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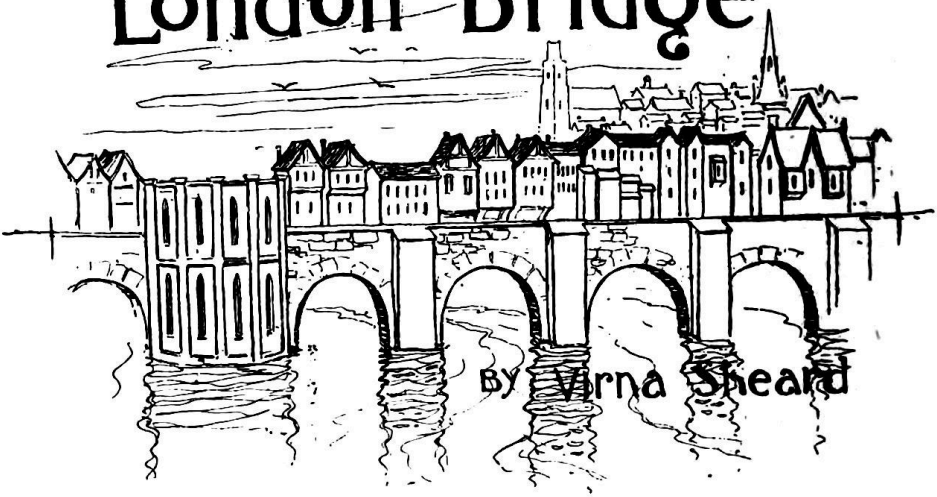
A Lily of London Bridge



By Virna Sheard

PART I.

THE tollhouse at the northern tower of London bridge was warped and rickety. Its gabled roof, red with rust, curled up at the eaves like the sides of a bishop's hat and the whole place leaned far over the river, seeming, indeed, to keep from falling more by some "power of adhesion than stability of construction."

Those were the days of the old bridge. Afterwards Elizabeth restored it with much splendour, but at this time the narrow arches were crumbling and the foundations crazy with age. Still the people loved it well for all it had seen of England's past.

"If the bridge has a fault," said some wag of the time, "it is its irritating habit of falling down in places." Yet well had it stood out against the siege of time, and many a generation had it seen vanish as the river mists of early morning.

Many a king returning home from war had crossed it in triumphant state to the music of jingling spurs and linked armour; many a queen had been carried over the dark arches in silken-lined litter, and with her "bright-clothed ladies bearing her company."

Sombre funerals had passed across it in slow procession. Many a grim fight had stained the flooring red. Ay, and there had been jousts fought there for love of glory alone, when the towers had their turrets plumed with banners and gay gentlemen rode beneath.

All these things the place knew, and many were its burdens—most gruesome of all the ghastly heads of traitors. These terrible trophies were still spiked upon the great Southwark gate, and were lit up in horrible brilliancy at night, when the flaming links fluttering in the river wind threw weird shadows over their staring faces.

Richard Davenport, toll-taker at the north tower, was known far and wide in the days of his youth for his handsome face and also for being a most rare villain. Thrice had he languished in the pillory, once barely missed flogging at the tail of a cart, and later for highway robberies he was sentenced with three others to be hung on Tyburn Hill.

Having sown the wind, and hearing in his ears the oncoming rush of the whirlwind, he vowed to Heaven that if one more chance be granted him he would live peaceably to his life's end. Whether these prayers made in terror

reached Heaven, or the Prince of Darkness looked after his own, fortune certainly turned her wheel and meted out long life to a man who seemed to stand on the edge of eternity.

For while he awaited execution Queen Mary died, and Elizabeth came to the throne. Furthermore, the time set apart for coronation fell upon the very day that Davenport and his companions were to make their unhappy exit.

Now, her Majesty was not minded that her reign should be ushered in by bloodshed, and graciously pardoned all criminals (not guilty of murder) who were condemned to suffer death on that auspicious day. She was also pleased to bestow the papers of liberation with her own fair hands. And when this prisoner, Richard Davenport, came into the royal presence with his fine, melancholy, face and appealing blue eyes, the Queen's heart melted with pity, and she turned quickly to her attendants saying that here some error of justice must surely have taken place, for if an evil spirit dwelt in so fair a body it was for the first time. Furthermore, as the youth seemed quite broken-hearted, she desired Lord Burleigh to bestow a purse of five golden rose-nobles upon him that he might begin life anew.

Following this the prisoners were disbanded, Davenport bowing himself away in graceful humility, and the nine others, who had no straight features or appealing eyes of azure, in a miserable, shambling bunch, making for the open, frantically, lest by some trick they be overtaken and condemned afresh.

Still more, the Queen bore this lucky scapegrace in mind and desired to have him become a good citizen. Therefore he was given the post of toll-taker on London bridge—a minor position in the gift of the crown. But though Richard Davenport found the earth firm beneath him instead of the distressful opposite, his nature was unchanged, and he lived a peaceable life only for policy's sake.

Within a year he married a pretty, timid country lass who knew nothing of his past. Gentle was she and sweet as one of her own garden roses, and the rushing of life over the bridge wore her heart away. She grew white and transparent as a spirit, then died, leaving one child—a girl beautiful beyond words, and blessed, as it seemed, with a high courage, for she feared neither the turmoil of the place nor the fierce and dominating temper of her father. And the little daughter of Davenport was well acquainted with all the haunting sights and sounds of the bridge, for since her starry eyes first opened upon this changeful world these things had been constantly before them—an ever altering panorama.

After her mother died, the man, tiring of the care of the child, sent her daily to a convent, where she learned out of books both French and Latin,

and where her tiny fingers caught the cunning art of tambour embroidery. But when Joyce grew old enough to take charge of the house her father bade her stay at home, and, save for Silas Sloper, a one-legged old sailor who did odd work about the place, the two lived quite alone in the tollhouse.

It was damp and dark and filled with the scent of mouldy wine barrels, for there was a tavern next, a rendezvous for sailors and watermen where a thriving business was done by one Jock Ferrier in old Burgundy and a certain hot wine of Spain.

DRAWN BY F. H. BRIGDEN.

"Came into the Royal presence with his handsome face and appealing blue eyes."

Joyce Davenport was used to the sound of drunken revelries and carousing, yet she grew up as clear of soul and white as one of the little lilies that blossom in the deep marshes where the river widens out, and her face was the one bright, pure thing the sun saw when he looked into the latticed windows of the old tollhouse. She was of a sunny nature and very gentle, yet with this gentleness was strangely blended an unbending will. There were times when the man wondered why he dare go but certain distance of demand with her, for though he had broken the spirit of his wife, this little maid of his had power to make him quail by simply looking at him in her still and tranquil way. And therefore she made a quiet place for herself in the heart of tumult.

Through the noisy hours of the day the toll-taker was busy and watchful lest some keen and money-saving driver pass by without tendering the city's lawful coin. Then he paid small heed to the comings and goings of his daughter, and she might trip in and out as she would. Provided only that his dinner be set to his liking, and she make no delay over it, he asked nothing further. But at eventide when traffic grew less, after the bell of St. Claves had tolled six times, and the river turned rose colour in the west, when the diamond panes in the windows and shops of the bridge-houses showed like cut brilliants, golden and fiery till they dazzled the eye, then did her father turn the key in the door, and the little maid was locked in, like a jewel in a rusty casket.

Then too came the one-legged sailor and watched the gate through the long evening, leaving Davenport free to follow his own wild fancies. Generally these led him to those places amongst the lowest river streets, where cock-fighting, bear-baiting and such pastimes were interlarded with much drinking of cheap wines, and chance games.

The girl would throw open the windows that swung back like tiny doors, and leaning out, talk softly to Silas. He was slow of speech this old sailor man and not over-wise, yet of an honest heart and of enough shrewdness withal to let no rider go by without handing down his silver penny. It was his greatest pride to be left in charge of the tollhouse and the little lass, and he was much like a gray old watchdog who, while seeming to sleep, hears each smallest sound.

In idle moments Silas told tales of the sea, when sailing was a different matter from what we know it to-day, and it grew to be the dearest delight of his simple soul to watch the lovely face at the casement grow bright with interest as he spun his yarn out from one thrilling climax to another. Often afterwards would that poor head of his ache sorely, for the resources of his brain were not great and those flights of fancy exhausted all its strength. Just

where truth ended and exaggeration began he did not stop to ask himself; sufficient was it for Silas to see the blue eyes of his young mistress wide with astonishment, and to hear her sweet voice tremble with anxiety as she plead to know more of some hardy hero or reckless adventurer.

As time passed she grew tall and passing fair; then there came a day when Richard Davenport suddenly awoke to the fact of her marvellous beauty and all it might mean to him.

Joyce had come to the doorway to call him to his mid-day meal; and standing, framed thus in the rough wood, the room dark behind her, she made a picture rare and not to be forgotten. Her hair, which was of a flaxen that seemed touched with silver, waved about her head so light and soft that each breath ruffled it. The delicate brows and curling lashes of her eyes, in strange contrast, were dark as a Spaniard's; and the eyes themselves blue like the hyacinth flowers that grew on the river bank far away from the city. The cupid's bow of her mouth was red and sweet, whilst her face had all the spring-like colouring of an apple blossom.

The russet gown she wore fell open at the throat, and her father saw the warm whiteness of it and the exquisite curves of her rounded arms, for the sleeves were rolled high.

He gave a low exclamation and drew his hand across his eyes as though dazzled.

"What is't father?" the girl asked. "Art not well?"

"Ay—well enough, lass," he returned half-roughly, following her into the room; "the sun was in my eyes—an' hark'e! keep thee close to the house in future. I will na have thee wandering past the shops, nor to Southwark neither! Dost heed me?"

DRAWN BY F. H. BRIGDEN.

JOYCE AT THE CONVENT.

"I hear thee, father," Joyce replied gently, cutting the wheaten loaf. "But it seemeth a strange command. Thou didst ever let me go as I wished, so I returned by sundown; an' I wandered far, far from the town, sometimes just following the river. Hast not seen the marsh marigolds and brown-eyed Susys I have brought back oftentimes? Yes, an' I went all the road to

Greenwich last March for the first pussywillows. Dost not remember? An' the tale I told thee of when I found the young cygnets in the old swan's nest? Thou didst not chide."

"Egad, I will do more than chide an' thou goest again. So do not bring me to't."

Joyce stepped round behind his chair and clasped her arms about his throat; for in somewhat she loved the man, and ever her ways were coaxing.

"Give me thy reason, then," she said with a little sigh. "I am no child, father."

"An' that is my reason, i'faith; thou art no longer a child, Mistress Joyce, an' thou art too fair withal. Dost not know my face once brought me the luck of my life? Thine is more beautiful, an't shall bring thee gold, an' high fortune, an'—who knows lass—a title to thy name perchance!"

She laughed merrily. "Well, I am content to bide—but, as for gold, I fear me 'twill not come my way. An' as for a title—count not on it, good father."

But there were others who had noted the girl's unusual beauty. Far and wide she was called "The Lily of the Bridge."

How she came by the name was not certain, though some said 'twas old brother Sebastian, a gentle monk from the ancient Dominican friary near the river, who first called her so. There were few of his order left, for the times had changed. Yet a number of them passed the tollhouse daily on their errands of mercy, and sometimes even stopped to rest there or ask for a draught of water. It was brother Sebastian, in his rough, hooded cloak girdled by the knotted rope, and his old face sharp and ivory white from vigils and fastings, who stopped there oftenest. He grew to love the maiden, and noticing her kindly spirit, wished her away from the keeping of such a dissolute father; for Davenport maintained but an outward semblance of respectability.

Now captured by a new idea, and fancying that in every man he saw one come to rob him of his daughter, the man guarded her with unreasonable watchfulness.

He called himself a fool for not having seen before what a pearl was in his keeping; what price might not be bidden for it! "There was not the like of Joyce Davenport," he said to himself, "no—not in the kingdom."

"Well had his own face served him; and hers—hers should bring him the best the country could give. He would live right merrily yet, and no gentleman of them all would know better how to spend a golden guinea."

This daughter of his should be seen by the highest in the land, and to see her was to worship her beauty and bid the highest price for it. Therefore to

the highest bidder she should go—to the topmost title and the heaviest purse in all England. 'Twas a game worth playing—one sure of success—but how to play it? But where? But where? Difficult questions these, and they puzzled the handsome head of Dick Davenport as he stood by the tower through the long autumn day and collected the Queen's tax.

Inside the dark house Joyce pined for liberty. The days were weary, long and unspeakably lonely. There were the dogs—three of them that she had found at different times wandering about the bridge lost and lean, and as desperately miserable as only homeless dogs can be—these were company of course. They followed her so closely, and watched her with such melancholy eyes, that she fancied they must understand her sad case. And there was her tambour work, and the books of Latin; yes, and the pigeons that flew to the upper windows. But oh! she longed to be away in the sunshine, longed to escape, and waited in patience and half-stifled hope for some change.

DRAWN BY F. H. BRIGDEN.

"The girl had come to the doorway to call him to his mid-day meal."

Then one morning there came to the toll-man a thought that struck him as little less than an inspiration. He remembered there was a place nearby frequented by the gay and wealthy people of the city. That was an inn on the Southwark side called "The Bear," a resort of fashion even like the Paris Gardens but smaller, and in the grounds behind there was often bull and bear-baiting. Ladies sometimes witnessed these sports accompanied by their gallant cavaliers; this was the very place, and Joyce should go with him to see the sights.

"If she does not take the eyes of every man there from the play of the hour," Richard Davenport said to himself, "then the ways of the world have changed."

"Aye, my lass," he cried swinging the door open suddenly and looking in at his daughter, "Thou hast been shut up long enow', to-night will I take thee for an outing to Ted Gillian's Gardens back o' the Bear Inn. Marry! thou need'st some gaiety. An' thou'lt have a rare pleasant evening. There be hardly a gentleman in England but what finds his way to Gillian's soon or late, an' to-night's to be a grand night. Beshrew me if there won't be bear-baiting, and bull baiting, and dancing! Thou'st seen nought of life, Sweeting, but thy father'll show 'e 'tis worth living."

The girl stood listening with parted lips and quick-coming breath. She leaned back slightly against an old seaman's chest, and with one hand steadied herself by it, for it seemed that she trembled a little. The dark wood made a wonderful background for her slight figure. Her eyes dilated as she listened, and then came by slow degrees an expression on the red curved mouth that the man knew well, and somewhat feared.

"I give thee thanks," she said coldly, "but I will na go. I will na go. I am na one who delights in seeing a poor beast tortured. I will bide here in peace."

Davenport swore softly under his breath. Twice before in her life had she answered him with the same cool determined spirit, and he knew her well—he knew her well.

She would not alter or be easily broken. To use force was to ruin the thing he valued; coaxing would not avail, and she was not to be affrighted nor intimidated.

Davenport turned on his heel muttering a curse, and his face as he went out was white and very evil.

He crossed to a shadowy corner of the tower, where he could watch the gate.

His thoughts were in a tangle, and he raged at such opposition. To be baffled by her—a bit of a lass, scarce eighteen. "Bah!" he said half aloud. It made him ill. Gnawing away at his long moustache with strong, white teeth, he planned afresh, and, to help these angry meditations, drew from a beaded pouch by his side a heavy pipe and some of that new weed that was worth its weight in silver. Then he smoked in silence. This, like all Davenport's habits, was expensive and grew apace. Gold was what he wanted, and must have, thought the man. As for collecting these wretched tolls, he loathed the task. And for the girl, if she would not fall in with his wishes, then she should marry Ted Gillian, who had wanted to wed her these many months. "Ted Gillian!" The man gave a short laugh. There was a chuckle-head, with a slow wit and a long purse—keeper and owner of the fashionable bear gardens! 'Twould answer. And she be obstinate? But he'd wait, he'd wait. So he pulled at his pipe savagely.

Presently came Silas to go on duty.

"There be rare doin's at t'other end o' bridge, maister," he called. "Rare doin's! There be a crowd gathered as I came by!"

"What's to-do?" asked Davenport sullenly.

"There be a juggler all dressed in brown leather, flecked with little gold tassels where 'tis laced. Zooks! but he tosseth knives till it maketh t'blood stiffen in one! And there be gay red hoops and balls he throws as well; and he doth magic with a silken ribbon, maister!"

"'Tis a tame show, and one fit for women," said the other roughly.

"Tame show or no," returned my sailor, "it chilled the marrow o' the bones to see him toss the long knives, and catch them when eight were falling tines down!

"But there be more to it," he half whispered, leaning towards Davenport. "He weareth a brown mask, and they do say 'tis some noble in disguise. Beshrew me, but he looketh like one, for he standeth full a head over any man around. The show be'th on till dark—so thou canst see for thyself."

"Ah, so!" said Davenport, "'tis a strange tale; and yet I doubt me but what the fellow is some banished court jester. Any tattling goeth down with thee. Hark'e! Thou talkest overmuch. Attend to thy business and there'll be short time for thee to be gazing open-jawed at some juggling fool or another. Be not late again, or I'll settle with thee."

Thus saying he went indoors and sat heavily down.

"Perhaps," thought the man, "an' I take the lass to see this fellow, it might bring her to easier mood. That far, and who knows, peradventure a bit

of coaxing might lead her on to the Gardens. 'Tis worth trying, but it goeth against the grain." Rising, he settled his doublet and made up his mind.

His little daughter was in her room looking down into the river and watching a soft, yellow mist that, smoke-like, rolled in from the sea.

"Ah, Joyce!" she heard him call, "I was over-harsh with thee; come, I will take thee for a stroll. At bridge-end is a fine show, they tell me—a sight that maidens may see, for 'tis just harmless juggling, no more nor less. Put on thy best gown, lass, to out walk with thy father, an' in token that thy temper is sweet again."

Joyce answered back gaily, and soon ran down from her room arrayed in a white cloth gown, and with a long cloak of hunter's green velvet tied about her throat. She pulled up the small hood, and dropped her father a little courtesy.

" 'Tis all the bravery I own," she said, "but 'twill serve."

"Aye!" he answered. "Thou lookest like a lily coming out of green leaves."

Laughing and chatting they walked down the bridge past the quaint bridge-houses, their tiny roof-gardens bright with flowers, and so in and out amongst the people.

The odd signs above the old shops swung back and forth with low creaking, while the air was full of sounds of life, and fresh with a salt smell from the sea. Under those arches the river surged and beat. Vessels from all ports passed up and down the dusky water that at this hour was touched with gold and red from the western sun.

Great trading ships were going out, some to the old, old East, and others to that new land of the West. Little wherries and punts went bustlingly back and forth, making a great to-do for things so small. A thousand sails, black, brown and tawny, were raised in the freshening evening breeze.

Here and there the swans drifted homeward, like patches of floating snow, down to the lower marshes they went, where was quiet and deep peace. Out on the docks a day's work was drawing in, and weary longshoremen wheeled the last casks from some fast-emptying vessel, or piled great chests of tea, curiously marked bales of foreign silks and rugs, or boxes of spice into shelter for the night.

All this Joyce saw as she had seen it a thousand times before. The wind blew in many a fragrant odour from the vessels being unloaded, a perfume of wine and leather, sandalwood, coffee and tobacco, all blended with the scent of the sea.

The sun touched the gray old tower, where it stood afar off, raising its grim head to heaven, and holding the secrets of the years. It gilded the ancient priories of St. Mary Overies, and the convent of Bermondsey, and there was but an afterglow lighting up the world as the two came upon a knot of sight-seers circling about the man Dick Davenport sought.

Yes! there he was, the mysterious juggler still playing for the amusement of the passing throng, and, doubtless, the better filling of his own wallet.

He stood on a small cedar table, where lay an open case of long, double-edged knives, and he was—as Davenport noticed—a good head taller than any man around.

As for his dress, it was sober brown, cut withal in the extreme fashion of the hour, and it followed the lines of his firmly-knit form, as though moulded upon it. His boots of soft tan colour rose to the mid-thigh, and were square and flaring at the top. His jerkin of leather also shone here and there where it was laced with little gilt tassels, as the old sailor had said. He was belted with a girdle of dull gold, from which dangled a small toy-like Venetian dagger. The hilt of this pretty thing glinted blue as though set thick with turquois. The linen at the man's throat and wrist was smooth and fair, testifying to the ease with which he wrought his work. Upon his short dark hair rested a jaunty peaked cap, holding one long pheasant's feather.

DRAWN BY F. H. BRIGDEN.

"She watched him breathlessly."

The pose of the player as he kept some ivory balls in mid air, was grace itself; still it was his face the people watched, for there lay the mystery of him. His lower jaws, strong and beautifully turned, were shaven clean; the mouth firm and close showed yet the faint indication of a smile, but across his eyes lay a mask, and none might say truly who looked from behind it.

An ancient serving man waited near the table holding a heavy cloak. The expression on the worn face was one of patience under great distress. He it was who collected the silver sixpences, groats and three-penny-bits after each performance—often from a fast-thinning crowd—and in truth his looks bespoke it an unwelcome task.

Davenport pushed through the mass of people to its innermost circle, holding Joyce fast by the cloak. They drew up just as the juggler stooped to take his knives from their case.

Next the girl stood a sailor all agape; barefoot and swarthy he was, his hair burned almost yellow from the tropic sun. On one arm he held a wooden cage wherein were two homesick paraquets that now and then uttered harsh, unhappy cries. Next again was a man of most noble deportment, whose keen eyes missed nothing of interest that passed around him. His close pointed beard was trimmed to a nicety and the half hidden mouth changed as he gazed about at the motley crowd with a smile now grave, now whimsical.

All this Joyce saw as in a dream for she was only conscious of one tall and beautiful figure clad from top to toe in sombre hue, flinging from him straight and high into the air a dozen glittering, dangerous knives.

She watched him breathlessly with eyes darkening, the pink coming and going in her cheeks, her hands clinging together till the rosy nails grew white.

One little slip—one breath too much—Ah! The juggler glanced down and his eyes caught the girl's uplifted face. There was a quiver of his arm—and then a shower of knives rattled on the wooden table or fell to the bridge.

Three he caught, and one grazed his cheek, or even more, for the blood streamed down upon his collar.

Joyce gave a low, half-checked scream and pulling her kerchief out of its swinging pocket held it up.

"Quick! Thy face!" she cried; "Bind it up, O! bind it up. Thou art welcome to the kerchief; I need it not."

Then turning to her father, suddenly caught his hand. "Take me home," she said again with soft intensity.

The juggler had leaned down and taken the tiny lace-edged square, which he pressed to his face. Then he leaped lightly from the table and stood beside Joyce.

"I give thee thanks—but trouble not thy pretty head about me, little maid," he said. "Had I put out my life 'twere a ne'er-do-well gone, and not a better man."

Some voice in the crowd called out, "Go on with thy show, sir juggler; 'tis not thy death wound this time," and there was much chattering and laughter.

"I trow 'twill make but a paltry scar," shouted a rough voice. "Finish thy show. Art turned chicken-hearted?"

Then the man who stood next the sailor looked quietly around, and the hum of voices ceased.

"Pray thee, go to thy homes, good citizens," he said in a rich commanding voice. "There will be no more knife-throwing to-night; the light has failed. Hast never heard this, 'He jests at scars who never felt a wound.'" So, laughing, he made his way through the people.

"'Tis Will Shakespeare," said one looking after the man. "A young player from the Globe Theatre."—"'Tis Will Shakespeare—none else."

Thus they scattered noisily and went away as the dusk fell.

Davenport and his daughter had long disappeared, as had the juggler, while the old serving man folded the table by some contrivance and carried it towards Bridge House.

PART II.

JOYCE sat long at her window after her father had locked the outer door and gone to his favourite haunts.

Persuasions had failed to change the girl's mind. She would not go to the bear-baiting. Then had Davenport named other places of fashion and amusement where the crowd was mixed from all classes. Chief amongst them was the "Knave of Clubs," a popular inn on Bridge Street, which owned a ball-room waxed and polished till it mirrored the gay dancers. There might she learn to trip a coranto or Galliard with the best of them. But Joyce shook her head and would not listen. So he had gone out, muttering oaths between clenched teeth.

Now she was alone watching the moon rise. Up it came, softly luminous, almost as though it were a big golden bubble floating out of the water. It transfigured the dingy places by the river side, touched with silver the Tower turrets, and shone pityingly upon the sad burdens raised on the spiked gates.

The girl leaned out into the sweet, dewy darkness, listening to a nightbird calling with mournful insistence. Now and again a little chill went over her; that was when she fancied she saw a knife fall with desperate swiftness!—down it came and glanced across a man's masked face turned towards her.

Life seemed to have come to a stop with Joyce Davenport. The past was nothing; the future less. To live was only to see again, if but for a moment, that gracious figure all in dusky brown; to hear him speak.

"Trouble not thy pretty head about me, little maid," he had said. O! vain warning! For what else was there in all the world to think or dream of?

She chided herself grievously for having been over-bold in giving him the kerchief, then smiled at the thought that he had it still.

By and by, as these things went through her mind, she suddenly remembered that there was the kerchief to be returned. 'Twas a dainty one, and broidered with little lilies. Then would she see him; or, no—peradventure 'twould be the aged serving man who would bring it. And her father might meet him and bid him about his business; or, worse still, might *he* not come himself—to-night—even while she was dreaming thus—and seeing none about the tollhouse save old Silas, leave the kerchief with him, and so depart. 'Twas over late for that perchance, for the moon was now

above the Tower; yet she would away to the bridge to speak with the old sailor.

Swiftly she slipped through the dark rooms; then, throwing back the window, called softly.

Silas was dozing against the gate, even, indeed, snoring unmelodiously from time to time; but he heard the girl's voice instantly, and started towards her, his peg-leg making an echoing thud at each step.

"How now, Mistress," he said, "is aught wrong?"

"No! no, nothing is amiss," she answered; "but pri'thee tell me, good Silas, hast seen to-night a tall man in high riding-boots with battlemented tops, brown jerkin, and hat with pheasant's feather? Think quickly, good Silas."

The sailor rubbed his eyes, yawned, and then pulled at his frowsy forelock.

"Art sure 'twas a pheasant's feather?" he asked.

"Yes! yes!" she said, leaning towards him, "an' thou could'st not mistake him for another; he is vastly tall and most comely. He hath a clean-shaven chin with a dimple fair in the centre. Rememberest thou now, Silas?"

"Art sure of the dimple?" asked he laboriously.

"O! quite, quite sure, dear Silas. It is a dimple not to be forgotten. Pray thee tell me if he spoke to thee and what he said."

"I saw him not," answered the old man, smiling to himself in the dark, "An' thou'st best to bed, Madam Joyce. 'Tis not for thee to be thinking about dimples in a man's chin. Gadzooks! thy father'd make short work o' him an' he crossed *his* path. Knowest thou not why he keeps thee so close, sweeting?"

"Nay. Tell me then, Silas. I can guess no good reason, though my head aches with thinking."

"Why, then, he'd marry thee to some fine gentleman. Thou art not for every market. Do'st never look in thy copper mirror, lass? I'faith, there are no such eyes as thine in England!"

"Thou art talking nonsense, good Silas! Where hast thou been to see the court beauties? Marry then, but the Queen herself—though she be not over young—is most marvellous fair. I'faith an' I had a few jewels and a silken gown I would pass; think'st thou not so? But, alas! I have naught but one of russet an' one of white."

"Thou may'st have more yet. Ay! farthingales and fluted ruffs, and such fal-de-rols as the gentles wear, all when thy ship comes in. An' when thou

be'est stiff with gold lace, an' bedecked so grandly, I warrant thoul't forget Silas, who would give the last bit o' timber in his old hulk just to serve thee. Wilt forget him, lass?"

"Never! good Silas, never! should such time come."

"Well a-day! I trow thou wilt not. Hast heard of the great funeral on the morrow? 'Twill be the last of the old Earl of Oxford."

"Speak not of funerals to-night. I like not the subject."

"An' why not then? 'Tis to be a grand show, sweet Mistress. Seven score of nobles follow, all in black velvet! Ask thy father to let me take thee, for thou need'st some sight-seeing at thy time o' life. 'Twill run through Fleet Street to Westminster."

"Pri'thee be still, good Silas. See'st thou not a man yonder half in shadow? I fancy he weareth high boots with battlemented tops! Ah! he comest this way! And he asks aught, answer him civilly, an' thou desirest to please me."

Joyce drew back her flaxen head and held her breath to listen.

Presently she heard a voice, the voice of the one who had thrown the knives, speaking to the sailor. There was a tone in it that brought the old man to an attitude of attention. He feared his master, but dare not disobey this stranger. They turned together to the window, and Silas looked within.

"Art there, Mistress Joyce?" he said half-sullenly. "Here be one who must have a word with thee, leastwise, would not be denied. Heaven send he be quick over it; thy father is not pleasant company when he returneth late."

The girl looked out and saw behind Silas the graceful figure of the juggler. He wore no mask, and in the moon-light his face was white like marble, and the long cut showed plainly from cheek to chin.

"Thou hast led me a dance little maid," he said, laughingly; "I hunted thee up hill and down dale! and by my faith thou art worth it all! Come, tell me why thou didst gaze at me so to-day? Thine heart was looking through those wondrous blue eyes, and it set me a-tremble so that my knives went down like a shower of devils! Egad! I am not one to be so easily overset."

Leaning against the casement, he covered the girl's small hands with one of his. "Look not so at me, an' thou would'st have me keep a cool head little maid. I am but mortal."

"Who art thou?" she said, softly.

"Did I not tell thee then?" answered the man. "A ne'er-do-well. One who has sown as fine a crop of wild oats as any gentle—as any fellow in England."

"Hast done evil deeds?" she asked with a quiver in her voice. "Is it why thou wear'st the mask? If so Master Juggler, why come'st thou to me?"

"Ah!" he said, looking down at her, "I doubt not 'tis because thou art the very opposite of all I am, or ever will be. I believe not, that like attracts like, but rather the reverse. Moreover I could not banish thy face, little maid. I saw more than thine eyes looking at me through the yellow light. I saw thy soul. Peradventure 'tis but to ask for thy prayers, I came to-night. Think'st thou so?"

"Nay, I know not," she answered; then with a little sigh, "Has't been so very wicked? Has't ever *killed* a man?"

The juggler gave a short laugh, and his face bold, dare-devil, half tender, bent towards hers.

"Ay," he said, "that have I. Two of them. I would I could have answered thee differently. But 'twas done in fair duelling, mark you. Listen then. I am like the prodigal son, in this much, that I have journeyed into far countries and spent my substance in riotous living. 'A short life, and a merry one.' 'Tis the song of the green-coat in the grass, little maid, and I have joined him at it. As for my sins, put down all those thou canst think of, save that of breaking faith and thou wilt have a fair sum of them."

"I will think no evil of thee," she said simply. "And dost not remember 'twas he who so journeyed into the far country that came home again, and was forgiven? Now go, my father wishes not to have me awake when he returns."

"Do'st fear what he will say and he find me by thy window?"

"Nay," answered Joyce, "I have done no wrong; why should I fear? But go thou quickly, for truly he is a dangerous man to meet at times, and I fear for thee."

"Thou art the sweetest maid in England," said the man passionately, "and I will surely see thee to-morrow."

"No! no!" she cried throwing out her hands in protest. "Indeed no, I am over-busy in the afternoon."

"Ay! so am I, for I ride to the Duke's funeral—"

"Then thou art a noble," she said with quick thought.

"Do'st think so?" he answered, smiling. "After what I told thee? Why what is't to be noble then little maid? So—I will not tarry longer. Fare-thee-well, and dream not of falling daggers. Yes! yes thou may'st; for then, marry, thou'lt dream of me."

Down the bridge he went, with light buoyant step, and the girl watched him till he passed into the gloom beyond. Then sighed, and pressed her two hands against her heart.

"I wish not to have him return," she said, "an' yet I do; never have I seen such another, for all he doth belittle himself. Twice have I heard of the Duke's funeral within an hour, and methinks 'twas a bat that flew above our heads as we talked. I like not such omens."

Then twelve struck, and as Joyce listened, three men came past the bridge-tower; arms locked to keep themselves upright.

Violently they lurched from right to left and occasionally the fellow in the centre crumpled down, and was carried onward by a series of jerks.

They sang in different key, but with apparent enjoyment an old hunting song—

"Come merry, merry, gentlemen
An', haste thee all away—
For we will hunt the jolly, jolly fox
At breaking o' the day."

The listener knew well whose high tenor it was that held the sweet top notes. She closed the window and waited.

Presently came the sound of Silas sleepily greeting the toll-taker.

"Is't thou good Master Davenport? Keep thee on thy legs then; I'faith thou hast no more stiffening in thee than a wet rag. Thou'll sleep in thy boots to-night. Nay, hang not so on my neck. Marry! thy doublet's in sorry plight, ne'er lace nor tag to't. Thou never wor'st that hat away, some knave hath thine I'll warrant an' the best o' the bargain. Steady then maister. Ste-ady then, breakers ahead! Mind thee, 'tis but a peg on my weatherside an' t'other one, starboard leg's a bit bowed out. Ste-ady then! Ste-ady!"

So they lumbered in, the door shut close and while the sailor latched it, the girl sought her room, with fast-beating heart, and misty eyes.

"I owe him naught," she thought bitterly, "neither respect nor obedience. Yet I would 'twere possible to give him both."

———

Next night when the world grew quiet the juggler came to the little shadowy window, and again old Silas listened to voices fresh and sweet, and brimming over with a melody of youth.

Now and then he heard the man laugh a low, vibrant laugh that echoed down and away upon the water, or there reached him a soft word or two from Joyce.

So it went till two weeks had gone by. Ever the old sailor saw his little mistress come to the casement, after dark fell, and wait for one who never failed her.

Then came a night when, after the tall, brown figure had gone, another came—one bent and spare—yet nervously quick in movement. He glided from out the shadow and went stealthily towards the tollhouse, and stopped, looking up and down. Seeing the sailor near by, he crossed to him, and touched him on the arm.

"I would speak with Mistress Joyce Davenport. She who talked with my master but lately."

"'Tis not an hour for any to speak with her," said Silas gruffly. "I like not these doings, neither thy master's nor thine. I know him for the thrower of balls and knives at bridge-foot. Marry! I would end it an' I had the heart; the little lass says naught, but she looketh at me with eyes that plead. Yet I would kill him, an' he played her false. 'Tis a very coil. Best get thee gone. See, an' the toll-man happens home early to-night, the devil's own temper'll bear him company."

"I fear not," answered the other, "an' indeed 'tis not near the stroke of eleven. I pray thee call thy mistress. Thou art no judge of my need to see her. Good master toll-man, I pray thee!"

Silas noted the trembling voice and saw by a flickering link at the gate that the old face was drawn and sharp with some intense feeling.

"Bide thee under yon gable, then, an' I will call the lass. But I be an old fool for my pains. An' thou make not short work, I will shut the casement."

"As short as I can, Heaven knows," answered the other, "but 'twill take a little time."

". . . And a candle she held, shaded by one hand, threw shadows up and over her face."

Then came Joyce again hastily, fearing she knew not what. From the velvet hood over her head, her face looked out white and flower-like, and a candle she held, shaded by one hand, threw shadows up and over it.

"This one also," said the sailor, with a jerk of his thumb backward, "would have a word with thee. 'Tis coming to a pass! Bid him be quick. I want no broken heads to bind when thy father comest back."

Joyce saw a thin, dark form and a head of snowy hair worn in a queue; then she blew out the light.

"Thou art Mistress Joyce Davenport?"

"Ay!" she answered, "I am the toll-master's daughter."

"They call thee, hereabouts, 'The Lily of the bridge,' and by vastly good right."

Joyce put her hands to her ears and laughed lightly.

"Go to! go to, good gentleman! Thou art surely past making pretty speeches. 'Tis late. I would be through an' to my room. Hast any word of import? If not—Ah!—Is't so then? I *do* remember now. Thou art he who stood by the table of knives—is't not so? Speak on, quickly. Hast brought a message?"

"No message, sweet lady; but in truth a word of import. My master hath been here each night for two weeks, as I count; sometimes but for a little space, again for longer. He doth not befool old Michael. He hath made love to thee—thou canst not deny it."

The beautiful face in the hood grew rosy. "Try not my patience," she said; "thy business had best not touch such matters."

"Nevertheless I spoke truth. He hath made love to thee, and thou—thou hast bewitched him till I know him not. Now hark'e! Do'st know the name of him who stands on London Bridge at sundown and juggles for the people's sport?" A ring of suppressed wrath sounded in the words.

"Hath he acquainted thee with his name, good Mistress Davenport?"

The man could see two little hands cling to the wooden sill—tight—tight.

"Ay! I know his name," she answered, "though he told me not. Look you, I saw the passing of the great Duke's funeral, and the gentles who followed clothed in black velvet. Thy master rode with them, unmasked. One near me in the crowd pointed to him jestingly and said 'Yonder goes the young Lord of Yelverton, who hath squandered more gold crown pieces and rose-nobles than any dandy of them all, from London to Land's End.' 'Twas so I learned thy master's name, good sir."

"Do'st know then why he playeth by the South Tower?"

"Nay!" she cried, with soft eagerness. "Nay, tell me, I pray thee; 'tis best thou should'st."

"Listen then," answered the man with a quick glance around.

"He thou knowest as the juggler, is indeed the young Lord of Yelverton. Soft—I would not be overheard, and the watch cometh by. Now again. 'Tis also true he hath played fast and loose with two goodlie fortunes. See you—when he came of age there were none to advise or control. 'Twas in this wise: my Lord and my Lady, Heaven rest them, died within short space of each other leaving no lawful guardian for the lad. There was not one in England near of kin, therefore the Crown appointed Lord Dudley to the care of the young master and estates. My Lord troubled but little over the matter, and the lad grew up without control of any, a bit wild, yet sweet in temper. When at one-and-twenty he came to his own (an' there were vast lands in France as well, for my Lady had been a Frenchwoman), he made short work of all the gold that had been storing up for his pleasure.

"I canst not tell thee how it went, but, marry, 'twas like water through a sieve, or sand through the fingers. The whole world was his friend then, though none cared for him, for himself alone, but just old Michael.

"The lad had ever been ungovernable save by his mother's gentleness, and there were plenty to lead him from her memory. It went like a fairy tale, Mistress Davenport, for my master was as much at home in France as England, and everywhere had a gay company at his heels. He lived like a Prince of the blood, and when the foreign moneys were spent, saddled the home estates with grievous debt. When all went the same road he shipped to America with some of Sir Walter Raleigh's men,—I following ever."

"Say on, good Master Michael," said Joyce, as the man paused in his rapidly told story. "Thou art not finished?"

"'Twas upon that long voyage," he continued "that my Lord learned from a queer Indian fellow of the East, brown limbed and supple as willow, the curious tricks of throwing balls and knives—ay! an' many another folly which goeth for magic. 'Twas a pastime when the sea lay like a blue mirror and the sun warmed idle sails and a quiet deck."

The old fellow stopped breathlessly, and drew his hand across his eyes as though to dispel some vision.

"Tell me all and quickly," said the girl, "the hour flyeth."

"Yes, yes; have patience, sweet lady. The story is hard to unravel. We returned again to England after a year of wandering in the strange New World—an' 'tis now thou need'st listen. Not long since came word that an

old friend of Lord Yelverton's father, one Frazer of Dundee (a dour man—an' o'er strange in many ways), was dead, an' had bequeathed all his hoard of wealth to my master. Ah! but there it did not end. There were conditions, mark you!"

The old voice stopped. And in the pause came the sound of Joyce Davenport's heart beating quick, quick, like a bird against cage bars.

"Full well did old Frazer of Dundee know my Lord Harry and his spendthrift ways. The conditions were these, therefore, as the man of law read I listening also:

> 'When Lord Henry Yelverton, by the craft of his hand, earneth twenty golden guineas in the space of one month then shall he enter into full possession of all land and moneys mentioned in the said will; provided also that he wed upon the same day the niece of Donald Frazer, who was also his ward and rich in her own right.'

"This, sweet Mistress Davenport, read the man of law in my hearing—with much mouthing of words that have slipped my memory."

"O, hasten, hasten, good Master Michael," cried the girl. "Is there aught else?"

"I'faith just this much. My young Lord laughed long, and as at a jest when he heard. 'I have a craft, Sir lawyer,' he said, 'an honest one in sooth, whereby I can earn the gold right merrily—if so be Michael will but pass around his chapeau. But I doubt me 'tis such an one as would have pleased the sainted Scot.' 'No especial craft is specified in the document,' said the man of law. 'Then was I born under a lucky star! But the maid: Beshrew me! Why did he throw in the maid? Could'st not have put in a word to save a man? I beseech thee, sweet lawyer, draw me her picture. An' it be not to my liking, I'd let the King's crown go by before I'd wed her.' Those, fair lady, were his very words."

Joyce gave a little laugh and caught the old man's arm.

"Said he so?" she cried. "Art sure?"

"Ay! an' that was a month back. He hath earned the gold—but—he hath also seen thee. An' but yestere'en said he thus to me, in all earnestness, 'The game is up, my trusty Michael, and I am where I was before.'"

"Be quick," she said breathlessly. "I see a shadow yonder, perchance the watch returneth, or thou hast wearied Silas, or 'tis my father."

"Ay!" again he panted; "this said my master, 'There is no heart left in me to go to Scotland and wed old Frazer's ward. A plague on him for throwing

in the maid. 'Twould plant a thorn in every golden rose-noble of them all. Nay then I will not wed her for my heart hath found its heritage here on London Bridge! A pearl washed up by old Father Thames that all the world passed unseeing. And 'tis the little maid of Davenport that may be my Lady of Yelverton an' she will—though there be not a groat behind the title—'

"See then, sweet mistress, 'tis on thy pity I throw myself. I doubt not he said all this to thee—but take him not at his word. Indeed 'twould be his undoing. Dost not understand 'tis the turn of the tide with him now? With the Scottish wealth all debts could be wiped away from the old castle, and the name kept pure in England. And thy father, knowest thou not he lived but by the grace of the Queen? 'Tis a marriage not to be entertained, though in truth my lord meant his words. Is it not enough that he play to the people, while I scorn the money I take? Have pity, sweet lady, for I know his moods. He is in deadly earnest, now, an' thou only canst save him. An' thou turn'st him off lightly, then perchance will he away to the north country and trouble be ended."

"Go," she said, looking out into the old white eager face. "I will not answer thee now—it need'th thought. Thy limbs tremble, good Sir. My father speaketh with Silas at the gate. Hasten, hasten!"

Soon Davenport came stumbling to the door. He called in quick, angry fashion for Joyce.

"Who is it that talk'st with thee after I am away— Hark'e, make no excuse."

"It is my Lord of Yelverton. Hast aught against him? Thou know'st his name surely; 'tis an old one in the country," she answered.

"Lord Yelverton!" he said thickly. "Is't so? Dost mean it? How camest thou to meet one of title? Thou hast been a caged beauty of late, also," turning up her face with one hand, and looking down into it with angry blood-shot eyes.

"Thou know'st I never speak aught but truth," she said gravely.

"Ay! little one, thy word is thy bond always, but report said 'twas the brown juggler at bridge-foot, who had found thee out." Then his face changing: "In *any* case 'twill not do, Mistress Joyce; 'twill not do; Yelverton hath not a sou to his title. There is Ted Gillian. See thou turn'st him not away when he cometh on the morrow.

"He is a good fellow, though no gentle. Speak him fair I bid thee. He is rich—Ted Gillian—rich, rich. As for this young noble, hast made love to thee, sweetheart?"

"Ay!" answered the girl softly. "He spoke somewhat of love."

"An' asked thee to marry him, I'll swear? If I could afford time I could'st wed thee to the greatest of them all. He asked thee to marry him, then did he, lass?"

"Peradventure," she said with a laugh that ended in a sob. Then turning, she threw her arms about the man's throat, with a sudden soft violence that half sobered him. "O father," she cried, "I desire not to marry any one of them if thou wilt but be kind an' have me bide with thee. Let us away from London Bridge. I am overweary of the crowd ever going by, an' of the endless noise an' turmoil. The bridge is worn and breaking, soon will the Queen have it rebuilt grandly, so say the gossips. I am weary of it, of the sights of it, and the dreadful heads blackening in the sunlight. Thou may'st not *always* have the tollhouse. Let us away then now to some quiet place; to the new country, dear father. The ships pass out at morning and evening. O, say thou wilt go with thy little Joyce, an' speak no more of marrying."

Davenport shook her away, but half comprehending the drift of her words.

"This time thou art mad," he said. "Thou art surely mad; an' thou always wert a strange maid. To thy bed, and rest! To thy bed and rest."

The girl went slowly away to her room and stood looking out at the wide, dark river, dappled here and there with silver from the late rising moon. Down her face fell a rain of tears, unheeded.

"There is no other way," she said half aloud. "Yet I would there were. 'Ted Gillian!'" with a catch in her breath, "'Ted Gillian!' O, I needed not that. To-morrow night at nine o' the clock will he come again, my Lord of Yelverton, an' I might go with him an' I would. Nay, 'twould be but a selfish love an' I went. I can remember his words, though I understood them not: 'Two roads lie before me, little maid; one dark and tiresome—even monotonous to desperation; the other through a green country, where the air is golden an' the sky the shade of thine eyes. Thou wilt be by my side there, an' if joy comes 'twill be greater with thee to share it; an' if sorrow, then I'll take thy part as well as my own. So, sweetheart, 'tis a fair journey lies in that direction. Would'st throw in thy lot with a strolling juggler who hath but love to give thee?'"

No, no! There was no time for thought, and 'twas needless, for her mind was firmly set. Love was not love to her—that harmed the thing it worshipped.

Yet all possibility of life in the old house by the north tower was over.

Tying the green cloak about her she went silently down the leaning stairs, through the quiet room and out into the darkness. One of the dogs

followed, a small tangle-haired thing with eyes great and melancholy.

On the bridge towers flamed the dying links, and the moon was sinking. There was a mackerel sky that night, and little broken clouds tinted with violet floated now and then across the “silver shield of heaven.”

"Then she stepped to the edge of the little craft."

Joyce stood looking at it all, her hands clasped, her head thrown back.

"'Tis a beautiful, beautiful world," she said, as though to the tiny dog pressing his rough head against her white gown. "Methinks 'tcould not be

fairer—even beyond—" Then stooping she patted the trembling animal. "Thou art a good little friend," said the girl softly, "a good little friend in sooth. But thou canst not bear me company to-night. Nay, plead not. I will not let thee come. Away to thy corner, away, away!"

So she watched, till he turned towards the house in obedient sadness. Not far off there were some steps, unsteady with age and worn in hollows, that led to the water. These she ran down swiftly, and unfastened a shallow punt that lay moored to them.

An old waterman who had known her long, stood near by, having been late at work. At first he thought it was a spirit, then chiding his fancies went nearer and saw Joyce Davenport untying the knotted rope. He called, and the girl answered nothing, but pushed off into the open river.

She stood quite still then and let the boat follow the tide. Out it went, out and out—below the arch—under the bridge—beyond. The old man saw her still standing, tall and white. He tried to call again but his heart beat hard and hard so that no sound would come.

Then she stepped to the edge of the little craft, and so into the river, with her arms out, and her face turned upward.

The water eddied and rippled, eddied and rippled, and was still. The punt tossed a moment; then floated slowly on alone.

DRAWN BY F. H. BRIGDEN.

"'Twas but a dream, good Michael," he said gently.

Years afterwards, away in Scotland, in one of the great houses rich with beauty two men were talking by an open fire. The wintry sun shone through glittering windows and the room was trimmed with holly, green and gay.

"The lads will be home for Christmas, master?" said the elder man, stooping to push back a heavy burning log and sending showers of sparks up the chimney.

"Ay!" answered the other, who was tall and straight, with a face good to look upon.

"Ay! the lads will be home, Michael. Their mother counteth much on it."

"Thou art a happy man, my Lord, with thy two sons, and all this of life's comfort."

"Happy of course, Michael; and who would not be? What have I missed of the best? Yet old fellow, seemeth it not wonderful that I am staid and sober-minded, and of a steady prosperity? Truly the gods seem to love me, although I die not young.

"But fancies, strange and outside of aught we do from day to day, come to the best and worst of us at times. Hearken, I will tell thee somewhat.

"Last night I dreamed, and it went in this wise: One came to me, shining as the sun and grave of face—an angel perchance, though there be others better able to judge of that than I. Be that as it may, this shining one spoke in marvellous sweet manner and said, 'Don thou thy brown leathern suit and go out into the world, and look through the east and through the west for a flower. Somewhere it groweth for thee to pluck. None other may have it. White it is, and pure, and when thou see'st it the earth will hold naught else for thee. In the golden heart of it lieth a potient of love that only thou may'st find.'

"So I went, good Michael, and long I searched. But not in the east, and not in the west was the flower I sought. Then as I grew overweary of my quest I found it blowing upon the old bridge in London town.

"Of the sweetness of it, I cannot tell thee; but as I would have taken it to my heart there came a wind, strong and terrible, that broke the fragile stem, and drifted the lily away, across into the river—and so out to sea. And so—out to sea."

The man stopped speaking and gave a little laugh, half-bitter, half-sweet; then touched the old servant as he bent over the fire, his head far down, his silvery locks shading the sharp, worn face.

"'Twas but a dream, good Michael," he said gently; "'twas but a dream. And I am waking now. Dost hear the yeomen bringing in the yule-log? Marry! 'tis over-heavy by the noise they make! Haste thee away; they'll

need thy wisdom to get it through the snow. Cheer up thine old heart then; cheer up thine old heart; to-morrow 'twill be Christmas."

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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 illustrations were moved to facilitate page layout.

[The end of *A Lily of London Bridge*, by Virna Sheard.]