fashion so unseemly, yet shall I withstand you. I shall cling you, clasp you, screaming for aid, screeching my best until—Oh my merciful Providence, here’s the child!”

Back went Jason’s leg at sound of feminine draperies beyond the opening door and he cowered, instinctive; then he closed his eyes as if dazzled, he opened them to look, and look in wondering joy, to gaze in a very rapture,—for ‘the child’ was a gracious, lovely shape in petticoats.

“Honor!?” he breathed, gazing up at her great-eyed while she looked down on him, and both, for a while, quite speechless in a joy that went beyond all words.

And because his brown hands showed so tremulous, and all words thus beyond him, she loved him but the more; and because her smooth cheek flushed to the adoration of his eyes, he thought her only the more lovely.

Then this speechless, yet most eloquent communion, was broken by Mrs. Hannah’s incisive tones:

“Beware, child! Our poor sufferer was raving for ’s garments—in a fever and clambering out o’ bed at me—to go seek them! Shall I call our Reverend? Summon the Sergeant, shall I?”

“No, Hannah. Bid Uncle Robin to us when I ring.”

Being alone together, they were still silent, only she reached gentle hand to touch the dark head upon its pillows, this uncropped hair that showed gleams of silver here and there above these pale, careworn features.

“Ah, Jason,” she sighed, at last, “my dear, how you have suffered!”

“And yet,” he answered, drawing this gentle hand to his kisses, “joy such as this is sweeter therefor, and outpayeth all. But ’tis a joy must soon pass . . . such happiness cannot endure. For now, my Honoria, because I love you with my every breath, every thought and part of me, I must begone lest I bring desolation upon this house. I must leave thee, for my way can never be thine.”

“But it is and shall be,” she murmured, “though it lead to exile, prison or death,—thy way shall be mine, Jason. I’ll follow thee to the end, and if thou must die I pray God take me too.”

Now when he tried to answer he could not for a while, and the hands he kissed were wet with his tears.

“Honoria,” said he, at last, “such love is too glorious for this poor world, and thus I know it can never be. Yet by thy valiant love I am the bolder to meet all that must be with mind serene and undismayed—like my valiant father . . . and alone, beloved,—alone!”

“Nay, my Jason, it is—too late.”

“How . . .” he cried, tightening his arms about her, “how too late? Tell me.”

“My dear,” she answered, smiling down into his anxious face, “ever since we bore you here, more dead than living, this house has been watched —” His arms fell from her and he sank back, staring up at her with eyes of horror.

“So then,” cried he, brokenly, “thus have I . . . brought shame and destruction on you all! Ha—God why did I not die first? Oh accursed me!” And turning, he hid contorted face in the pillow, writhing in anguish.

“Jason!” she pleaded, touching this abased head. “Oh my dear love—”

“No!” he groaned. “No, I am your ruin! I am to be the brutal destruction of you all! Oh, God, why did I live for this?”

But presently, as Jason lay thus in torment, he felt a hand upon his restless head, a strong hand though very gentle.

“Mr. Wayne,” said the little Parson, “Jason . . . my son, in such time as this we have no resource save belief in the eternal, infinite mercy of God and the little of God that is within ourselves. So now believe this: that whatsoever comes, be it good or a seeming evil, is of God and, howsoever hard to bear, is and must be to our eventual good, since God is good and we his children, everyone, to thus learn perfection and win to glory of Life—though it be by a crown of thorns and cross of agony. So be comforted, my son, nor blame thyself for what may be, since it cometh by God His will.”

“But . . . prison!” gasped Jason. “Shame . . . death belike . . . for you and Charles and . . . Oh . . . Honoria. Ha—don’t you remember? There was Lady Lisle in the West Country, beheaded for much . . . much less than you have done for me . . . you remember?”

“Ay indeed, ’twas in Monmouth’s time. But how many such innocents have endured shame and death in the body, even as Christ Himself, to their everlasting glory . . . this part of us that can never die? So grieve not for us, my son, let us see in adversity, in pain—yea, in death itself the very face of God.”

“Ah, sir,” groaned Jason, looking up into the placid features above him, “so thought these noble martyrs . . . but I pray God you may not so end . . . and by reason of me.”

“Nay, son, by reason of God’s Providence. ’Tis by His will we live or die . . . and beneath us are the everlasting arms of His mercy—”

Here was a soft rapping on the door and in came Charles booted and dusty from the road and on tiptoe, but, seeing Jason sitting up in bed, he came striding glad-eyed, both hands outstretched.

“Now, damme—ha, your pardon, Uncle! What I mean is—I’m rejoiced to see thee so well recovered, Jason. And stretch me blee—no! I’m just in from Alfriston and full o’ news. First of all the soldiers are seeking you high and low, Jason, and quite vainly, by reason of false informations, for, you being Sussex bred and born and no bare-legged, wild Scot, Sussex is your friend, and Sussex folk will shelter you by word and deed. Then, coming to ‘The Star,’ I learned that, a week or so since, Dartry quarrelled with Will Rokeby and they fell to it then and there, with the result that poor Rokeby was left on the floor and Dartry comes riding hither, Lord knoweth why, where you, Uncle Rob, showed him some of your sword-magic. So back he goes, and finding Rokeby nigh death, sends for surgeons and so forth and sets himself to undo his murderous work, with the result that I found Rokeby

pretty well again, though weak, to be sure, and in bed with Dartry attendant . . . and, Jason, they know you are here with us—”

“Oh, merciful heaven!” gasped Honoria.

“Nay but,” continued Charles, “they were both mighty civil, and bade me assure you, Jason, how they are and will be your good friends—for certain considerations you wot of—”

“Ay, I do!” nodded Jason.

“Regarding which same, Dartry will see you here this afternoon at three o’ the clock!”

“Why, then,” said Jason, smiling into Honoria’s anxious eyes, “it is high time I was up and dressed.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

IN WHICH THIS NARRATIVE DRAWS TO ITS CONCLUSION

Propped by cushions, and quite needlessly according to himself, Jason was sitting beneath a certain gnarled, old apple tree and with Honoria very close beside him.

The sunny garden lay around them hushed and peaceful as usual, birds chirped as drowsily, butterflies hovered, the warm slumberous air was sweet with flowery fragrance,—all indeed was just as usual on such day, and yet, for these two, here was very paradise, since here was such deep content and unspeakable happiness as might never be again; here for them was brief respite, a blessed season of calm ere broke the furious tempest that might sweep them away.

And Honoria feeling and knowing this, and Jason being very sure of it, they were silent in their present happiness, and when at last Jason spoke, it was with a forced cheeriness she thought pathetic.

“Ah, Tom, my Tommy lad, to-day is the first time I ever saw thee in petticoats, and they so grace thy beauty, Tom, that Honoria is but the lovelier!”

“And thine, Jason, for ever and ever!”

“And there’s the abiding wonder!” he sighed. “So now you are beginning to suspect, madam, though extreme vaguely to be sure,—that I love you, Honoria?”

“Yes, Jason.”

“That in all this beautiful world there can be no other woman for Jason Wayne because, besides loving, he honours and worships thee for thy valiant soul and this beauteous body and ever must. You begin to be something conscious of this, my lady?”

“Yes, my Jason.”

“Then, bearing all this in mind, woman, and also that I asked but once and was then refused . . . Honoria, beloved, will you . . . kiss me . . . now?”

“Yes . . . yes, my dear one,” she whispered. “Oh, my own, silly man I’ve been . . . yearning . . . dying to . . . ever since!”

She swayed to him, and yielding to his arm which, though only one, was sufficiently compelling and masterful, she sank upon his knees and, cradled thus upon his breast, met his kiss with such sweet passion that thereafter she hid her face against him, sighing:

“There, oh there, my Jason, see now and know . . . how I do love thee!”

It was now that Sergeant Joshua was heard speaking behind the hedge, but unexpectedly near, and though his words were sufficiently respectful in themselves, his tone was decidedly grim and menacing.

“Mr. Dartry—sir! If you’ m here again minded for a little sword-play, sir, my master, the Reverend Tulliver—or me myself, sir, myself—shall be oncommon glad to obleege, yes, sir, oncommon! And, sir—you are ’umbly re-requested to keep that animile o’ yourn from trampling our turf. You are so requested sir, very meek, very mild, but very firm, sir—firm!”

Mr. Dartry’s answer, though as mild, was no less firm.

“Do not scowl, my good fellow, go you instead and desire Mr. Wayne to grant me speech with him. Nay, attempt no idle prevarication, the gentleman is here, I know. As for my horse, he shall remain in the lane with my man.”

With murmurous kiss Honoria vanished, then Jason rose as his visitor came strolling towards him, a shape of languid elegance. Mr. Dartry returned Jason’s bow with ceremony.

“Mr. Wayne,” said he, “I rejoice to see you well, and beg to congratulate you on yet another escape; it made no little stir and the soldiery, sir, are still seeking you. Let the fact that your so blissful retirement remains untroubled proclaim my good will towards you, and ardent wish for your safety.”

“On a condition, of course!” retorted Jason, motioning his visitor to be seated.

“Naturally, Mr. Wayne,—*quid pro quo*.”

“Failing which condition, sir?”

“Alas,” sighed Mr. Dartry, seating and arranging himself with a studied grace, “in such event I grieve to think your chaste seclusion here must be rudely and most unhappily broke in upon! Even should you yet again evade capture by instant flight, you leave this unfortunate household—these unhappy folk—to be taken in your stead as harbourers of the King’s enemy and aiders and abettors in his escape. You behold the situation, sir?”

“So clearly,” answered Jason, reaching the wallet from his breast, “that you shall have all you demand of me to purchase of you the well-being of these my friends.”

“Also the life of Jason Wayne, surely, sir?”

Jason merely scowled.

“Howbeit,” he continued, “I am willing to put you in the way of finding this treasure on your assurance that this household shall be nowise troubled hereafter by reason of me.”

“Mr. Wayne, I swear this upon my honour!”

Jason paused in the act of opening the wallet, to look at the speaker and, as their glances met, into Mr. Dartry’s pale cheek crept a tinge of colour.

“Mr. . . . Wayne,” said he, almost stammering, “I . . . swear this upon my soul . . . my very life!”

“Yes,” nodded Jason, his eyes yet intent, “but you had a mother,—swear now on her honour and the sacred memory of the love she bore you in kinder days!”

Mr. Dartry’s keen gaze shifted to the grass underfoot, to the sunny peaceful garden, up to the cloudless heaven; Mr. Dartry fumbled off his hat, not at all gracefully, and, looking back into Jason’s sombre eyes, he answered in voice hushed now and very solemn:

“Sir, I swear by my mother, and she is . . . my most sacred memory.”

“Then,” said Jason, opening the wallet, “this treasure is now for your discovering. For I ask you to believe that I know no more of its hiding place than yourself,—all I have learned concerning it is set down in this letter. . . . You believe me, I hope?”

“Mr. Wayne, I . . . hope I do.”

“This letter was writ to me by my father from his prison cell immediately before execution. Take it, sir, read it for yourself, but handle it tenderly for it is naturally very precious to me.” So Mr. Dartry took the letter, reading it through very carefully, word by word; and when he had finished, sat motionless some while, staring before him with half-closed eyes; when he moved it was to bare his head again and rising, he stood with hat in one hand, the letter yet open in the other.

“You,” said he, “you were blessed in a noble father . . . I was cursed with brute beast, a monster I tried to kill . . . and I a boy! But you, Mr. Wayne, as

son of such father, are man I must needs believe and cannot but trust. . . . I see there are certain directions here for the discovery of the other paper, which, by your leave, I will copy into my tablets.”

“Do so!” answered Jason. “Pray sit beside me and I’ll show you—though the directions are not very cryptic, how should they be, written as they were in such haste and stress of mind? The lines run thus, I mind:

’Bove thy head at stricken hind
Eke in dolphin hid.
All ye seek ye here shall find
Merest crack amid.

“The first letter of each line, as you see, forms an acrostic that reads: B.E.A.M. The ‘Stricken Hind’ I guess for some inn or tavern on the North Road, the Dolphin a chamber of this inn, and the paper you seek should lie hid in crack of some beam in this room.”

“Yes,” nodded Mr. Dartry, “all this should be sufficiently plain.” Then, folding the letter with as much reverent care as Jason himself might have done, he returned it and, leaning back in his chair, gazed up and away across the high, sunlit Down with haggard, musing eyes.

“Mr. Wayne,” said he, suddenly, “we are all, as it seems to me, waifs of the wind, children of Circumstance, driven souls going each his solitary way whether he will or no . . . up or down . . . giving evil for evil and, sometimes, good for good. And some of us have met with very little of good. . . . So, like leaves we are borne on—out of the unknown into an unknown . . . to be lost and soon forgotten quite!” Speaking, he arose and stood looking down on Jason and fumbling with his hat while Jason sat looking up at him.

“Mr. Wayne, we are never like to meet again . . . you have felt scorn for me and I contempt for you in a very evil world . . . yet now, oddly enough, I would have you think the best of me you may. . . . I would have you believe that I wish you well . . . and because of your noble father and the sweet memory of . . . my own, loved mother, I’d have you . . . take my hand . . . if you will.”

Then Jason smiled and stood up.

“Sir,” said he, as their hands met and clasped each other, “should you ever discover this treasure of a dead cause and lost men, I hope it may bring you happiness and some good to others. And, Mr. Dartry, I am glad to take your hand in this hour of better understanding, and to think you my friend,

even for this so brief space, because 'tis more than possible I shall be adventuring forth into that Great Unknown you mentioned . . . and very presently."

"How, sir? Wayne . . . what do you mean?"

"Death, sir! For 'twixt you and me, I am leaving these good friends suddenly, and to put them beyond all possibility of future harms, I shall deliver myself up for the rebel I was. This is determination known only to yourself, therefore pray let it be secret betwixt us. And so . . . Good-bye!"

For a long moment Mr. Dartry was silent, then his words were low and hurried.

"Jason Wayne, my mother believed in a God and now . . . I would beseech her God to give you life . . . a safe and speedy deliverance. . . ." Then he turned hastily and went away through this sunny garden, his modish languor quite forgotten. . . .

Jason was still seated beneath the apple tree, and very thoughtful, when spurs jingled and young Charles came striding, a petulant youth and extremely woebegone.

"Oh, Jason," he exclaimed, dropping hat and whip on the grass and himself into the vacant chair. "Oh, Jason man, 'tis very cursed world, a doghole, damme!"

"Why so, lad?"

"Because love's a plague, a pest! Woman's inconstant as the wind, and she I love loves another! So am I the sorriest dog that ever howled! Look on me, Jason, look and behold a desolate, broken-hearted wretch! . . . And he, let me die, a—scaly fisherman!"

"Who, Charles?"

"My rival. 'Tis none other than Nick Saul, of East Bourne village yonder! Was bootboy here none so long since, stole apples with me as a boy and now . . . Oh, damme . . . my successful rival!"

"You mean he's to wed Cecily Ortis?"

"What,—then you know her, Jason?"

"I'm acquainted with her father—"

"A smuggling rascal . . . and broke my head—"

"Ay, Charles, I remember."

“Do you, by heavens?”

“Oh yes, ’twas then we met, as you may remember?”

“So, that was the how of it? Ah but . . . how I loved her, worshipped her, Jason, to perfect distraction . . . and do yet! And she . . . ha, confusion . . . to wed Nick Saul! Told me so with her own sweet lips! So I, Jason, I am passed over, given the go-by, damme, for a mere fisherman! Let me perish, but I can scarce credit it yet! Stretch me in blood but it passes all belief! So here’s perfectly damnable coil, Jason! What’s a poor gentleman to do?”

“Act like one, Charles! Bestow on them your blessing and a worthy marriage present.”

“Why as to—hush, Jason man, not a word o’ this,—yonder cometh Honoria! So must I hide bleeding heart—” But now came Honoria to take them each by an arm and lead them in to the evening meal.

CHAPTER XXXVII

JOURNEY'S END . . .

The tall, old grandfather clock downstairs had chimed the hour of midnight when Jason cautiously opened his bedroom door and, with riding-boots beneath his arm, crept furtively down the wide, dim stair. Thus, moving with extremest care, he reached the front door at last and was fumbling awkwardly for bolt and chain when he started to a whisper in the darkness close by:

“Suffer me, my dear one.”

“Honorias?” he gasped.

“I’ve been waiting for you, my Jason.” So saying, she opened the door for him very silently and they stepped out into a night of dewy sweetness and radiant with a full, late-rising moon; and thus he saw she was habited for riding.

“So you . . . guessed?”

“No, I listened and heard you tell Mr. Dartry you mean to give yourself up and why. Nor will I plead or seek to stay you since I know ’twould be vain. So, because I love you, Jason, I go with you. . . . Our horses are ready saddled.”

“Honorias,” said he, drawing her near, “it is because I love you more than life that I go.”

“Yes,” she sighed, hiding her face against him and shivering in his embrace. “I do know this. And so you find me ready to go beside you, my dearest, to share so much of your peril as I may—”

“No—no!” cried he harshly. “This you shall not! Mine must be the lonely road.”

“And mine also, Jason. So will I be one with you in this loneliness, and follow this road beside you though it lead to death. For, Jason, if you are to die . . . indeed I cannot live.”

Now as he clasped her closer yet in very ecstasy of grief, they heard a step nearby and beheld the Reverend Robin standing in the open doorway.

“So, Jason,” said he, gently, “thou’rt determined to yield thyself up—ay, I heard but now, I was listening,—to lay down thy life, and the joy of it, for sake of thy friends . . . this is the way of a man, and such as is truly son of God. So now, dear my children, let us pray!”

And there on the threshold of his home the little Parson knelt, and they with him, and the moon very bright upon them; then lifting his face to this glory, Parson Robin prayed:

“Almighty God and tender Father of us all, I, thy most humble servant, beseech thy mercy on this poor, troubled world, and thy blessing upon thy earthly children every one,—but in especial upon this man Jason, this strong son of Thine that goeth to front peril of death that others may be delivered. And we pray not for his life so much as that Thy love may enfold him, Thy power strengthen him to abide Thy will whatsoever it be, so that, now or hereafter, he shall win to thy everlasting glory. Amen! . . . And now, Jason,” said he, as they rose, “since no need is there for any haste, come in and eat the meal loving hands have prepared thee, for good food is a notable solace, and begetteth a comfortable philosophy the hungry may not compass.”

So indoors they went, and very silently, but were scarcely seated at table than the door Honoria had closed so cautiously, swung wide and Charles appeared, scantily clad but armed for desperate strife, his naked sword in one hand, a pistol in the other.

“Eh? What’s here?” he exclaimed, blinking in the candlelight. “Past midnight—and eating? Well, stretch me—”

“Hush, boy!” murmured Parson Robin. “Put away those things and join our feast which is, in truest sense, a holy sacrament ere our Jason rides away to submit himself to the King’s mercy.”

“No!” cried Charles. “No! The King had no mercy on Lord Derwentwater and others! This is madness . . . ’tis sheerest folly and must not . . . shall not be!”

“Howbeit, I go!” said Jason, softly yet with lean visage very grimly determined.

“Then, by Heavens!” quoth Charles, “I’ll be mad and fool likewise, for I’ll go with thee, Jason!”

“No, Charles, I ride alone! I’ll suffer none to go with me, let this be understood,—and finally,—no one! He that rebels ’gainst King or Circumstance must needs be solitary and rides the lonely road—”

“But, Jerry, Oh, Jason, this is death! Ah, and such frightful death . . . ha, God—”

“God indeed!” repeated Parson Robin, reverently, “Ay, call on Him, Charles lad, for He is our present hope, our comfort and future salvation. And I dare to think He is very near to us now, and that when Jason rides forth, God’s holy angels will be all about him, a great and glorious company. So put away all grief and fearful imaginings and trust to the Lord His abounding mercy.”

Now as Charles stood, dismayed beyond words, Honoria went and kissed his troubled face, she took his weapons, laid them by and brought him to the table.

“Ah, my dears,” said she, looking round upon them radiant eyed, “I think never again shall be such night as this, and surely never for me, because, though none of you guessed it, this feast that is sacrament is also my marriage feast, this night, my wedding night. Uncle Robin, you shall wed us, here and now, you shall give me to Jason and Jason to me in God’s holy sight, making us one. So, when Jason rides away he shall ride alone, being but one, yet part of that one—his own loving wife. How say you, my Jason?”

“Nay,” he answered, brokenly, “nay but . . . but should Fate . . . widow thee . . . Oh, my dear one—!”

“Dost love me, Jason?”

“Body and soul!”

“And what say you, my Charles?”

“I say . . . yes,—yes and with all my heart!”

“And thou, dear, loved Uncle Robin? May it . . . can it be?” The little Parson looked from her gentle loveliness to Jason’s adoring eyes and bowed his head. . . .

“It . . . shall!” he answered, at last.

So it was done, and for lack of ring, Jason used one of Honoria’s own. . . . And presently they came forth together into the fragrant garden and the deep, solemn hush of this midsummer night, walking hand-in-hand, and both very silent. But presently they paused and turned to behold each other in the pallid radiance of the moon.

“Oh, Jason!” she whispered, and clung to him as in sudden terror. “Oh, my husband! Life . . . might have been . . . so glorious—”

Now when he tried to speak he could not, only he looked down at her pale, woeful face all misted by an agony of tears.

“Ah, my love,” she whispered, brokenly. “I do . . . yes I do believe . . . in God’s mercy! And yet now . . . Oh now I seem all cold with fearful dread that our love is . . . maybe . . . too great for this little world, and so . . . we are not meant to know it fully . . . in this life.”

Still he was dumb, holding her the closer until it seemed they could hear the painful throbbing of each other’s heart. But this was a throbbing that grew and grew upon the all-pervading stillness, a fevered pulse becoming ever louder upon the night’s deep quietude . . . louder . . . to the rhythmic drumming of a horse’s hoofs.

“Oh—what is it?” she gasped. “Ah God—they are coming to take thee, my love . . . thou’rt betrayed!”

Rigid they stood, clasped together, listening to these relentless, oncoming hoofs that were now trampling in the lane,—they were at the gate,—they were thudding across the lawn with a harsh voice that cried:

“House—ho!”

Then before them was a snorting, foam-spattered horse and Mr. Dartry’s face pallid in the moonlight.

“News!” he cried, rather breathlessly. “News . . . for you, Jason Wayne . . . news late from London! A royal Proclamation! A general pardon for all concerned in the late Rebellion! See, I’ve brought you the printed bill of it . . . read, read it for yourselves!”

It was read and re-read; it was passed from hand to hand, for the household was astir.

An inarticulate Charles was grasping Francis Dartry’s hand; Parson Robin stood mute, reverent head bowed above sinewy fingers clasped in fervent gratitude; and remote in shadow of the gnarled, old apple tree, were two silent ones who gazed upon each other in an ecstasy of sudden joy.

“Life . . . oh, life!” whispered Honoria.

“Thou and . . . love!” murmured Jason.

Thus stood they, conscious only of each other, of a new life, the promise of a golden future and a present tremulous happiness that awed them.

“What, Tom . . . ha, Tommy lad! Oh, beloved Honoria! . . . See, they wait us yonder! So . . . lady wife . . . ha, Mistress Wayne, go now with . . . thy loving husband. . . .”

“To the end!” she sighed. “And for ever, my Jason!”

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Some pages of advertising from the publisher were excluded from the ebook edition.

[The end of *The Lonely Road* by John Jeffery Farnol]