

BLACK WILLIAM

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE:
HER LOVE AFFAIRS AND
OTHER ADVENTURES

William Black

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Содержание

CHAPTER I.	5
CHAPTER II.	12
CHAPTER III.	15
CHAPTER IV.	21
CHAPTER V.	24
CHAPTER VI.	30
CHAPTER VII.	36
CHAPTER VIII.	41
CHAPTER IX.	47
CHAPTER X.	54
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	57

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CHAPTER I.

AN ASSIGNATION

It was a fair, clear, and shining morning, in the sweet May-time of the year, when a young English damsel went forth from the town of Stratford-upon-Avon to walk in the fields. As she passed along by the Guild Chapel and the Grammar School, this one and the other that met her gave her a kindly greeting; for nearly every one knew her, and she was a favorite; and she returned those salutations with a frankness which betokened rather the self-possession of a young woman than the timidity of a girl. Indeed, she was no longer in the first sensitive dawn of maidenhood – having, in fact, but recently passed her five-and-twentieth birthday – but nevertheless there was the radiance of youth in the rose-leaf tint of her cheeks, and in the bright cheerfulness of her eyes. Those eyes were large, clear, and gray, with dark pupils and dark lashes; and these are a dangerous kind; for they can look demure, and artless, and innocent, when there is nothing in the mind of the owner of them but a secret mirth; and also – and alas! – they can effect another kind of concealment, and when the heart within is inclined to soft pity and yielding, they can refuse to confess to any such surrender, and can maintain, at the bidding of a wilful coquetry, an outward and obstinate coldness and indifference. For the rest, her hair, which was somewhat short and curly, was of a light and glossy brown, with a touch of sunshine in it; she had a good figure, for she came of a quite notably handsome family; she walked with a light step and a gracious carriage; and there were certain touches of style and color about her costume which showed that she did not in the least undervalue her appearance. And so it was "Good-morrow to you, sweet Mistress Judith," from this one and the other; and "Good-morrow, friend So-and-so," she would answer; and always she had the brightest of smiles for them as they passed.

Well, she went along by the church, and over the foot-bridge spanning the Avon, and so on into the meadows lying adjacent to the stream. To all appearance she was bent on nothing but deliberate idleness, for she strayed this way and that, stooping to pick up a few wild flowers, and humming to herself as she went. On this fresh and clear morning the air seemed to be filled with sweet perfumes after the close atmosphere of the town; and if it was merely to gather daisies, and cuckoo-flowers, and buttercups, that she had come, she was obviously in no hurry about it. The sun was warm on the rich green grass; the swallows were dipping and flashing over the river; great humble-bees went booming by; and far away somewhere in the silver-clear sky a lark was singing. And she also was singing, as she strayed along by the side of the stream, picking here and there a speedwell, and here and there a bit of self-heal or white dead-nettle; if, indeed that could be called singing that was but a careless and unconscious recalling of snatches of old songs and madrigals. At one moment it was:

Why, say you so? Oh no, no, no;
Young maids must never a-wooing go.

And again it was:

Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, jolly hunter!

And again it was:

For a morn in spring is the sweetest thing
Cometh in all the year!

And in truth she could not have lit upon a sweeter morning than this was; just as a chance passer-by might have said to himself that he had never seen a pleasanter sight than this young English maiden presented as she went idly along the river-side, gathering wild flowers the while.

But in course of time, when she came to a part of the Avon from which the bank ascended sharp and steep, and when she began to make her way along a narrow and winding foot-path that ascended through the wilderness of trees and bushes hanging on this steep bank, she became more circumspect. There was no more humming of songs; the gathering of flowers was abandoned, though here she might have added a wild hyacinth or two to her nosegay; she advanced cautiously, and yet with an affectation of carelessness; and she was examining, while pretending not to examine, the various avenues and open spaces in the dense mass of foliage before her. Apparently, however, this world of sunlight and green leaves and cool shadow was quite untenanted; there was no sound but that of the blackbird and the thrush; she wandered on without meeting any one. And then, as she had now arrived at a little dell or chasm in the wood, she left the foot-path, climbed up the bank, gained the summit, and finally, passing from among the bushes, she found herself in the open, at the corner of a field of young corn.

Now if any one had noticed the quick and searching look that she flashed all around on the moment of her emerging from the brush-wood – the swiftness of lightning was in that rapid scrutiny – he might have had some suspicion as to the errand that had brought her hither; but in an instant her eyes had recovered their ordinary look of calm and indifferent observation. She turned to regard the wide landscape spread out below her; and the stranger, if he had missed that quick and eager glance, would have naturally supposed that she had climbed up through the wood to this open space merely to have a better view. And indeed this stretch of English-looking country was well worth the trouble, especially at this particular time of the year, when it was clothed in the fresh and tender colors of the spring-time; and it was with much seeming content that this young English maiden stood there and looked abroad over the prospect – at the placid river winding through the lush meadows; at the wooden spire of the church rising above the young foliage of the elms; at here and there in the town a red-tiled house visible among the thatched roofs and gray walls and orchards – these being all pale and ethereal and dream-like in the still sunshine of this quiet morning. It was a peaceful English-looking picture that ought to have interested her, however familiar it may have been; and perhaps it was only to look at it once more that she had made her way up hither; and also to breathe the cool sweet air of the open, and to listen to the singing of the birds, that seemed to fill the white wide spaces of the sky as far as ever she could hear.

Suddenly she became aware that some one was behind her and near her, and instantly turning, she found before her an elderly man with a voluminous gray beard, who appeared to affect some kind of concealment by the way he wore his hat and his long cloak.

"God save you, sweet lady!" he had said, almost before she turned.

But if this stranger imagined that by his unlooked-for approach and sudden address he was likely to startle the young damsel out of her self-possession, he knew very little with whom he had to deal.

"Good-morrow to you, good Master Wizard," said she, with perfect calmness, and she regarded him from head to foot with nothing beyond a mild curiosity. Indeed, it was rather he who was embarrassed. He looked at her with a kind of wonder – and admiration also; and if she had been sufficiently heedful and watchful she might have observed that his eyes, which were singularly dark,

had a good deal of animation in them for one of his years. It was only after a second or so of this bewildered and admiring contemplation of her that he managed to say, in a grave and formal voice, something in praise of her courage in thus keeping the appointment he had sought.

"Nay, good sir," said she, with much complacency, "trouble not yourself about me. There is no harm in going out to gather a few flowers in the field, surely. If there be any danger, it is rather you that have to fear it, for there is the pillory for them that go about the country divining for gold and silver."

"It is for no such vain and idle purposes that I use my art," said he; and he regarded her with such an intensity of interest that sometimes he stumbled forgetfully in his speech, as if he were repeating a lesson but ill prepared, "It is for the revelation of the future to them that are born under fortunate planets. And you are one of these, sweet lady, or I would not have summoned you to a meeting that might have seemed perilous to one of less courage and good heart. If it please you to listen, I can forecast that that will befall you – "

"Nay, good sir," said she, with a smile, "I have heard it frequently, though perhaps never from one so skilled. 'Tis but a question between dark and fair, with plenty of money and lands thrown in. For that matter, I might set up in the trade myself. But if you could tell me, now – "

"If I were to tell you – if by my art I could show you," said he, with a solemnity that was at least meant to be impressive (though this young maid, with her lips inclining to a smile, and her inscrutable eyes, did not seem much awe-stricken) – "if I could convince you, sweet lady, that you shall marry neither dark nor fair among any of those that would now fain win you – and rumor says there be several of those – what then?"

"Rumor?" she repeated, with the color swiftly mantling in her face. But she was startled, and she said, quickly, "What do you say, good wizard? Not any one that I know? What surety have you of that? Is it true? Can you show it to me? Can you assure me of it? Is your skill so great that you can prove to me that your prophecy is aught but idle guessing? No one that I have seen as yet, say you? Why," she added half to herself, "but that were good news for my gossip Prue."

"My daughter," said this elderly person, in slow and measured tones, "it is not to all that the stars have been so propitious at their birth."

"Good sir," said she, with some eagerness, "I beseech you to forgive me if I attend you not; but – but this is the truth, now, as to how I came in answer to your message to me. I will speak plain. Perchance rumor hath not quite belied herself. There may be one or two who think too well of me, and would have me choose him or him to be my lover; and – and – do you see now? – if there were one of those that I would fain have turn aside from idle thoughts of me and show more favor to my dear cousin and gossip Prudence Shawe – nay, but to tell the truth, good wizard, I came here to seek of your skill whether it could afford some charm and magic that would direct his heart to her. I have heard of such things – "

And here she stopped abruptly, in some confusion, for she had in her eagerness admitted a half-belief in the possible power of his witchcraft which she had been careful to conceal before. She had professed incredulity by her very manner; she had almost laughed at his pretensions; she had intimated that she had come hither only out of curiosity; but now she had blundered into the confession that she had cherished some vague hope of obtaining a love-philtre, or some such thing, to transfer away from herself to her friend the affections of one of those suitors whose existence seemed to be so well known to the wizard. However, he soon relieved her from her embarrassment by assuring her that this that she demanded was far away beyond the scope of his art, which was strictly limited to the discovery and revelation of such secrets as still lay within the future.

"And if so, good sir," said she, after a moment's reflection, "that were enough, or nearly enough, so that you can convince us of it."

"To yourself alone, gracious lady," said he, "can I reveal that which will happen to you. Nay, more, so fortunate is the conjunction of the planets that reigned at your birth – the *ultimum supplicium auri* might almost have been declared to you – that I can summon from the ends of the earth, be he

where he may, the man that you shall hereafter marry, or soon or late I know not; if you will, you can behold him at such and such a time, at such and such a place, as the stars shall appoint."

She looked puzzled, half incredulous and perplexed, inclined to smile, blushing somewhat, and all uncertain.

"It is a temptation – I were no woman else," said she, with a laugh. "Nay, but if I can see him, why may not others? And if I can show them him who is to be my worshipful lord and master, why, then, my gossip Prue may have the better chance of reaching the goal where I doubt not her heart is fixed. Come, then, to prove your skill, good sir. Where shall I see him, and when? Must I use charms? Will he speak, think you, or pass as a ghost? But if he be not a proper man, good wizard, by my life I will have none of him, nor of your magic either."

She was laughing now, and rather counterfeiting a kind of scorn; but she was curious; and she watched him with a lively interest as he took forth from a small leather bag a little folded piece of paper, which he carefully opened.

"I cannot answer all your questions, my daughter," said he; "I can but proceed according to my art. Whether the person you will see may be visible to others I know not, nor can I tell you aught of his name or condition. Pray Heaven he be worthy of such beauty and gentleness; for I have heard of you, gracious lady, but rumor had but poor words to describe such a rarity and a prize."

"Nay," said she, in tones of reproof (but the color had mounted to a face that certainly showed no sign of displeasure), "you speak like one of the courtiers now."

"This charm," said he, dropping his eyes, and returning to his grave and formal tones, "is worth naught without a sprig of rosemary; that must you get, and you must place it within the paper in a threefold manner – thus; and then, when Sol and Luna are both in the descendant – but I forget me, the terms of my art are unknown to you; I must speak in the vulgar tongue; and meanwhile you shall see the charm, that there is nothing wicked or dangerous in it, but only the wherewithal to bring about a true lovers' meeting."

He handed her the open piece of paper; but she, having glanced at the writing, gave it him back again.

"I pray you read it to me," she said.

He regarded her for a second with some slight surprise; but he took the paper, and read aloud, slowly, the lines written thereon:

"Dare you haunt our hallowed green?
None but fairies here are seen.
Down and sleep,
Wake and weep,
Pinch him black, and pinch him blue,
That seeks to steal a lover true,
When you come to hear us sing,
Or to tread our fairy ring,
Pinch him black, and pinch him blue —
Oh, thus our nails shall handle you!"

"Why, 'tis like what my father wrote about Herne the Hunter," said she, with a touch of indifference; perhaps she had expected to hear something more weird and unholy.

"Please you, forget not the rosemary; nothing will come of it else," he continued. "Then this you must take in your hand secretly, and when no one has knowledge of your outgoing; and when Luna – nay, but I mean when the moon has risen to-night so that, standing in the church-yard, you shall see it over the roof of the church, then must you go to the yew-tree that is in the middle of the church-yard, and there you shall scrape away a little of the earth from near the foot of the tree, and

bury this paper, and put the earth firmly down on it again, saying thrice, *Hieronymo! Hieronymo! Hieronymo!* You follow me, sweet lady?"

"'Tis simple enough," said she, "but that on these fine evenings the people are everywhere about; and if one were to be seen conjuring in the church-yard – "

"You must watch your opportunity, my daughter," said he, speaking with an increased assumption of authority. "One minute will serve you; and this is all that needs be done."

"Truly? Is this all?" said she, and she laughed lightly. "Then will my gallant, my pride o' the world, my lord and master, forthwith spring out of the solid ground? God mend me, but that were a fearful meeting – in a church-yard! Gentle wizard, I pray you – "

"Not so," he answered, interrupting her. "The charm will work there; you must let it rest; the night dews shall nourish it; the slow hours shall pass over it; and the spirits that haunt these precincts must know of it, that they may prepare the meeting. To-night, then, sweet lady, you shall place this charm in the church-yard at the foot of the yew-tree, and to-morrow at twelve of the clock – "

"By your leave, not to-morrow," said she, peremptorily. "Not to-morrow, good wizard; for my father comes home to-morrow; and, by my life, I would not miss the going forth to meet him for all the lovers between here and London town!"

"Your father comes home to-morrow, Mistress Judith?" said he, in somewhat startled accents.

"In truth he does; and Master Tyler also, and Julius Shawe – there will be a goodly company, I warrant you, come riding to-morrow through Shipston and Tredington and Alderminster; and by your leave, reverend sir, the magic must wait."

"That were easily done," he answered, after a moment's thought, "by the alteration of a sign, if the day following might find you at liberty. Will it so, gracious lady?"

"The day after! At what time of the day?" she asked.

"The alteration of the sign will make it but an hour earlier, if I mistake not; that is to say, at eleven of the forenoon you must be at the appointed place – "

"Where, good wizard!" said she – "where am I to see the wraith, the ghost, the phantom husband that is to own me?"

"That know I not myself as yet; but my aids and familiars will try to discover it for me," he answered, taking a small sun-dial out of his pocket and adjusting it as he spoke.

"And with haste, so please you, good sir," said she, "for I would not that any chance comer had a tale of this meeting to carry back to the gossips."

He stooped down and placed the sun-dial carefully on the ground, at a spot where the young corn was but scant enough on the dry red soil, and then with his forefinger he traced two or three lines and a semicircle on the crumbling earth.

"South by west," said he, and he muttered some words to himself. Then he looked up. "Know you the road to Bidford, sweet lady?"

"As well as I know my own ten fingers," she answered.

"For myself, I know it not, but if my art is not misleading there should be, about a mile or more along that road, another road at right angles with it, bearing to the right, and there at the junction should stand a cross of stone. Is it so?"

"'Tis the lane that leads to Shottery; well I know it," she said.

"So it has been appointed, then," said he, "if the stars continue their protection over you. The day after to-morrow, at eleven of the forenoon, if you be within stone's-throw of the cross at the junction of the roads, there shall you see, or my art is strangely mistaken, the man or gentleman – nay, I know not whether he be parson or layman, soldier or merchant, knight of the shire or plain goodman Dick – I say there shall you see him that is to win you and wear you; but at what time you shall become his wife, and where, and in what circumstances, I cannot reveal to you. I have done my last endeavor."

"Nay do not hold me ungrateful," she said, though there was a smile on her lips, "but surely, good sir, what your skill has done, that it can also undo. If it have power to raise a ghost, surely it has power to lay him. And truly, if he be a ghost, I will not have him. And if he be a man, and have a red beard, I will not have him. And if he be a slape-face, I will have none of him. And if he have thin legs, he may walk his ways for me. Good wizard, if I like him not, you must undo the charm."

"My daughter, you have a light heart," said he, gravely. "May the favoring planets grant it lead you not into mischief; there be unseen powers that are revengeful. And now I must take my leave, gracious lady. I have given you the result of much study and labor, of much solitary communion with the heavenly bodies; take it, and use it with heed, and so fare you well."

He was going, but she detained him.

"Good sir, I am your debtor," said she, with the red blood mantling in her forehead, for all through this interview she had clearly recognized that she was not dealing with any ordinary mendicant fortune-teller. "So much labor and skill I cannot accept from you without becoming a beggar. I pray you – "

He put up his hand.

"Not so," said he, with a certain grave dignity. "To have set eyes on the fairest maid in Warwickshire – as I have heard you named – were surely sufficient recompense for any trouble; and to have had speech of you, sweet lady, is what many a one would venture much for. But I would humbly kiss your hand; and so again fare you well."

"God shield you, most courteous wizard, and good-day," said she, as he left; and for a second she stood looking after him in a kind of wonder, for this extraordinary courtesy and dignity of manner were certainly not what she had expected to find in a vagabond purveyor of magic. But now he was gone, and she held the charm in her hand, and so without further ado she set out for home again, getting down through the brushwood to the winding path.

She walked quickly, for she had heard that Master Bushell's daughter, who was to be married that day, meant to beg a general holiday for the school-boys; and she knew that if this were granted these sharp-eyed young imps would soon be here, there, and everywhere, and certain to spy out the wizard if he were in the neighborhood. But when she had got clear of this hanging copse, that is known as the Wier Brake, and had reached the open meadows, so that from any part around she could be seen to be alone, she had nothing further to fear, and she returned to her leisurely straying in quest of flowers. The sun was hotter on the grass now; but the swallows were busy as ever over the stream; and the great bees hummed aloud as they went past; and here and there a white butterfly fluttered from petal to petal; and, far away, she could hear the sound of children's voices in the stillness. She was in a gay mood. The interview she had just had with one in league with the occult powers of magic and witchery did not seem in the least to have overawed her. Perhaps, indeed, she had not yet made up her mind to try the potent charm that she had obtained; at all events the question did not weigh heavily on her. For now it was,

Oh, mistress mine, where are you roaming?

and again it was,

For a morn in spring is the sweetest thing
Cometh in all the year!

and always another touch of color added to the daintily arranged nosegay in her hand. And then, of a sudden, as she chanced to look ahead, she observed a number of the school-boys come swarming down to the foot-bridge; and she knew right well that one of them – to wit, young Willie

Hart – would think a holiday quite thrown away and wasted if he did not manage to seek out and secure the company of his pretty cousin Judith.

"Ah! there, now," she was saying to herself, as she watched the school-boys come over the bridge one by one and two by two, "there, now, is my sweetheart of sweethearts; there is my prince of lovers! If ever I have lover as faithful and kind as he, it will go well. 'Nay, Susan,' says he, 'I love you not; you kiss me hard, and speak to me as if I were still a child; I love Judith better.' And how cruel of my father to put him in the play, and to slay him so soon; but perchance he will call him to life again – nay, it is a favorite way with him to do that; and pray Heaven he bring home with him to-morrow the rest of the story, that Prue may read it to me. And so are you there, among the unruly imps, you young Prince Mamillius? Have you caught sight of me yet, sweetheart blue-eyes? Why, come, then; you will outstrip them all, I know, when you get sight of Cousin Judith; for as far off as yon are, you will reach me first, that I am sure of; and then, by my life, sweetheart Willie, you shall have a kiss as soft as a dove's breast!"

And so she went on to meet them, arranging the colors of her straggling blossoms the while, with now and again a snatch of careless song:

Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn, hunter!
Come, blow thy horn – jolly hunter!

CHAPTER II. SIGNIOR CRAB-APPLE

There was much ado in the house all that day, in view of the home-coming on the morrow, and it was not till pretty late in the evening that Judith was free to steal out for a gossip with her friend and chief companion, Prudence Shawe. She had not far to go – but a couple of doors off, in fact; and her coming was observed by Prudence herself, who happened to be sitting at the casement window for the better prosecution of her needle-work, there being still a clear glow of twilight in the sky. A minute or so thereafter the two friends were in Prudence's own chamber, which was on the first floor, and looking out to the back over barns and orchards; and they had gone to the window, to the bench there, to have their secrets together. This Prudence Shawe was some two years Judith's junior – though she really played the part of elder sister to her; she was of a pale complexion, with light straw-colored hair; not very pretty, perhaps, but she had a restful kind of face that invited friendliness and sympathy, of which she had a large abundance to give in return. Her custom was of a Puritanical plainness and primness, both in the fashion of it and in its severe avoidance of color; and that was not the only point on which she formed a marked contrast to this dear cousin and wilful gossip of hers, who had a way of pleasing herself (more especially if she thought she might thereby catch her father's eye) in apparel as in most other things. And on this occasion – at the outset at all events – Judith would not have a word said about the assignation of the morning. The wizard was dismissed from her mind altogether. It was about the home-coming of the next day that she was all eagerness and excitement; and her chief prayer and entreaty was that her friend Prudence should go with her to welcome the travellers home.

"Nay, but you must and shall, dear Prue; sweet mouse, I beg it of you!" she was urging. "Every one at New Place is so busy that they have fixed upon Signior Crab-apple to ride with me; and you know I cannot suffer him; and I shall not have a word of my father all the way back, not a word; there will be nothing but a discourse about fools, and idle jests, and wiseman Matthew the hero of the day – "

"Dear Judith, I cannot understand how you dislike the old man so," her companion said, in that smooth voice of hers. "I see no garden that is better tended than yours."

"I would I could let slip the mastiff at his unmannerly throat!" was the quick reply – and indeed for a second she looked as if she would fain have seen that wish fulfilled. "The vanity of him! – the puffed-up pride of him. – he thinks there be none in Warwickshire but himself wise enough to talk to my father; and the way he dogs his steps if he be walking in the garden – no one else may have a word with him! – sure my father is sufficiently driven forth by the preachers and the psalm-singing within-doors that out-of-doors, in his own garden, he might have some freedom of speech with his own daughter – "

"Judith, Judith," her friend said, and she put her hand on her arm, "you have such wilful thoughts, and wild words too. I am sure your father is free of speech with every one – gentle and simple, old and young, it matters not who it is that approaches him."

"This Signior Crab-apple truly!" the other exclaimed, in the impetuosity of her scorn. "If his heart be as big as a crab-apple, I greatly doubt; but that it is of like quality I'll be sworn. And the bitterness of his railing tongue! All women are fools – vools he calls them, rather – first and foremost; and most men are fools; but of all fools there be none like the fools of Warwickshire – that is because my worshipful goodman gardener comes all the way from Bewdley. 'Tis meat and drink to him, he says, to discover a fool, though how he should have any difficulty in the discovering, seeing that we are all of us fools, passes my understanding. Nay, but I know what set him after that quarry; 'twas one day in the garden, and my father was just come home from London, and he was talking to my

uncle Gilbert, and was laughing at what his friend Benjamin Jonson had said, or had written, I know not which. 'Of all beasts in the world,' says he, 'I love most the serious ass.' Then up steps goodman Matthew. 'There be plenty of 'em about 'ere, zur,' says he, with a grin on his face like that on a cat when a dog has her by the tail. And my father, who will talk to any one, as you say truly, and about anything, and always with the same attention, must needs begin to challenge goodman Crab-apple to declare the greatest fools that ever he had met with; and from that day to this the ancient sour-face hath been on the watch – and it suits well with his opinion of other people and his opinion of himself as the only wise man in the world – I say ever since he hath been on the watch for fools; and the greater the fool the greater his wisdom, I reckon, that can find him out. A purveyor of fools! – a goodly trade! I doubt not but that it likes him better than the tending of apricots when he has the free range of the ale-houses to work on. He will bring a couple of them into the garden when my father is in the summer-house. "Ere, zur, please you come out and look 'ere, zur; 'ere be a brace of rare vools.' And the poor clowns are proud of it; they stand and look at each other and laugh. 'We be, zur – we be.' And then my father will say no, and will talk with them, and cheer them with assurance of their wisdom; then must they have spiced bread and ale ere they depart; and this is a triumph for Master Matthew – the withered, shrivelled, dried-up, cankered nutshell that he is!"

"Dear Judith, pray have patience – indeed you are merely jealous."

"Jealous!" she exclaimed, as if her scorn of this ill-conditioned old man put that well out of the question.

"You think he has too much of your father's company, and you like it not; but consider of it, Judith, he being in the garden, and your father in the summer-house, and when your father is tired for the moment of his occupation, whatever that may be, then can he step out and speak to this goodman Matthew, that amuses him with his biting tongue, and with the self-sufficiency of his wisdom – nay, I suspect your father holds him to be a greater fool than any that he makes sport of, and that he loves to lead him on."

"And why should my father have to be in the summer-house but that in-doors the wool-spinning is hardly more constant than the lecturing and the singing of psalms and hymns?"

"Judith! Judith!" said her gentle friend, with real trouble on her face, "you grieve me when you talk like that – indeed you do, sweetheart! There is not a morning nor a night passes that I do not pray the Lord that your heart may be softened and led to our ways – nay, far from that, but to the Lord's own ways – and the answer will come; I have faith; I know it; and God send it speedily, for you are like an own sister to me, and my heart yearns over you!"

The other sat silent for a second. She could not fail to be touched by the obvious sincerity, the longing kindness of her friend, but she would not confess as much in words.

"As yet, sweet Prue," said she, lightly, "I suppose I am of the unregenerate, and if it is wicked to cherish evil thoughts of your neighbor, then am I not of the elect, for I heartily wish that Tom Quiney and some of the youths would give Matthew gardener a sound ducking in a horse-pond, to tame his arrogance withal. But no matter. What say you, dear Prue? Will you go with me to-morrow, so that we may have the lad Tookey in charge of us, and Signior Crab-apple be left to his weeding and grafting and railing at human kind? Do, sweet mouse –"

"The maids are busy now, Judith," said she, doubtfully.

"But a single day, dear mouse!" she urged. "And if we go early we may get as far as Shipston, and await them there. Have you no desire to meet your brother, Prudence – to be the first of all to welcome him home? Nay, that is because you can have him in your company as often as you wish; there is no goodman-wiseman-fool to come between you."

"Dear heart," said Prudence Shawe, with a smile, "I know not what is the witchery of you, but there is none I wot of that can say you nay."

"You will, then?" said the other, joyfully. "Ah, look, now, the long ride home we shall have with my father, and all the news I shall have to tell him! And all good news, Prue; scarcely a whit or

bit that is not good news: the roan that he bought at Evesham is well of her lameness – good; and the King's mulberry is thriving bravely (I wonder that wiseman Matthew has not done it a mischief in the night-time, for the King, being above him in station, must needs have nothing from him but sour and envious words); and then the twenty acres that my father so set his heart upon he is to have – I hear that the Combes have said as much – and my father will be right well pleased; and the vicar is talking no longer of building the new piggery over against the garden – at least for the present there is nothing to be done: all good news; but there is better still, as you know; for what will he say when he discovers that I have taught Bess Hall to ride the mastiff?"

"Pray you have a care, dear Judith," said her friend, with some apprehension on her face. "'Tis a dangerous-looking beast."

"A lamb, a very lamb!" was the confident answer. "Well, now, and as we are riding home he will tell me of all the things he has brought from London; and you know he has always something pretty for you, sweet Puritan, though you regard such adornment as snares and pitfalls. And this time I hope it will be a silver brooch for you, dear mouse, that so you must needs wear it and show it, or he will mark its absence; and for the others let us guess; let us see. There may be some more of that strange-fashioned Murano glass for Susan, for as difficult as it is to carry; and some silk hangings or the like for my mother, or store of napery, perchance, which she prizeth more; and be sure there is the newest book of sermons from Paul's Churchyard for the Doctor; a greyhound, should he hear of a famous one on the way, for Thomas Combe; toys for the little Harts, that is certain; for my aunt Joan – what? – a silver-topped jug, or some perfumes of musk and civet? – and what else – and for whom else – well –"

"But what for yourself, dear Judith?" her friend said, with a smile. "Will he forget you? Has Matthew gardener driven you out even from his recollection? Will he not have for you a pretty pair of rose shoe-strings, or one of the new tasselled French hoods they are speaking of, or something of the kind, that will turn the heads of all the lads in Stratford twice further round? You are a temptress surely, sweetheart; I half forget that such vanities should displease me when I see the way you wear them; and that I think you must take from your father, Judith; for no matter how plain his apparel is – and it is plain indeed for one that owns the New Place – he wears it with such an ease, and with such a grace and simplicity, that you would say a prince should wear it even so."

"You put me off, Prue," her friend said with a sort of good-natured impatience. "Why, I was showing you what nicelings and delicates my father was bringing, and what I had thought to say was this: that he may have this for one, and that for the other, and many a one proud to be remembered (as I shall be if he thinks of me), but this that I know he is bringing for little Bess Hall is something worth all of these, for it is nothing less than the whole love of his heart. Nay, but I swear it; there is not a human creature in the world to compare with her in his eyes; she is the pearl that he wears in his heart of hearts. If it were London town she wanted, and he could give it to her, that is what he would bring for her."

"What! are you jealous of her too?" said Prudence, with her placid smile.

"By yea and nay, sweet Puritan, if that will content you, I declare it is not so," was the quick answer. "Why, Bess is my ally! We are in league, I tell you; we will have a tussle with the enemy ere long; and, by my life, I think I know that that will put goodman-wiseman's nose awry!"

At this moment the secret confabulation of these two friends was suddenly and unexpectedly broken in upon by a message from without. Something white came fluttering through the open casement, and fell, not quite into Judith's lap, which was probably its intended destination, but down toward her feet. She stooped and picked it up; it was a letter, addressed to her, and tied round with a bit of rose-red silk ribbon that was neatly formed into a true-lover's knot.

CHAPTER III. THE PLANTING OF THE CHARM

The embarrassment that ensued – on her part only, for the pale and gentle face of her friend betrayed not even so much as surprise – was due to several causes. Judith could neither read nor write. In her earlier years she had been a somewhat delicate child, and had consequently been excused from the ordinary tuition, slight as that usually was in the case of girls; but when, later on, she grew into quite firm and robust health, in her wilfulness and pride and petulance she refused to retransform herself into a child and submit to be taught children's lessons. Moreover, she had an acute and alert brain; and she had a hundred reasons ready to show that what was in reality a mere waywardness on her part was the most wise and natural thing in the world; while her father, who had a habitual and great tolerance for everything and everybody that came within his reach, laughed with her rather than at her, and said she should do very well without book-learning so long as those pink roses shone in her cheeks. But she had one reason that was not merely an excuse. Most of the printed matter that reached the house was brought thither by this or that curate, or by this or that famous preacher, who, in going through the country, was sure of an eager and respectful welcome at New Place; and perhaps it was not kindly nor civilly done of them – though it may have been regarded as a matter of conscience – that they should carry thither and read aloud, among other things, the fierce denunciations of stage-plays and stage-players which were common in the polemical and puritanical literature of the day. Right or wrong, Judith resented this with a vehement indignation; and she put a ban upon all books, judging by what she had heard read out of some; nay, one day she had come into the house and found her elder sister, who was not then married, greatly distressed, and even in the bitterness of tears; and when she discovered that the cause of this was a pamphlet that had been given to Susanna, in which not only were the heinous wickednesses of plays and players denounced, but also her own father named by his proper name, Judith, with hot cheeks and flashing eyes, snatched the pamphlet from her sister's hand and forthwith sent it flying through the open window into the mud without, notwithstanding that books and pamphlets were scarce and valuable things, and that this one had been lent. And when she discovered that this piece of writing had been brought to the house by the pious and learned Walter Blaise – a youthful divine he was who had a small living some few miles from Stratford, but who dwelt in the town, and was one of the most eager and disputatious of the Puritanical preachers there – it in no way mitigated her wrath that this worthy Master Blaise was regarded by many, and even openly spoken of, as a suitor for her own hand.

"God mend me," said she, in her anger (and greatly to the distress of the mild-spoken Prudence), "but 'tis a strange way of paying court to a young woman to bring into the house abuse of her own father! Sir Parson may go hang, for me!" And for many a day she would have nothing to say to him; and steeled and hardened her heart not only against him, but against the doctrines and ways of conduct that he so zealously advocated; and she would not come in to evening prayers when he happened to be present; and wild horses would not have dragged her to the parish church on the Sunday afternoon that it was his turn to deliver the fortnightly lecture there. However, these things abated in time. Master Walter Blaise was a civil-spoken and an earnest and sincere young man, and Prudence Shawe was the gentle intermediary. Judith suffered his presence, and that was about all as yet; but she would not look the way of printed books. And when Prudence tried to entice her into a study of the mere rudiments of reading and writing, she would refuse peremptorily, and say, with a laugh, that, could she read, the first thing she should read would be plays, which, as sweet cousin Prue was aware, were full of tribulation and anguish, and fit only for the foolish Galatians of the world, the children of darkness and the devil. But this obstinacy did not prevent her overcoming her dear cousin Prue's scruples, and getting her to read aloud to her in the privacy of their secret haunts this or the

other fragments of a play, when that she had adroitly purloined a manuscript from the summer-house in New Place; and in this surreptitious manner she had acquired a knowledge of what was going on at the Globe and the Blackfriars theatres in London, which, had they but guessed of it, would have considerably astounded her mother, her sister, and good Parson Blaise as well.

In more delicate matters still, Prudence was her confidante, her intermediary, and amanuensis: and ordinarily this caused her no embarrassment, for she wished for no secrets with any of human kind. But in one direction she had formed certain suspicions; and so it was that on this occasion, when she stooped down and picked up the letter that had been so deftly thrown in at the casement, her face flushed somewhat.

"I know from whom it comes," said she, and she seemed inclined to put it into the little wallet of blue satin that hung at her side.

Then she glanced at Prudence's eyes. There was nothing there in the least approaching displeasure or pique, only a quiet amusement.

"It was cleverly done," said Prudence, and she raised her head cautiously and peeped through one of the small panes of pale green glass. But the twilight had sunk into dusk, and any one outside could easily have made his escape unperceived through the labyrinth of barns and outhouses.

Judith glanced at the handwriting again, and said, with an affectation of carelessness:

"There be those who have plenty of time, surely, for showing the wonders of their skill. Look at the twisting and turning and lattice-work of it – truly he is a most notable clerk; I would he spent the daylight to better purpose. Read it for me, sweet Prue."

She would have handed the letter – with much studied indifference of look and manner – to her friend, but that Prudence gently refused it.

"'Tis you must undo the string; you know not what may be inside."

So Judith herself opened the letter, which contained merely a sprig of rosemary, along with some lines written in a most ornate calligraphy.

"What does he say?" she asked, but without any apparent interest, as she gave the open letter to her companion.

Prudence took the letter and read aloud;

"Rosemary is for remembrance
Between us day and night;
Wishing that I might always have
You present in my sight.

This from your true well-wisher, and one that would be your loving servant
unto death.

T. Q."

"The idle boy!" she said, and again she directed a quick and penetrating look of inquiry to her friend's face. But Prudence was merely regarding the elaborate handwriting. There was no trace of wounded pride or anything of the kind in her eyes. Nay, she looked up and said, with a smile,

"For one that can wrestle so well, and play at foot-ball, and throw the sledge as they say he can, he is master of a most delicate handwriting."

"But the rosemary, Prue!" Judith exclaimed, suddenly, and she groped about at her feet until she had found it. "Why, now, look there, was ever anything so fortunate? Truly I had forgotten all about rosemary, and my reverend wizard, and the charm that is to be buried to-night; and you know not a word of the story. Shall I tell you, sweet mouse? Is there time before the moon appears over the roof of the church? – for there I am summoned to fearful deeds. Why, Prue, you look as frightened

as if a ghost had come into the room – you yourself are like a ghost now in the dusk – or is it the coming moonlight that is making you so pale?"

"I had thought that better counsels would have prevailed with you, Judith," she said, anxiously. "I knew not you had gone to see the man, and I reproach myself that I have been an agent in the matter."

"A mouth-piece only, sweet Prue! – a mere harmless, innocent whistle that had nothing to do with the tune. And the business was not so dreadful either; there was no caldron, nor playing with snakes and newts, no, nor whining for money, which I expected most; but a most civil and courteous wizard, a most town-bred wizard as ever the sun set eye on, that called me 'gracious lady' every other moment, and would not take a penny for his pains. Marry, if all the powers of evil be as well-behaved, I shall have less fear of them; for a more civil-spoken gentleman I have never encountered; and 'sweet lady' it was, and 'gracious lady,' and a voice like the voice of my lord bishop; and the assurance that the planets and the stars were holding me in their kindest protection; and a promise of a ghost husband that is to appear that I may judge whether I like him or like him not; and all this and more – and he would kiss my hand, and so farewell, and the reverend magician makes his obeisance and vanishes, and I am not a penny the poorer, but only the richer because of my charm! There, I will show it to you, dear mouse."

After a little search she found the tiny document; and Prudence Shawe glanced over it.

"Judith! Judith!" said she, almost in despair, "I know not whither your wilfulness will carry you. But tell me what happened. How came you by this paper? And what ghost husband do you speak of?"

Then Judith related, with much circumstantiality, what had occurred that morning: not toning it down in the least, but rather exaggerating here and there; for she was merry-hearted, and she liked to see the sweet Puritan face grow more and more concerned. Moreover, the dull gray light outside, instead of deepening into dark, appeared to be becoming a trifle clearer, so that doubtless the moon was declaring itself somewhere; and she was looking forward, when the time came, to securing Prudence's company as far as the church-yard, if her powers of persuasion were equal to that.

"But you will not go – surely you will not go, darling Judith," said Prudence, in accents of quite pathetic entreaty. "You know the sin of dealing with such ungodly practices – nay, and the danger too, for you would of your own free will go and seek a meeting with unholy things, whereas I have been told that not so long ago they used in places to carry a pan of frankincense round the house each night to keep away witchcraft from them as they slept. I beseech you, dearest Judith, give me the paper, and I will burn it!"

"Nay, nay, it is but an idle tale, a jest; I trust it not," said her friend to reassure her. "Be not afraid, sweet Prue. Those people who go about compelling the planets and summoning spirits and the like have lesser power than the village folk imagine, else would their own affairs thrive better than they seem to do."

"Then give me the paper; let me burn it, Judith!"

"Nay, nay, mouse," said she, withholding it; and then she added, with a sort of grave merriment or mischief in her face:

"Whether the thing be aught or naught, sure I cannot treat so ill my courteous wizard. He was no goose-herd, I tell you, but a most proper and learned man; and he must have the chance of working the wonders he foretold. Come, now, think of it with reason, dear Prue. If there be no power in the charm, if I go to Shottery for my morning walk and find no one in the lane, who is harmed? Why, no one; and Grandmother Hathaway is pleased, and will show me how her garden is growing. Then, on the other hand, should the charm work, should there be some one there, what evil if I regard him as I pass from the other side of the way? Is it such a wonder that one should meet a stranger on the Bidford road? And what more? Man or ghost, he cannot make me marry him if I will not. He cannot make me speak to him if I will not. And if he would put a hand on me, I reckon Roderigo would speedily have him by the throat, as I hope he may some day have Goodman Matthew."

"But, Judith, such things are unlawful and forbidden – "

"To you, sweet saint – to you," said the other, with much good-humor. "But I have not learned to put aside childish things as yet; and this is only a jest, good Prue; and you, that are so faithful to your word, even in the smallest trifle, would not have me break my promise to my gentle wizard? 'Gracious lady,' he says, and 'sweet lady,' as if I were a dame of the court; it were unmannerly of me not to grant him this small demand – "

"I wish I had misread the letter," said Prudence, so occupied with her own fears that she scarcely knew what to do.

"What!" exclaimed her friend, in tones of raillery, "you would have deceived me? Is this your honesty, your singleness of heart, sweet Puritan? You would have sent me on some fool's errand, would you?"

"And if it were to be known you had gone out to meet this conjurer, Judith, what would your mother and sister say? – and your father?"

"My mother and sister – hum!" was the demure reply. "If he had but come in the garb of a preacher, with a Bible under one arm and a prayer-book under the other, I doubt not that he would have been welcome enough at New Place – ay, and everything in the house set before him, and a Flanders jug full of Quiney's best claret withal to cheer the good man. But when you speak of my father, dear Prue, there you are wide of the mark – wide, wide of the mark; for the wizard is just such an one as he would be anxious to know and see for himself. Indeed, if my mother and Susan would have the house filled with preachers, my father would rather seek his company from any strange kind of vagrant cattle you could find on the road – ballad-singers, strolling players, peddlers, and the like; and you should see him when some ancient harper in his coat of green comes near the town – nay, the constable shall not interfere with him, license or no license – my father must needs entertain him in the garden; and he will sit and talk to the old man; and the best in the house must be brought out for him; and whether he try his palsied fingers on the strings, or perchance attempt a verse of 'Pastime with good company' with his quavering old voice, that is according to his own good-will and pleasure; nothing is demanded of him but that he have good cheer, and plenty of it, and go on his way the merrier, with a groat or two in his pouch. Nay, I mind me, when Susan was remonstrating with my father about such things, and bidding him have some regard for the family name – 'What?' says he, laughing; 'set you up, Madam Pride! Know you not, then, whence comes our name? And yet 'tis plain enough. *Shacks*, these are but vagrant, idle, useless fellows; and then we come to *pere*, that is, an equal and companion. There you have it complete —*Shackspere*, the companion of strollers and vagabonds, of worthless and idle fellows. What say you, Madam Pride?' And, indeed, poor Susan was sorely displeased, insomuch that I said, 'But the spear in the coat of arms, father – how came we by that?' 'Why, there, now,' says he, 'you see how regardless the heralds are of the King's English. I warrant me they would give a ship to Shipston and a hen to Enstone.' Indeed, he will jest you out of anything. When your brother would have left the Town Council, Prue – "

But here she seemed suddenly to recollect herself. She rose quickly, thrust open the casement still wider, and put out her head to discover whereabouts the moon was; and when she withdrew her head again there was mischief and a spice of excitement in her face.

"No more talking and gossip now, Prue; the time has arrived for fearful deeds."

Prudence put her small white hand on her friend's arm.

"Stay, Judith. Be guided – for the love of me be guided, sweetheart! You know not what you do. The profaning of sacred places will bring a punishment."

"Profaning, say you, sweet mouse? Is it anything worse than the children playing tick round the grave-stones; or even, when no one is looking, having a game of King-by-your-leave?"

"It is late, Judith. It must be nine o'clock. It is not seemly that a young maiden should be out-of-doors alone at such an hour of the night."

"Marry, that say I," was the light answer. "And the better reason that you should come with me, Prue."

"I?" said Prudence, in affright.

"Wherefore not, then? Nay, but you shall suffer no harm through the witchery, sweet mouse; I ask your company no further than the little swing-gate. One minute there, and I shall be back with you. Come, now, for your friend's sake; get your hood and your muffler, dear Prue, and no one shall know either of us from the witch of Endor, so quickly shall we be there and back."

Still she hesitated.

"If your mother were to know, Judith – "

"To know what, sweetheart? That you walked with me as far as the church and back again? Why, on such a fine and summer-like night I dare be sworn, now, that half the good folk of Stratford are abroad; and it is no such journey into a far country that we should take one of the maids with us. Nay, come, sweet Prue! We shall have a merry ride to-morrow; to-night for your friendship's sake you must do me this small service."

Prudence did not answer, but somewhat thoughtfully, and even reluctantly, she went to a small cupboard of boxes that stood in the corner of the apartment, and brought forth some articles of attire which (although she might not have confessed it) were for the better disguising of herself, seeing that the night was fine and warm. And then Judith, having also drawn a muffler loosely round her neck and the lower half of her face, was ready to go, and was gone, in fact, as far as the door, when she suddenly said:

"Why, now, I had nearly forgot the rosemary, and without that the charm is naught. Did I leave it on the window-shelf?"

She went back and found it, and this time she took the precaution of folding it within the piece of paper that she was to bury in the church-yard.

"Is it fair, dear Judith?" Prudence said, reproachfully, before she opened the door. "Is it right that you should take the bit of rosemary sent you by one lover, and use it as a charm to bring another?"

"Nay, why should you concern yourself, sweet mouse?" said Judith, with a quick glance, but indeed at this end of the room it was too dark for her to see anything. "My lover, say you? Let that be as the future may show. In the meantime I am pledged to no one, nor anxious that I should be so. And a scrap of rosemary, now, what is it? But listen to this, dear Prue: if it help to show me the man I shall marry – if there be aught in this magic – will it not be better for him that sent the rosemary that we should be aware of what is in store for us?"

"I know not – I scarcely ever know – whether you are in jest or in earnest, Judith," her friend said.

"Why, then, I am partly in starched cambric, good mouse, if you must know, and partly in damask, and partly in taffeta of popinjay blue. But come, now, let us be going. The awful hour approaches, Prue. Do you not tremble, like Faustus in the cell? What was't he said?

It strikes; it strikes. Now, body, turn to air!

Come along, sweet Prue."

But she was silent as they left. Indeed, they went down the dark little staircase and out at the front door with as little noise as might be. Judith had not been mistaken: the fine, clear, warm evening had brought out many people; and they were either quietly walking home or standing in dusky little groups at the street corners talking to each other; whilst here and there came a laugh from a ruddy-windowed ale-house; and here and there a hushed sound of singing, where a casement had been left a bit open, told that the family within were at their devotional exercises for the night. The half-moon was now clear and silvery in the heavens. As they passed under the massive structure of the Guild Chapel the upper portions of the tall windows had a pale greenish glow shining through them

that made the surrounding shadows look all the more solemn. Whether it was that their mufflers effectually prevented their being recognized, or whether it was that none of their friends happened to be abroad, they passed along without attracting notice from any one, nor was a word spoken between themselves for some time.

But when they drew near to the church, the vast bulk of which, towering above the trees around, seemed almost black against the palely clear sky, the faithful Prudence made bold to put in a final word of remonstrance and dissuasion.

"It is wickedness and folly, Judith. Naught can come of such work," she said.

"Then let naught come of it, and what harm is done?" her companion said, gayly. "Dear mouse, are you so timorous? Nay, but you shall not come within the little gate; you shall remain without. And if the spirits come and snatch me, as they snatched off Doctor Faustus, you shall see all the pageant, and not a penny to pay. What was it in the paper?"

'Pinch him black, and pinch him blue,
That seeks to steal a lover true!'

Did it not run so? But they cannot pinch you, dear heart; so stand here now, and hush! – pray do not scream if you see them whip me off in a cloud of fire – and I shall be with you again in a minute."

She passed through the little swinging gate and entered the church-yard, casting therewith a quick glance around. Apparently no one was within sight of her, either among the gray stones or under the black-stemmed elms by the river; but there were people not far off, for she could hear their voices – doubtless they were going home through the meadows on the other side of the stream. She looked but once in that direction. The open country was lying pale and clear in the white light; and under the wide branches of the elms one or two bats were silently darting to and fro; but she could not see the people, and she took it for granted that no one could now observe what she was about. So she left the path, made her way through the noiseless grass, and reached the small yew-tree standing there among the grave-stones. The light was clear enough to allow her to open the package and make sure that the sprig of rosemary was within; then she rapidly, with her bare hand, stooped down and scooped a little of the earth away; she imbedded the packet there, repeating meanwhile the magic words; she replaced the earth, and brushed the long grass over it, so that, indeed, as well as she could make out, the spot looked as if it had not been disturbed in any manner. And then, with a quick look toward the roof of the church to satisfy herself that all the conditions had been fulfilled, she got swiftly back to the path again, and so to the little gate, passing through the church-yard like a ghost.

"The deed is done, good Prue," said she, gayly, but in a tragic whisper, as she linked her arm within the arm of her friend and set out homeward. "Now are the dark powers of the earth at league to raise me up – what think you, sweetheart? – such a gallant as the world ne'er saw! Ah! now when you see him come riding in from Shottery, will not the town stare? None of your logget-playing, tavern-jesting, come-kiss-me-Moll lovers, but a true-sworn knight on his white war steed, in shining mail, with a golden casque on his head and ostrich feathers, and on his silver shield 'St. George and England!'"

"You are light-hearted, Judith," said the timid and gentle-voiced Puritan by her side; "and in truth there is nothing that you fear. Well, I know not, but it will be in my prayers that no harm come of this night."

CHAPTER IV. A PAGEANT

On the morning after the arrival of Judith's father he was out and abroad with his bailiff at an early hour, so that she had no chance of speaking to him; and when he returned to New Place he went into the summer-house in the orchard, where it was the general habit and custom to leave him undisturbed. And yet she only wished to ask permission to take the mastiff with her as far as Shottery; and so, when she had performed her share of the domestic duties, and got herself ready, she went out through the back court and into the garden, thinking that he would not mind so brief an interruption.

It was a fresh and pleasant morning, for there had been some rain in the night, and now there was a slight breeze blowing from the south, and the air was sweet with the scent of the lilac bushes. The sun lay warm on the pink and white blossoms of the apple-trees and on the creamy masses of the cherry; martins were skimming and shooting this way and that, with now and again a rapid flight to the eaves of the barn; the bees hummed from flower to flower, and everywhere there was a chirping, and twittering, and clear singing of birds. The world seemed full of light and color, of youth, and sweet things, and gladness: on such a morning she had no fear of a refusal, nor was she much afraid to go near the summer-house that the family were accustomed to hold sacred from intrusion.

But when she passed into the orchard, and came in sight of it, there was a sudden flash of anger in her eyes. She might have guessed – she might have known. There, blocking up the doorway of the latticed and green-painted tenement, was the figure of goodman Matthew; and the little bandy-legged pippin-faced gardener was coolly resting on his spade while he addressed his master within. Was there ever (she asked herself) such hardihood, such audacity and impertinence? And then she rapidly bethought her that now was a rare opportunity for putting in practice a scheme of revenge that she had carefully planned. It is true that she might have gone forward and laid her finger on Matthew's arm (he was rather deaf), and so have motioned him away. But she was too proud to do that. She would dispossess and rout him in another fashion. So she turned and went quickly again into the house.

Now at this time Dr. Hall was making a round of professional visits at some distance away in the country; and on such occasions Susanna Hall and her little daughter generally came to lodge at New Place, where Judith was found to be an eager and assiduous, if somewhat impatient and unreasoning, nurse, playmate, and music-mistress. In fact, the young mother had to remonstrate with her sister, and to point out that, although baby Elizabeth was a wonder of intelligence and cleverness – indeed, such a wonder as had never hitherto been beheld in the world – still, a child of two years and three months or so could not be expected to learn everything all at once; and that it was just as reasonable to ask her to play on the lute as to imagine that she could sit on the back of Don the mastiff without being held. However, Judith was fond of the child, and that incomparable and astute small person had a great liking for her aunt (in consequence of benefits received), and a trust in her which the wisdom of maturer years might have modified; and so, whenever she chose, Judith found no difficulty in obtaining possession of this precious charge, even the young mother showing no anxiety when she saw the two go away together.

So it was on this particular morning that Judith went and got hold of little Bess Hall, and quickly smartened up her costume, and carried her out into the garden. Then she went into the barn, outside of which was the dog's kennel; she unclasped the chain and set free the huge, slow-stepping, dun-colored beast, that seemed to know as well as any one what was going forward; she affixed to his collar two pieces of silk ribbon that did very well for reins; and then she sat little Bess Hall on Don Roderigo's back, and gave her the reins to hold, and so they set out for the summer-house.

On that May morning the wide and gracious realm of England – which to some minds, and especially at that particular season of the year, seems the most beautiful country of any in the world

– this rich and variegated England lay basking in the sunlight, with all its lush meadows and woods and hedges in the full and fresh luxuriance of the spring; and the small quiet hamlets were busy in a drowsy and easy-going kind of fashion; and far away around the white coasts the blue sea was idly murmuring in; but it may be doubted whether in all the length and breadth of that fair land there was any fairer sight than this that the wit of a young woman had devised. She herself was pleasant enough to look on (and she was always particularly attentive about her attire when her father was at home), and now she was half laughing as she thought of her forthcoming revenge; she had dressed her little niece in her prettiest costume of pink and white, and pink was the color of the silken reins; while the great slow-footed Don bore his part in the pageant with a noble majesty, sometimes looking up at Judith as if to ask whether he were going in the right direction. And so the procession passed on between the white-laden cherry-trees and the redder masses of the apple-blossom; and the miniature Ariadne, sitting sideways on the back of the great beast, betrayed no fear whatsoever; while her aunt Judith held her, walking by her, and scolding her for that she would not sing.

"Tant sing, Aunt Judith," said she.

"You can sing well enough, you little goose, if you try," said her aunt, with the unreasoning impatience of an unmarried young woman. "What's the use of your going hunting without a hunting song? Come along, now:

'The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day; – '

try it, Bess!"

"Hunt is up, hunt is up," said the small rider; but she was occupied with the reins, and clearly did not want to be bothered.

"No, no, that is not singing, little goose. Why, sing it like this, now:

'The hunt is up, the hunt is up,
And it is well-nigh day; —
And Harry our king is gone hunting
To bring his deer to bay!'"

However, the music lesson came to an abrupt end. They had by this time almost reached the summer-house. Saturnine Matthew, gardener, who still stood there, blocking up the doorway, had not heard them approach, but his master within had. The next instant Goodman Matthew suddenly found himself discarded, dismissed, and treated, indeed, as if he were simply non-existent in the world; for Judith's father, having paused for a moment to regard from the doorway the pretty pageant that had been arranged for him (and his face lit up, as it were, with pleasure at the sight), was the next minute down beside his little granddaughter, with one knee on the ground, so that he was just on a level with her outstretched hands.

"What, Bess?" he said, as he caught her by both hands and feet. "You imp, you inch, you elfin queen, you! – would you go a-hunting, then?"

"Send away Don – me want to ride the high horse," said the small Bess, who had her own ideas as to what was most comfortable, and also secure.

"And so you shall, you sprite, you Ariel, you moonlight wonder!" he exclaimed, as he perched her on his shoulder and rose to his feet again. "The high horse, truly; indeed, you shall ride the high horse! Come, now, we will go see how the King's mulberry thrives; that is the only tree we have that is younger than yourself, you ancient, you beldame, you witch of Endor, you!"

"Father," said Judith, seeing that he was going away perfectly regardless of anybody or anything except his granddaughter, "may I take the Don with me for an hour or so?"

"Whither away, wench – whither?" he asked, turning for a moment.

"To Shottery, father."

"Well, well," said he, and he turned again and went off.

"Come, Bess, you world's jewel, you, you shall ride with me to London some day, and tell the King how his mulberry thrives; that shall you, you fairy, you princess, you velvet-footed maidiekin! To London, Bess – to London!"

Judith did not stay to regard them further; but she could not help casting a look before she left at goodman Matthew, who stood there discomfited, dispossessed, unheeded, annihilated, as it were. And then, calling the dog after her, she went in by the back court and through the house again (for Chapel Lane was in a sad condition after the rain of the night, and was not a pleasant pathway even in the best of times). And she was laughing to herself at Matthew's discomfiture, and she was singing to herself as she went out by the front door,

There's never a maid in all the town,
But well she knows that malt's come down.

And in the street it was "Good-morrow to you, Master Jelleyman; the rain will do good, will it not?" and, again, "Good-morrow, Neighbor Pike; do you know that my father is come home?" and again, "Get you within the doorway, little Parsons, else the wagon-wheels will be over thee." And then, when she was in the freedom of the fields, she would talk blithely to Don Roderigo, or snatch a buttercup here or there from among the long, lush, warm grass, or return to her careless singing:

For malt's come down, and malt's come down —
Oh, well she knows that malt's come down!

CHAPTER V. IN A WOODED LANE

Now it would be extremely difficult to say with what measure of faith or scepticism, of expectation or mere curiosity, she was now proceeding through these meadows to the spot indicated to her by the wizard. Probably she could not have told herself, for what was really uppermost in her mind was a kind of malicious desire to frighten her timid Puritan friend with the wildness of such an adventure. And then she was pretty safe. Ostensibly she was going to Shottery to pay a visit to her grandmother; to look at the pansies, the wall-flowers, the forget-me-nots in the little garden, and see how the currants and raspberries were getting on. She could hardly expect a ghost to rise from the ground in broad daylight. And if any mere strangers happened to be coming along the lane leading in from the Bidford road, Don Roderigo was a sufficient guardian. On the other hand, if there was anything real and of verity in this witchcraft – which had sought her, and not she it – was it not possible that the wizard might on one point have been mistaken? If her future husband were indeed to appear, would it not be much more likely to be Parson Blaise or Tom Quiney, or young Jelleyman, or one or other of them that she knew in everyday life? But yet she said to herself – and there was no doubt about her absolute conviction and certainty on this point – that, even if she were to meet one of those coming in from Evesham, not all the magic and mystery and wizardry in the world would drive her to marry him but of her own free good-will and choice.

When she had passed through the meadows and got near to the scattered cottages and barns and orchards of the little hamlet, instead of going forward to these, she bore away to the left, and eventually found herself in a wide and wooded lane. She was less light of heart now; she wished the place were not so still and lonely. It was a pretty lane, this; the ruddy-gray road that wound between luxuriant hedges and tall elms was barred across by alternate sunlight and shadow, and every now and again she had glimpses of the rich and fertile country lying around, with distant hills showing an outline serrated by trees along the pale, summer-like sky. But there was not a human being visible anywhere, nor a sound to be heard but the soft repeated note of the cuckoo. She wished that there were some farm people near at hand, or a shepherd lad, or anybody. She spoke to Roderigo, and her voice sounded strange – it sounded as if she were afraid some one was listening. Nay, she began, quite unreasonably, to be angry with the wizard. What business had he to interfere with her affairs, and to drive her on to such foolish enterprises? What right had he to challenge her to show that she was not afraid? She was not afraid, she assured herself. She had as good a title to walk along this lane as any one in Warwickshire. Only the thought that as soon as she had got as far as the cross at the meeting of the roads (this was all that had been demanded of her) she would go back to Stratford by the public highway rather than return by this solitary lane, for on the public highway there would be farm servants and laden wains and carriers, and such-like comfortable and companionable objects.

The next minute – she had almost reached the cross – her heart bounded with an unreasoning tremor of fear: she had suddenly become aware that a stranger was entering the lane from the wide highway beyond. She had only one glimpse of him, for instantly and resolutely she bent her eyes on Don Roderigo, and was determined to keep them there until this person should have passed; and yet that one lightning-like glimpse had told her somewhat. The stranger was young, and of a distinguished bearing and presence; and it certainly was a singular and unusual thing that a gentleman (as he seemed to be, although his travelling cloak concealed most of his attire) should be going afoot and unattended. But her only concern was to let him pass. Ghost or man as he might be, she kept her eyes on Don Roderigo. And then, to her increased alarm, she found that the stranger was approaching her.

"I beseech your pardon, lady," said he, in a most respectful voice, "but know you one in this town of the name of Master Shakespeare?"

She certainly was startled, and even inwardly aghast; but she had a brave will. She was determined that nothing would drive her either to scream or to run away. And indeed when she looked up and said, rather breathlessly, "There be several of the name, sir," she was quickly assured that this was no ghost at all, but a substantial and living and breathing young man, tall and dark, of a pleasant expression of face, though in truth there was nothing in those singularly black eyes of his but the most ordinary and matter-of-fact inquiry.

"One Master William Shakespeare," said he, in answer to her, "that is widely known."

"It is my father, sir, you speak of," said she, hastily and, in fact, somewhat ashamed of her fright.

At this news he removed his hat and made her a gracious obeisance, yet simply, and with not too elaborate a courtesy.

"Since I am so fortunate," said he, "may I beg you to direct me how I shall find the house when I get to the town? I have a letter for him, as you may see."

He took out a letter, and held it so that, if she liked, she might read the superscription – "*To my loving good friend Master William Shakespeare: Deliver these.*" But Judith merely glanced at the writing.

"'Tis from Master Ben Jonson – that you know of, doubtless, madam – commending me to your father. But perhaps," he added, directing toward her a curious timid look of inquiry, "it were as well that I did not deliver it?"

"How so, sir?" she asked.

"I am one that is in misfortune," said he, simply; "nay, in peril."

"Truly I am sorry for that, sir," said she, regarding him with frank eyes of sympathy, for indeed there was a kind of sadness in his air, that otherwise was distinguished enough, and even noble. And then she added: "But surely that is the greater reason you should seek my father."

"If I dared – if I knew," he said, apparently to himself. And then he addressed her: "If I make so bold, sweet lady, as to ask you if your father be of the ancient faith – or well disposed toward that, even if he do not openly profess it – I pray you set it down to my need and hard circumstances."

She did not seem to understand.

"I would ask if he be not at heart with the Catholic gentlemen that are looking for better times – for indeed I have heard it stated of him."

"Oh no, sir – surely not," said Judith, in some alarm, for she knew quite enough about the penal laws against priests and recusants, and would not have her father associated in any way with these, especially as she was talking with a stranger.

"Nay, then, it were better I did not deliver the letter," said the young man, with just a touch of hopelessness in his tone. "Under the protection of your father I might have had somewhat more of liberty, perchance; but I am content to remain as I am until I can get proofs that will convince them in authority of my innocence; or mayhap I may get away from the country altogether, and to my friends in Flanders. If they would but set my good friend Walter Raleigh free from the Tower, that also were well, for he and I might make a home for ourselves in another land. I crave your pardon for detaining you, madam, and so bid you farewell."

He raised his hat and made her a most respectful obeisance, and was about to withdraw.

"Stay, sir," said she, scarcely knowing what she said, but with trouble and anxiety in her gentle eyes.

Indeed, she was somewhat bewildered. So sudden had been the shock of surprise that she had forgotten, or very nearly forgotten, all about ghosts and wizards, about possible lovers or husbands, and only knew that here, in actual fact, was a stranger – and a modest young stranger, too – that was in trouble, and yet was afraid to seek shelter and aid from her father. That he had no reason to be thus afraid she was certain enough; and yet she dare not assume – she had no reason for believing – that her father was secretly inclined to favor those that were still hoping for the re-establishment of the Catholic faith. The fact was that her father scarcely ever spoke of such matters. He would listen,

if he happened to be in the house, to any theological discussion that might be going on, and he would regard this or that minister or preacher calmly, as if trying to understand the man and his opinions; but he would take no part in the talk; and when the discussion became disputatious, as sometimes happened, and the combatants grew warm and took to making hot assertions, he would rise and go out idly into the garden, and look at the young apple-trees or talk to Don Roderigo. Indeed, at this precise moment, Judith was quite incapable of deciding for herself which party her father would most likely be in sympathy with – the Puritans, who were sore at heart because of the failure of the Hampton Court Conference, or the Catholics, who were no less bitter on account of the severity of the penal laws – and a kind of vague wish arose in her heart that she could ask Prudence Shawe (who paid more attention to such matters, and was, in fact, wrapped up in them) before sending this young man away with his letter of commendation unopened.

"Your brother-in-law, madam, Dr. Hall," said he, seeing that she did not wish him to leave on the instant, "is well esteemed by the Catholic gentry, as I hear."

Judith did not answer that; she had been rapidly considering what she could do for one in distress.

"By your leave, sir, I would not have you go away without making further inquiry," said she. "I will myself get to know how my father is inclined, for indeed he never speaks of such matters to us; and sure I am that, whatever be his opinion, no harm could come to you through seeking his friendship. That I am sure of. If you are in distress, that is enough; he will not ask you whence you come; nor has he censure for any one; and that is a marvel in one that is so good a man himself, that he hath never a word of blame for any one, neither for the highwayman that was taken red-handed, as it were, last Sunday near to Oxford – 'Why,' says my father, 'if he take not life, and be a civil gentleman, I grudge him not a purse or two' – nor for a lesser criminal, my cousin Willie Hart, that but yesterday let the Portuguese singing-bird escape from its cage. 'Well, well,' says my father, 'so much the better, if only it can find food for itself.' Indeed, you need fear naught but kindness and gentleness; and sure I am that he would be but ill pleased to know that one coming from his friend Benjamin Jonson had been in the neighborhood and gone away without having speech of him."

"But this is no matter of courtesy, sweet lady," said he. "It is of a more dangerous cast; and I must be wary. If, now, you were inclined to do as you say – to make some discreet inquiry as to your good father's sentiments –"

"Not from himself," said she, quickly, and with some color mounting to her cheeks – "for he would but laugh at my speaking of such things – but from my gossip and neighbor I think I could gain sufficient assurance that would set your fears at rest."

"And how should I come to know?" he said, with some hesitation – for this looked much like asking for another meeting.

But Judith was frank enough. If she meant to confer a kindness, she did not stay to be too scrupulous about the manner of doing it.

"If it were convenient that you could be here this evening," said she, after a moment's thought, "Willie Hart and myself often walk over to Shottery after supper. Then could I let you know."

"But how am I to thank you for such a favor?" said he.

"Nay, it is but little," she answered, "to do for one that comes from my father's friend."

"Rare Ben, as they call him," said he, more brightly. "And now I bethink me, kind lady, that it ill becomes me to have spoken of nothing but my own poor affairs on my first having the honor of meeting with you. Perchance you would like to hear something of Master Jonson, and how he does? May I accompany you on your homeward way for a space, if you are returning to the town? The road here is quiet enough for one that is in hiding, as well as for pleasant walking; and you are well escorted, too," he added, looking at the grave and indifferent Don. "With such a master as your father, and such a sweet mistress, I should not wonder if he became as famous as Sir John Harrington's Bungey that the Prince asked about. You have not heard of him? – the marvellous dog that Sir John would intrust with

messages all the way to the court at Greenwich; and he would bring back the answer without more ado. I wonder not that Prince Henry should have asked for an account of all his feats and doings."

Now insensibly she had turned and begun to walk toward Shottery (for she would not ask this unhappy young man to court the light of the open highway), and as he respectfully accompanied her his talk became more and more cheerful, so that one would scarcely have remembered that he was in hiding, and in peril of his life mayhap. And he quickly found that she was most interested in Jonson as being her father's friend and intimate.

"Indeed, I should not much marvel to hear of his being soon in this very town of Stratford," said he, "for he has been talking of late – nay, he has been talking this many a day of it, but who knows when the adventure will take place? – of travelling all the way to Scotland on foot, and writing an account of his discoveries on the road. And then he has a mind to get to the lake of Lomond, to make it the scene of a fisher and pastoral play, he says; and his friend Drummond will go with him; and they speak of getting still farther to the north, and being the guests of the new Scotch lord, Mackenzie of Kintail, that was made a peer last winter. Nay, friend Ben, though at times he gibes at the Scots, at other times he will boast of his Scotch blood – for his grandfather, as I have heard, came from Annandale – and you will often hear him say that whereas the late Queen was a niggard and close-fisted, this Scotch King is lavish and a generous patron. If he go to Scotland, as is his purpose, surely he will come by way of Stratford."

"It were ill done of him else," said Judith. But truly this young gentleman was so bent on entertaining her with tales of his acquaintance in London, and with descriptions of the court shows and pageants, that she had not to trouble herself much to join in the conversation.

"A lavish patron the King has been to him truly," he continued, stooping to pat the Don's head, as if he would make friends with him too, "what with the masks, and revels, and so forth. Their last tiltings at Prince Henry's barriers exceeded everything that had gone before, as I think – and I marvel not that Ben was found at his best, seeing how the King had been instructing him. Nay, but it was a happy conceit to have our young Lord of the Isles addressed by the Lady of the Lake, and have King Arthur hand him his armor out of the clouds –"

"But where was it, good sir?" said she (to show that she was interested). And now he seemed so cheerful and friendly that she ventured to steal a look at him. In truth, there was nothing very doleful or tragic in his appearance. He was a handsomely made young man, of about eight-and-twenty or so, with fine features, a somewhat pale and sallow complexion (that distinguished him markedly from the rustic red and white and sun-brown she was familiar with), and eyes of a singular blackness and fire that were exceedingly respectful; but that could, as any one might see, easily break into mirth. He was well habited too, for now he had partly thrown his travelling cloak aside, and his slashed doublet and hose and shoes were smart and clearly of a town fashion. He wore no sword; in his belt there was only a small dagger, of Venetian silver-work on the handle, and with a sheath of stamped crimson velvet.

"Dear lady, you must have heard of them," he continued, lightly – "I mean of the great doings in the banqueting-house at Whitehall, when Prince Henry challenged so many noble lords. 'Twas a brave sight, I assure you; the King and Queen were there, and the ambassadors from Spain and Venice, and a great and splendid assemblage. And then, when Ben's speeches came to be spoken, there was Cyril Davy, that is said to have the best woman's voice in London, as the Lady of the Lake, and he came forward and said,

'Lest any yet should doubt, or might mistake
What Nymph I am, behold the ample Lake
Of which I'm styled; and near it Merlin's tomb;'

and then King Arthur appeared, and our young Lord of the Isles had a magic shield handed to him. Oh, 'twas a noble sight, I warrant you! And I heard that the Duke of Lennox and the Earls

of Arundel and Southampton and all of them were but of one mind, that friend Ben had never done better."

Indeed, the young man, as they loitered along the pretty wooded lane in the hush of the warm still noon (there was scarce enough wind to make a rustle in the great branching elms), and as he talked of all manner of things for the entertainment of this charming companion whom a happy chance had thrown in his way, seemed to be well acquainted with the court and its doings, and all the busy life of London. If she gathered rightly, he had himself been present when the King and the nobles went in the December of the previous year to Deptford to witness the launching of the great ship of the East India Company – the *Trade's Encrease*, it was called – for he described the magnificent banquet in the chief cabin, and how the King gave to Sir Thomas Smith, the Governor, a fine chain of gold, with his portrait set in a jewel, and how angry his Majesty became when they found that the ship could not be launched on account of the state of the tide. But when he again brought in the name of Jonson, and said how highly the King thought of his writings, and what his Majesty had said of this or the other device or masque that had been commanded of him, Judith grew at length to be not so pleased; and she said, with some asperity, "But the King holds my father in honor also, for he wrote him a letter with his own hand."

"I heard not of that," said he, but of course without appearing to doubt her word.

"Nay, but I saw it," said she – "I saw the letter; and I did not think it well that my father should give it to Julius Shawe, for there are some others that would have valued it as much as he – yes, and been more proud of it, too."

"His own daughter, perchance?" he said gently.

Judith did not speak. It was a sore subject with her; indeed, she had cried in secret, and bitterly, when she learned that the letter had been casually given away, for her father seemed to put no great store by it. However, that had nothing to do with this unhappy young gentleman that was in hiding. And soon she had dismissed it from her mind, and was engaged in fixing the exact time at which, as she hoped, she would be able to bring him that assurance, or that caution, in the evening.

"I think it must be the province of women to be kind to the unfortunate," said he, as they came in sight of the cottages; and he seemed to linger and hesitate in his walk, as if he were afraid of going further.

"It is but a small kindness," said she; "and I hope it will bring you and my father together. He has but just returned from London, and you will not have much news to give him from his friend; but you will be none the less welcome, for all are welcome to him, but especially those whom he can aid."

"If I were to judge of the father by the daughter, I should indeed expect a friendly treatment," said he, with much courtesy.

"Nay, but it is so simple a matter," said she.

"Then fare you well, Mistress Judith," said he, "if I may make so bold as to guess at a name that I have heard named in London."

"Oh, no, sir?" said she, glancing up with some inquiry.

"But indeed, indeed," said he, gallantly. "And who can wonder? 'Twas friend Ben that I heard speak of you; I marvel not that he carried your praises so far. But now, sweet lady, that I see you would go – and I wish not to venture nearer the village there – may I beseech of you at parting a further grace and favor? It is that you would not reveal to any one, no matter what trust you may put in them, that you have seen me or spoken with me. You know not my name, it is true, though I would willingly confide it to you – indeed, it is Leofric Hope, madam; but if it were merely known that you had met with a stranger, curious eyes might be on the alert."

"Fear not, sir," said she, looking at him in her frank way – and there was a kind of friendliness, too, and sympathy in her regard. "Your secret is surely safe in my keeping. I can promise you that none shall know through me that you are in the neighborhood. Farewell, good sir. I hope your fortunes will mend speedily."

"God keep you, sweet Mistress Judith," said he, raising his hat and bowing low, and not even asking to be allowed to take her hand. "If my ill fortune should carry it so that I see you not again, at least I will treasure in my memory a vision of kindness and beauty that I trust will remain forever there. Farewell, gentle lady; I am your debtor."

And so they parted; and he stood looking after her and the great dog as they passed through the meadows; and she was making all the haste she might, for although, when Judith's father was at home, the dinner hour was at twelve instead of at eleven, still it would take her all the time to be punctual, and she was scrupulous not to offend. He stood looking after her as long as she was in sight, and then he turned away, saying to himself:

"Why, our Ben did not tell us a tithe of the truth! – for why? – because it was with his tongue, and not with his pen, that he described her. By heaven, she is a marvel! – and I dare be sworn, now, that half the clowns in Stratford imagine themselves in love with her."

CHAPTER VI. WITHIN-DOORS

When in the afternoon Judith sought out her gentle gossip, and with much cautious tact and discretion began to unfold her perplexities to her, Prudence was not only glad enough to hear nothing further of the wizard – who seemed to have been driven out of Judith's mind altogether by the actual occurrences of the morning – but also she became possessed with a secret wonder and joy; for she thought that at last her dearest and closest friend was awaking to a sense of the importance of spiritual things, and that henceforth there would be a bond of confidence between them far more true and abiding than any that had been before. But soon she discovered that politics had a good deal to do with these hesitating inquiries; and at length the bewildered Prudence found the conversation narrowing and narrowing itself to this definite question: Whether, supposing there were a young man charged with complicity in a Catholic plot, or perhaps having been compromised in some former affair of the kind, and supposing him to appeal to her father, would he, Judith's father, probably be inclined to shelter him and conceal him, and give him what aid was possible until he might get away from the country?

"But what do you mean, Judith?" said Prudence, in dismay. "Have you seen any one? What is't you mean? Have you seen one of the desperate men that were concerned with Catesby?"

Indeed, it was not likely that either of these two Warwickshire maidens had already forgotten the terrible tidings that rang through the land but a few years before, when the Gunpowder Treason was discovered; nor how the conspirators fled into this very county; nor yet how in the following January, on a bitterly cold and snowy day, there was brought into the town the news of the executions in St. Paul's Churchyard and at Westminster. And, in truth, when Prudence Shawe mentioned Catesby's name, Judith's cheek turned pale. It was but for an instant. She banished the ungenerous thought the moment that it occurred to her. No, she was sure the unhappy young man who had appealed to her compassion could not have been concerned in any such bloody enterprise. His speech was too gentle for that. Had he not declared that he only wanted time to prove his innocence? It is true he had said something about his friends in Flanders, and often enough had she heard the Puritan divines denouncing Flanders as the very hot-bed of the machinations of the Jesuits; but that this young man might have friends among the Jesuits did not appear to her as being in itself a criminal thing, any more than the possibility of his being a Catholic was sufficient of itself to deprive him of her frank and generous sympathy.

"I may not answer you yea nor nay, sweet mouse," said she; "but assure yourself that I am not in league with any desperate villain. I but put a case. We live in quiet times now, do we not, good Prue? and I take it that those who like not the country are free to leave it. But tell me, if my father were to speak openly, which of the parties would he most affect? And how stands he with the King? Nay, the King himself, of what religion is he at heart, think you?"

"These be questions!" said Prudence, staring aghast at such ignorance.

"I but use my ears," said Judith, indifferently, "and the winds are not more variable than the opinions that one listens to. Well you know it, Prue. Here is one that says the King is in conscience a papist, as his mother was; and that he gave a guarantee to the Catholic gentry ere he came to the throne; and that soon or late we shall have mass again; and then comes another with the story that the Pope is hot and angry because the King misuseth him in his speech, calling him Antichrist and the like and that he has complained to the French King on the matter, and that there is even talk of excommunication. What can one believe? How is one to know? Indeed, good mouse, you would have me more anxious about such things; but why should one add to one's difficulties? I am content to be like my father, and stand aside from the quarrel."

"Your wit is too great for me, dear Judith," her friend said, rather sadly; "and I will not argue with you. But well I know there may be a calmness that is of ignorance and indifference, and that is slothful and sinful; and there may be a calmness that is of assured wisdom and knowledge of the truth, and that I trust your father has attained to. That he should keep aside from disputes, I can well understand."

"But touching the King, dear cousin," said Judith, who had her own ends in view. "How stands my father with the King and his religion? Nay, but I know, and every one knows, that in all other matters they are friends; for your brother has the King's letter – "

"That I wish you had yourself, Judith, since your heart is set upon it," said her companion, gently.

Judith did not answer that.

"But as regards religion, sweet Prue, what think you my father would most favor, were there a movement any way? – a change to the ancient faith perchance?"

She threw out the question with a kind of studied carelessness, as if it were a mere matter of speculation; but there was a touch of warmth in Prudence's answer:

"What, then, Judith? You think he would disturb the peace of the land, and give us over again to the priests and their idol-worship? I trow not." Then something seemed to occur to her suddenly. "But if you have any doubt, Judith, I can set your mind at rest – of a surety I can."

"How, then, dear mouse?"

"I will tell you the manner of it. No longer ago than yesterday evening I was seated at the window reading – it was the volume that Dr. Hall brought me from Worcester, and that I value more and more the longer I read it – and your father came into the house asking for Julius. So I put the book on the table, with the face downward, and away I went to seek for my brother. Well, then, sweet cousin, when I came back to the room, there was your father standing at the window reading the book that I had left, and I would not disturb him; and when he had finished the page, he turned, saying, 'Good bishop! good bishop!' and putting down the book on the table just as he had found it. Dear Judith, I hope you will think it no harm and no idle curiosity that made me take up the book as soon as my brother was come in, and examine the passage, and mark it – "

"Harm! – bless thee, sweetheart!" Judith exclaimed. And she added, eagerly: "But have you the book? Will you read it to me? Is it about the King? Do, dear cousin, read to me what it was that my father approved. Beshrew me! but I shall have to take to school lessons, after all, lest I outlive even your gentle patience."

Straightway Prudence had gone to a small cupboard of boxes in which she kept all her most valued possessions, and from thence she brought a stout little volume, which, as Judith perceived, had a tiny book-mark of satin projecting from the red-edged leaves.

"Much comfort indeed have I found in these Comfortable Notes," said she. "I wish, Judith, you, that can think of everything, would tell me how I am to show to Dr. Hall that I am more and more grateful to him for his goodness. What can I do? – words are such poor things!"

"But the passage, good Prue – what was't he read? I pray you let me hear," said Judith, eagerly; for here, indeed, might be a key to many mysteries.

"Listen, then," said her companion, opening the book. "The Bishop, you understand, Judith, is speaking of the sacrifices the Jews made to the Lord, and he goes on to say:

"Thus had this people their peace-offerings; that is, duties of thankfulness to their God for the peace and prosperity vouchsafed unto them. And most fit it was that He should often be thanked for such favors. The like mercies and goodness remain to us at this day: are we either freed from the duty or left without means to perform it? No, no; but as they had oxen and kine, and sheep and goats, then appointed and allowed, so have we the calves of our lips and the sacrifice of thanksgiving still remaining for us, and as strictly required of us as these (in those days) were of them. Offer them up, then, with a free heart and with a feeling soul. Our peace is great; our prosperity comfortable;

our God most sweet and kind; and shall we not offer? The public is sweet, the private is sweet, and forget you to offer? We lay us down and take our rest, and this our God maketh us dwell in safety. Oh, where is your offering? We rise again and go to our labor, and a dog is not heard to move his tongue among us: owe we no offering? O Lord, O Lord, make us thankful to Thee for these mercies: the whole state we live in, for the common and our several souls, for several mercies now many years enjoyed! O touch us; O turn us from our fearful dulness, and abusing of this so sweet, so long, and so happy peace! Continue thy sacred servant' – surely you know, Judith, whom he means – 'the chiefest means under Thee of this our comfort, and ever still furnish him with wise helps, truly fearing Thee, and truly loving him. Let our heads go to the grave in this peace, if it may be Thy blessed pleasure, and our eyes never see the change of so happy an estate. Make us thankful and full of peace-offerings; be Thou still ours, and ever merciful. Amen! Amen!'"

"And what said he, sweet Prue – what said my father?" Judith asked, though her eyes were distant and thoughtful.

"Good bishop! good bishop!" said he, as if he were right well pleased, and he put down the book on the table. Nay, you may be certain, Judith, that your father would have naught to do with the desperate men that would fain upset the country, and bring wars among us, and hand us over to the Pope again. I have heard of such; I have heard that many of the great families have but a lip loyalty, and have malice at their heart, and would willingly plunge the land in blood if they could put the priests in power over us again. Be sure your father is not of that mind."

"But if one were in distress, Prudence," said the other, absently, "perchance with a false charge hanging over him that could be disproved – say that one were in hiding, and only anxious to prove his innocence, or to get away from the country, is my father likely to look coldly on such a one in misfortune? No, no, surely, sweet mouse!"

"But of whom do you speak, Judith?" exclaimed her friend, regarding her with renewed alarm. "It cannot be that you know of such a one? Judith, I beseech you speak plainly! You have met with some stranger that is unknown to your own people? You said you had but put a case, but now you speak as if you knew the man. I beseech you, for the love between us, speak plainly to me, Judith!"

"I may not," said the other rising. And then she added, more lightly, "Nay, have no fear, sweet Prue; if there be any danger, it is not I that run it, and soon there will be no occasion for my withholding the secret from you, if secret there be."

"I cannot understand you, Judith," said her friend, with the pale, gentle face full of a tender wistfulness and anxiety.

"Such timid eyes!" said Judith, laughing good-naturedly. "Indeed, Prudence, I have seen no ghost, and goodman Wizard has failed me utterly; nor sprite nor phantom has been near me. In sooth I have buried poor Tom's bit of rosemary to little purpose. And now I must get me home, for Master Parson comes this afternoon, and I will but wait the preaching to hear Susan sing: 'tis worth the penance. Farewell, sweet mouse; get you rid of your alarm. The sky will clear all in good time."

So they kissed each other, and she left; still in much perplexity, it is true, but nevertheless resolved to tell the young man honestly and plainly the result of her inquiries.

As it turned out, she was to hear something more about the King and politics and religion that afternoon; for when she got home to New Place, Master Blaise was already there, and he was eagerly discussing with Judith's mother and her sister the last news that had been brought from London; or rather he was expounding it, with emphatic assertions and denunciations that the women-folk received for the most part with a mute but quite apparent sympathy. He was a young man of about six-and-twenty, rather inclined to be stout, but with strongly lined features, fair complexion and hair, an intellectual forehead, and sharp and keen gray eyes. The one point that recommended him to Judith's favor – which he openly and frankly, but with perfect independence, sought – was the uncompromising manner in which he professed his opinions. These frequently angered her, and even at times roused her to passionate indignation; and yet, oddly enough, she had a kind of lurking

admiration for the very honesty that scorned to curry favor with her by means of any suppression or evasion. It may be that there was a trace of the wisdom of the serpent in this attitude of the young parson, who was shrewd-headed as well as clear-eyed, and was as quick as any to read the fearless quality of Judith's character. At all events, he would not yield to any of her prejudices; he would not stoop to flatter her; he would not abate one jot of his protests against the vanity and pride, the heathenish show and extravagance, of women; the heinousness and peril of indifferentism in matters of doctrine; and the sinfulness of the life of them that countenanced stage plays and such like devilish iniquities. It was this last that was the real stumbling-block and contention between them. Sometimes Judith's eyes burned. Once she rose and got out of the room. "If I were a man, Master Parson," she was saying to herself, with shut teeth, "by the life of me I would whip you from Stratford town to Warwick!" And indeed there was ordinarily a kind of armed truce between these two, so that no stranger or acquaintance could very easily decide what their precise relations were, although every one knew that Judith's mother and sister held the young divine in great favor, and would fain have had him of the family.

At this moment of Judith's entrance he was much exercised, as has been said, on account of the news that was but just come from London – how that the King was driving at still further impositions because of the Commons begrudging him supplies; and naturally Master Blaise warmly approved of the Commons, that had been for granting the liberties to the Puritans which the King had refused. And not only was this the expression of a general opinion on the subject, but he maintained as an individual – and as a very emphatic individual too – that the prerogatives of the crown, the wardships and purveyances and what not, were monstrous and abominable, and a way of escape from the just restraint of Parliament, and he declared with a sudden vehemence that he would rather perish at the stake than contribute a single benevolence to the royal purse. Judith's mother, a tall, slight, silver-haired woman, with eyes that had once been of extraordinary beauty, but now were grown somewhat sad and worn, and her daughter Susanna Hall, who was darker than her sister Judith as regarded hair and eyebrows, but who had blue-gray eyes of a singular clearness and quickness and intelligence, listened and acquiesced; but perhaps they were better pleased when they found the young parson come out of that vehement mood; though still he was sharp of tongue and sarcastic, saying as an excuse for the King that now he was revenging himself on the English Puritans for the treatment he had received at the hands of the Scotch Presbyterians, who had harried him not a little. He had not a word for Judith; he addressed his discourse entirely to the other two. And she was content to sit aside, for indeed this discontent with the crown on the part of the Puritans was nothing strange or novel to her, and did not in the least help to solve her present perplexity.

And now the maids (for Judith's father would have no serving-men, nor stable-men, nor husbandmen of any grade whatever, come within-doors; the work of the house was done entirely by women-folk) entered to prepare the long oaken table for supper, seeing which Master Blaise suggested that before that meal it might be as well to devote a space to divine worship. So the maids were bidden to stay their preparations, and to remain, seating themselves dutifully on a bench brought crosswise, and the others sat at the table in their usual chairs, while the preacher opened the large Bible that had been fetched for him, and proceeded to read the second chapter of the Book of Jeremiah, expounding as he went along. This running commentary was, in fact, a sermon applied to all the evils of the day, as the various verses happened to offer texts; and the ungodliness and the vanity and the turning away from the Lord that Jeremiah lamented were attributed in no unsparing fashion to the town of Stratford and the inhabitants thereof: "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel: thus saith the Lord, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?" Nor did he spare himself and his own calling: "The priests said not, Where is the Lord? and they that should minister the law knew me not: the pastors also offended against me, and the prophets prophesied in Baal, and went after things that did not profit." And there were bold paraphrases and inductions, too: "What hast thou now

to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Nilus? or what makest thou in the way of Asshur, to drink the waters of the river?" Was not that the seeking of strange objects – of baubles, and jewels, and silks, and other instruments of vanity – from abroad, from the papist land of France, to lure the eye and deceive the senses, and turn away the mind from the dwelling on holy things? "Can a maid forget her ornament, or the bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number." This was, indeed, a fruitful text, and there is no doubt that Judith was indirectly admonished to regard the extreme simplicity of her mother's and sister's attire; so that there can be no excuse whatever for her having in her mind at this very moment some vague fancy that as soon as supper was over she would go to her own chamber and take out a certain beaver hat. She did not often wear it, for it was a present that her father had once brought her from London, and it was ranked among her most precious treasures; but surely on this evening (she was saying to herself) it was fitting that she should wear it, not from any personal vanity, but to the end that this young gentleman, who seemed to know several of her father's acquaintances in London, should understand that the daughter of the owner of New Place was no mere country wench, ignorant of what was in the fashion. It is grievous that she should have been concerned with such frivolous thoughts. However, the chapter came to an end in due time.

Then good Master Blaise said that they would sing the One-hundred-and-thirty-seventh Psalm; and this was truly what Judith had been waiting for. She herself was but an indifferent singer. She could do little more than hum such snatches of old songs as occurred to her during her careless rambles, and that only for her private ear; but her sister Susanna had a most noble, pure, and clear contralto voice, that could at any time bring tears to Judith's eyes, and that, when she joined in the choral parts of the service in church, made many a young man's heart tremble strangely. In former days she used to sing to the accompaniment of her lute; but that was given over now. Once or twice Judith had brought the discarded instrument to her, and said,

"Susan, sweet Susan, for once, for once only, sing to me '*The rose is from my garden gone.*'"

"Why, then – to make you cry, silly one?" the elder sister would answer. "What profit those idle tears, child, that are but a luxury and a sinful indulgence?"

"Susan, but once!" Judith would plead (with the tears almost already in her eyes) – "once only, '*The rose is from my garden gone.*' There is none can sing it like you."

But the elder sister was obdurate, as she considered was right; and Judith, as she walked through the meadows in the evening, would sometimes try the song for herself, thinking, or endeavoring to think, that she could hear in it the pathetic vibrations of her sister's voice. Indeed, at this moment the small congregation assembled around the table would doubtless have been deeply shocked had they known with what a purely secular delight Judith was now listening to the words of the psalm. There was but one Bible in the house, so that Master Blaise read out the first two lines (lest any of the maids might have a lax memory):

"When as we sat in Babylon,
The rivers round about;"

and that they sang; then they proceeded in like manner:

"And in remembrance of Sion,
The tears for grief burst out;
We hanged our harps and instruments
The willow-trees upon;
For in that place men for their use
Had planted many a one."

It is probable, indeed, that Judith was so wrapped up in her sister's singing that it did not occur to her to ask herself whether this psalm, too, had not been chosen with some regard to the good preacher's discontent with those in power. At all events, he read out, and they sang, no further than these two verses:

"Then they to whom we prisoners were,
Said to us tauntingly:
Now let us hear your Hebrew songs
And pleasant melody.
Alas! (said we) who can once frame
His sorrowful heart to sing
The praises of our loving God
Thus under a strange king?

"But yet if I Jerusalem
Out of my heart let slide,
Then let my fingers quite forget
The warbling harp to guide;
And let my tongue within my mouth
Be tied forever fast,
If that I joy before I see
Thy full deliverance past."

Then there was a short and earnest prayer; and, that over, the maids set to work to get forward the supper; and young Willie Hart was called in from the garden – Judith's father being away at Wilmcote on some important business there. In due course of time, supper being finished, and a devout thanksgiving said, Judith was free; and instantly she fled away to her own chamber to don her bravery. It was not vanity (she again said to herself), it was that her father's daughter should show that she knew what was due to him and his standing in the town; and indeed, as she now regarded herself in the little mirror – she wore a half-circle farthingale, and had on one of her smartest ruffs – and when she set on her head of short brown curls this exceedingly pretty hat (it was a gray beaver above, and underneath it was lined with black satin, and all around the rim was a row of hollow brass beads that tinkled like small bells), she was quite well satisfied with her appearance, and that she was fairly entitled to be. Then she went down and summoned her sweetheart Willie, to act as her companion and protector and ally; and together these two passed forth from the house – into the golden clear evening.

CHAPTER VII. A FAREWELL

Always, when she got out into the open air, her spirits rose into a pure content; and now, as they were walking westward through the peaceful meadows, the light of the sunset was on her face; and there was a kind of radiance there, and careless happiness, that little Willie Hart scarce dared look upon, so abject and wistful was the worship that the small lad laid at his pretty cousin's feet. He was a sensitive and imaginative boy; and the joy and crown of his life was to be allowed to walk out with his cousin Judith, her hand holding his; and it did not matter to him whether she spoke to him, or whether she was busy with her private thinking, and left him to his own pleasure and fancies. He had many of these; for he had heard of all kinds of great and noble persons – princesses, and empresses, and queens; but to him his cousin Judith was the Queen of queens; he could not believe that any one ever was more beautiful – or more gentle and lovable, in a magical and mystical way – than she was; and in church, on the quiet Sunday mornings, when the choir was singing, and all else silence, and dreams were busy in certain small brains, if there were any far-away pictures of angels in white and shining robes, coming toward one through rose-red celestial gardens, be sure they had Judith's eyes and the light and witchery of these; and that, when they spoke (if such wonderful creatures vouchsafed to speak), it was with the softness of Judith's voice. So it is not to be conceived that Judith, who knew something of this mute and secret adoration, had any malice in her heart when, on this particular evening, she began to question the boy as to the kind of sweetheart he would choose when he was grown up: the fact being that she spoke from idleness, and a wish to be friendly and companionable, her thoughts being really occupied elsewhere.

"Come now, Willie, tell me," said she, "what sort of one you will choose, some fifteen or twenty years hence, when you are grown up to be a man, and will be going abroad from place to place. In Coventry, perchance, you may find her, or over at Evesham, or in Warwick, or Worcester, or as far away as Oxford; in all of them are plenty of pretty maidens to be had for the asking, so you be civil-spoken enough, and bear yourself well. Now tell me your fancy, sweetheart; what shall her height be?"

"Why, you know, Judith," said he, rather shamefacedly. "Just your height."

"My height?" she said, carelessly. "Why, that is neither the one way nor the other. My father says I am just as high as his heart; and with that I am content. Well, now, her hair – what color of hair shall she have?"

"Like yours, Judith; and it must come round about her ears like yours," said he, glancing up for a moment.

"Eyes: must they be black, or gray, or brown, or blue? nay, you shall have your choice, sweetheart Willie; there be all sorts, if you go far enough afield and look around you. What eyes do you like, now?"

"You know well, Judith, there is no one has such pretty eyes as you; these are the ones I like, and no others."

"Bless the boy! – would you have her to be like me?"

"Just like you, Judith – altogether," said he, promptly; and he added, more shyly, "for you know there is none as pretty, and they all of them say that."

"Marry, now!" said she, with a laugh. "Here be news. What? When you go choosing your sweetheart, would you pick out one that had as large hands as these?"

She held forth her hands, and regarded them; and yet with some complacency, for she had put on a pair of scented gloves which her father had brought her from London, and these were beautifully embroidered with silver, for he knew her tastes, and that she was not afraid to wear finery, whatever the preachers might say.

"Why, you know, Judith," said he, "that there is none has such pretty hands as you, nor so white, nor so soft."

"Heaven save us! am I perfection, then?" she cried (but she was pleased). "Must she be altogether like me?"

"Just so, Cousin Judith; altogether like you; and she must wear pretty things like you, and walk as you walk, and speak like you, else I shall not love her nor go near her, though she were the Queen herself."

"Well said, sweetheart Willie! – you shall to the court some day, if you can speak so fair. And shall I tell you, now, how you must woo and win such a one?" she continued, lightly. "It may be you shall find her here or there – in a farm-house, perchance; or she may be a great lady with her coach; or a wench in an ale-house; but if she be as you figure her, this is how you shall do: you must not grow up to be too nice and fine and delicate-handed; you must not bend too low for her favor; but be her lord and governor; and you must be ready to fight for her, if need there be – yes, you shall not suffer a word to be said in dispraise of her; and for slanderers you must have a cudgel and a stout arm withal; and yet you must be gentle with her, because she is a woman; and yet not too gentle, for you are a man; and you must be no slape-face, with whining through the nose that we are all devilish and wicked and the children of sin; and you must be no tavern-seeker, with oaths and drunken jests and the like; and when you find her you must be the master of her – and yet a gentle master: marry, I cannot tell you more; but, as I hope for heaven, sweet Willie, you will do well and fairly if she loves thee half as much as I do."

And she patted the boy's head. What sudden pang was it that went through his heart?

"They say you are going to marry Parson Blaise, Judith," said he, looking up at her.

"Do they, now?" said she, with a touch of color in her face. "They are too kind that would take from me the business of choosing for myself."

"Is it true, Judith?"

"It is but idle talk; heed it not, sweetheart," said she, rather sharply. "I would they were as busy with their fingers as with their tongues; there would be more wool spun in Warwickshire!"

But here she remembered that she had no quarrel with the lad, who had but innocently repeated the gossip he had heard; and so she spoke to him in a more gentle fashion; and, as they were now come to a parting of the ways, she said that she had a message to deliver, and bade him go on by himself to the cottage, and have some flowers gathered for her from out of the garden by the time she should arrive. He was a biddable boy, and went on without further question. Then she turned off to the left, and in a few minutes was in the wide and wooded lane where she was to meet the young gentleman that had appealed to her friendliness.

And there, sure enough, he was; and as he came forward, hat in hand, to greet her, those eloquent black eyes of his expressed so much pleasure (and admiration of a respectful kind) that Judith became for a moment a trifle self-conscious, and remembered that she was in unusually brave attire. There may have been something else: some quick remembrance of the surprise and alarm of the morning; and also – in spite of her determination to banish such unworthy fancies – some frightened doubt as to whether, after all, there might not be a subtle connection between her meeting with this young gentleman and the forecasts of the wizard. This was but for a moment, but it confused her in what she had intended to say (for, in crossing the meadows, she had been planning out certain speeches as well as talking idly to Willie Hart), and she was about to make some stumbling confession to the effect that she had obtained no clear intelligence from her gossip Prudence Shawe, when the young gentleman himself absolved her from all further difficulty.

"I beseech your pardon, sweet lady," said he, "that I have caused you so much trouble, and that to no end; for I am of a mind now not to carry the letter to your father, whatever hopes there might be of his sympathy and friendship."

She stared in surprise.

"Nay, but, good sir," said she, "since you have the letter, and are so near to Stratford, that is so great a distance from London, surely it were a world of pities you did not see my father. Not that I can honestly gather that he would have any favor for a desperate enterprise upsetting the peace of the land – "

"I am in none such, Mistress Judith, believe me," said he, quickly. "But it behooves me to be cautious; and I have heard that within the last few hours which summons me away. If I were inclined to run the risk, there is no time at this present: and what I can do now is to try to thank you for the kindness you have shown to one that has no habit of forgetting."

"You are going away forthwith?" said she.

There was no particular reason why she should be sorry at his departure from the neighborhood, except that he was an extraordinarily gentle-spoken young man, and of a courteous breeding, whom her father, as she thought, would have been pleased to welcome as being commended from his friend Ben Jonson. Few visitors came to New Place; the faces to be met with there were grown familiar year after year. It seemed a pity that this stranger – and so fair-spoken a stranger, moreover – should be close at hand, without making her father's acquaintance.

"Yes, sweet lady," said he, in the same respectful way, "it is true that I must quit my present lodging for a time; but I doubt whether I could find anywhere a quieter or securer place – nay, I have no reason to fear you; I will tell you freely that it is Bassfield Farm, that is on the left before you go down the hill to Bidford; and it is like enough I may come back thither, when that I see how matters stand with me in London."

And then he glanced at her with a certain diffidence.

"Perchance I am too daring," said he; "and yet your courtesy makes me bold. Were I to communicate with you when I return – "

He paused, and his hesitation well became him; it was more eloquent in its modesty than many words.

"That were easily done," said Judith at once, and with her usual frankness; "but I must tell you, good sir, that any written message you might send me I should have to show to my friend and gossip Prudence Shawe, that reads and writes for me, being so skilled in that; and when you said that to no one was the knowledge to be given that you were in this neighborhood – "

"Sweet lady," said he, instantly, with much gratitude visible in those handsome dark eyes, "if I may so far trespass on your goodness, I would leave that also within your discretion. One that you have chosen to be your friend must needs be trustworthy – nay, I am sure of that."

"But my father too, good sir – "

"Nay, not so," said he, with some touch of entreaty in his voice. "Take it not ill of me, but one that is in peril must use precautions for his safety, even though they savor of ill manners and suspicion."

"As you will, sir – as you will; I know little of such matters," Judith said. "But yet I know that you do wrong to mistrust my father."

"Nay, dearest lady," he said, quickly, "it is you that do me wrong to use such words. I mistrust him not; but, indeed, I dare not disclose to him the charge that is brought against me until I have clearer proofs of my innocence, and these I hope to have in time, when I may present myself to your father without fear. Meanwhile, sweet Mistress Judith, I can but ill express my thanks to you that you have vouchsafed to lighten the tedium of my hiding through these few words that have passed between us. Did you know the dulness of the days at the farm – for sad thoughts are but sorry companions – you would understand my gratitude toward you – "

"Nay, nothing, good sir, nothing," said she; and then she paused, in some difficulty. She did not like to bid him farewell without any reference whatsoever to the future; for in truth she wished to hear more of him, and how his fortunes prospered. And yet she hesitated about betraying so much interest

– of however distant and ordinary a kind – in the affairs of a stranger. Her usual frank sympathy conquered: besides, was not this unhappy young man the friend of her father's friend?

"Is it to the farm that you return when you have been to London?" she asked.

"I trust so: better security I could not easily find elsewhere; and my well-wishers have means of communication with me, so that I can get the news there. Pray Heaven I may soon be quit of this skulking in corners! I like it not: it is not the life of a free man."

"I hope your fortunes will mend, sir, and speedily," said she, and there was an obvious sincerity in her voice.

"Why," said he, with a laugh – for, indeed, this young man, to be one in peril of his life, bore himself with a singularly free and undaunted demeanor; and he was not looking around him in a furtive manner, as if he feared to be observed, but was allowing his eyes to rest on Judith's eyes, and on the details of her costume (which he seemed to approve), in a quite easy and unconcerned manner – "the birds and beasts we hunt are allowed to rest at times, but a man in hiding has no peace nor freedom from week's end to week's end – no, nor at any moment of the day or night. And if the good people that shelter him are not entirely of his own station, and if he cares to have but little speech with them, and if the only book in the house be the family Bible, then the days are like to pass slowly with him. Can you wonder, sweet Mistress Judith," he continued, turning his eyes to the ground in a modest manner, "that I shall carry away the memory of this meeting with you as a treasure, and dwell on it, and recall the kindness of each word you have spoken?"

"In truth, no, good sir," she said, with a touch of color in her cheeks, that caught the warm golden light shining over from the west. "I would not have you think them of any importance, except the hope that matters may go well with you."

"And if they should," said he, "or if they should go ill, and if I were to presume to think that you cared to know them, when I return to Bassfield I might make so bold as to send you some brief tidings, through your friend Mistress Prudence Shawe, that I am sure must be discreet, since she has won your confidence. But why should I do so?" he added, after a second. "Why should I trouble you with news of one whose good or evil fortune cannot concern you?"

"Nay, sir, I wish you well," said she, simply, "and would fain hear better tidings of your condition. If you may not come at present to New Place, where you would have better counsel than I can give you, at least you may remember that there is one in the household there that will be glad when she hears of your welfare, and better pleased still when she learns that you are free to make her father's friendship."

This was clearly a dismissal; and after a few more words of gratitude on his part (he seemed almost unable to take away his eyes from her face, or to say all that he would fain say of thanks for her gracious intervention and sympathy) they parted; and forthwith Judith – now with a much lighter heart, for this interview had cost her not a little embarrassment and anxiety – hastened away back through the lane in the direction of the barns and gardens of Shottery. All these occurrences of the day had happened so rapidly that she had had but little time to reflect over them; but now she was clearly glad that she should be able to talk over the whole affair with Prudence Shawe. There would be comfort in that, and also safety; for, if the truth must be told, that wild and bewildering fancy that perchance the wizard had prophesied truly would force itself on her mind in a disquieting manner. But she strove to reason herself and laugh herself out of such imaginings. She had plenty of courage and a strong will. From the first she had made light of the wizard's pretensions; she was not going to alarm herself about the possible future consequences of this accidental meeting. And, indeed, when she recalled the particulars of that meeting, she came to think that the circumstances of the young man could not be so very desperate. He did not speak nor look like one in imminent peril; his gay description of the masques and entertainments of the court was not the talk of a man seriously and really in danger of his life. Perhaps he had been in some thoughtless escapade, and was waiting for the bruit of it to blow over: perhaps he was unused to confinement, and may have exaggerated (for

this also occurred to her) somewhat in order to win her sympathy. But, anyhow, he was in some kind of misfortune or trouble, and she was sorry for him; and she thought that if Prudence Shawe could see him, and observe how well-bred and civil-spoken and courteous a young gentleman he seemed to be, she, too, would pity the dulness of the life he must be leading at the farm, and be glad to do anything to relieve such a tedium. In truth, by the time Judith was drawing near her grandmother's cottage, she had convinced herself that there was no dark mystery connected with this young man; that she had not been holding converse with any dangerous villain or conspirator; and that soon everything would be cleared up, and perhaps he himself present himself at New Place, with Ben Jonson's letter in his hand. So she was in a cheerful enough frame of mind when she arrived at the cottage.

This was a picturesque little building of brick and timber, with a substantial roof of thatch, and irregularly placed small windows; and it was prettily set in front of a wild and variegated garden, and of course all the golden glow of the west was now flooding the place with its beautiful light, and causing the little rectangular panes in the open casements to gleam like jewels. And here, at the wooden gate of the garden, was Willie Hart, who seemed to have been using the time profitably, for he had a most diverse and sweet-scented gathering of flowers and herbs of a humble and familiar kind – forget-me-nots, and pansies, and wall-flower, and mint, and sweet-brier, and the like – to present to his pretty cousin.

"Well done, sweetheart? and are all these for me?" said she, as she passed within the little gate, and stood for a moment arranging and regarding them. "What, then, what is this? – what mean you by it, Cousin Willie?"

"By what, Cousin Judith?" said the small boy, looking up with his wondering and wistful eyes.

"Why," said she, gayly, "this pansy that you have put fair in the front. Know you not the name of it?"

"Indeed I know it not, Cousin Judith."

"Ah, you cunning one! well you know it, I'll be sworn! Why, 'tis one of the chiefest favorites everywhere. Did you never hear it called 'kiss me at the gate?' Marry, 'tis an excellent name; and if I take you at your word, little sweetheart?"

And so they went into the cottage together; and she had her arm lying lightly round his neck.

CHAPTER VIII. A QUARREL

But instantly her manner changed. Just within the doorway of the passage that cut the rambling cottage into two halves, and attached to a string that was tied to the handle of the door, lay a small spaniel-gentle, peacefully snoozing; and well Judith knew that the owner of the dog (which she had heard, indeed, was meant to be presented to herself) was inside. However, there was no retreat possible, if retreat she would have preferred; for here was the aged grandmother – a little old woman, with fresh pink cheeks, silver-white hair, and keen eyes – come out to see if it were Judith's footsteps she had heard; and she was kindly in her welcome of the girl, though usually she grumbled a good deal about her, and would maintain that it was pure pride and wilfulness that kept her from getting married.

"Here be finery!" said she, stepping back as if to gain a fairer view. "God's mercy, wench, have you come to your senses at last? – be you seeking a husband? – would you win one of them? They have waited a goodly time for the bating of your pride; but you must after them at last – ay, ay, I thought 'twould come to that."

"Good grandmother, you give me no friendly welcome," said Judith. "And Willie here; have you no word for him, that he is come to see how you do?"

"Nay, come in, then, sweetings both; come in and sit ye down: little Willie has been in the garden long enough, though you know I grudge you not the flowers, wench. Ay, ay, there is one within, Judith, that would fain be a nearer neighbor, as I hear, if you would but say yea; and bethink ye, wench, an apple may hang too long on the bough – your bravery may be put on to catch the eye when it is overlate – "

"I pray you, good grandmother, forbear," said Judith, with some asperity. "I have my own mind about such things."

"All's well, wench, all's well," said the old dame, as she led the way into the main room of the cottage. It was a wide and spacious apartment, with heavy black beams overhead, a mighty fire-place, here or there a window in the walls just as it seemed to have been wanted, and in the middle of the floor a plain old table, on which were placed a jug and two or three horn tumblers.

Of course Judith knew whom she had to expect: the presence of the little spaniel-gentle at the door had told her that. This young fellow that now quickly rose from his chair and came forward to meet her – "Good-even to you, Judith," said he, in a humble way, and his eyes seemed to beseech her favor – was as yet but in his two-and-twentieth year, but his tall and lithe and muscular figure had already the firm set of manhood on it. He was spare of form and square-shouldered; his head smallish, his brown hair short; his features were regular, and the forehead, if not high, was square and firm; the general look of him was suggestive of a sculptured Greek or Roman wrestler, but that this deprecating glance of the eyes was not quite consistent. And, to tell the truth, wrestling and his firm-sinewed figure had something to do with his extreme humility on this occasion. He was afraid that Judith had heard something. To have broken the head of a tapster was not a noble performance, no matter how the quarrel was forced on him; and this was but the most recent of several squabbles; for the championship in the athletic sports of a country neighborhood is productive of rivals, who may take many ways of provoking anger. "Good-even to you, Judith," said he, as if he really would have said, "Pray you believe not all the ill you hear of me!" Judith, however, did not betray anything by her manner, which was friendly enough in a kind of formal way, and distinctly reserved. She sat down, and asked her grandmother what news she had of the various members of the family, that now were widely scattered throughout Warwickshire. She declined the cup of merry-go-down that the young man civilly offered to her. She had a store of things to tell about her father; and about the presents he had brought; and about the two pieces of song-music that Master Robert Johnson had sent, that her

father would have Susan try over on the lute; and the other twenty acres that were to be added; and the talk there had been of turning the house opposite New Place, at the corner of Chapel Street and Scholars Lane, into a tavern, and how that had happily been abandoned – for her father wanted no tavern-revelry within hearing; and so forth; but all this was addressed to the grandmother. The young man got scarce a word, though now and again he would interpose gently, and, as it were, begging her to look his way. She was far kinder to Willie Hart, who was standing by her side; for sometimes she would put her hand on his shoulder, or stroke his long yellow-brown hair.

"Willie says he will have just such another as I, grandmother," said she, when these topics were exhausted, "to be his sweetheart when he grows up; so you see there be some that value me."

"Look to it that you be not yourself unmarried then, Judith," said the old dame, who was never done grumbling on this account. "I should not marvel; they that refuse when they are sought come in time to wonder that there are none to seek – nay, 'tis so, I warrant you. You are hanging late on the bough, wench; see you be not forgotten."

"But, good grandmother," said Judith, with some color in her cheeks (for this was an awkward topic in the presence of this youth), "would you have me break from the rule of the family? My mother was six-and-twenty when she married, and Susan four-and-twenty; and indeed there might come one of us who did not perceive the necessity of marrying at all."

"In God's name, if that be your mind, wench, hold to it. Hold to it, I say!" And then the old dame glanced with her sharp eyes at the pretty costume of her visitor. "But I had other thoughts when I saw such a fine young madam at the door; in truth, they befit you well, these braveries; indeed they do; though 'tis a pity to have them bedecking out one that is above the marrying trade. But take heed, wench, take heed lest you change your mind when it is too late; the young men may hold you to your word, and you find yourself forsaken when you least expect it."

"Give ye thanks for your good comfort, grandmother," said Judith, indifferently. And then she rose. "Come, Willie, 'tis about time we were going through the fields to the town. What message have you, grandmother, for my father? He is busy from morning till night since his coming home; but I know he will be over to visit you soon. The flowers, Willie – did you leave them on the bench outside?"

But she was not allowed to depart in this fashion. The old dame's discontents with her pretty granddaughter – that was now grown into so fair and blithe a young woman – were never of a lasting nature; and now she would have both Judith and little Willie taste of some gingerbread of her own baking, and then Judith had again to refuse a sup of the ale that stood on the table, preferring a little water instead. Moreover, when they had got out into the garden, behold! this young man would come also, to convoy them home on their way across the fields. It was a gracious evening, sweet and cool; there was a clear twilight shining over the land; the elms were dark against the palely luminous sky. And then, as the three of them went across the meadows toward Stratford town, little Willie Hart was intrusted with the care of the spaniel-gentle – that was young and wayward, and possessed with a mad purpose of hunting sparrows – and as the dog kept him running this way and that, he was mostly at some distance from these other two, and Judith's companion, young Quiney, had every opportunity of speaking with her.

"I sent you a message, Judith," said he, rather timidly, but anxiously watching the expression of her face all the time, "a token of remembrance: I trust it did not displease you?"

"You should have considered through whose hands it would come," said she, without regarding him.

"How so?" he asked, in some surprise.

"Why, you know that Prudence would have to read it."

"And why not, Judith? Why should she not? She is your friend; and I care not who is made aware that – that – well, you know what I mean, dear Judith, but, I fear to anger you by saying it. You were not always so hard to please."

There was a touch of reproach in this that she did not like. Besides, was it fair? Of course she had been kinder to him when he was a mere stripling – when they were boy and girl together; but now he had put forth other pretensions; and they stood on a quite different footing; and in his pertinacity he would not understand why she was always speaking to him of Prudence Shawe, and extolling her gentleness and sweet calm wisdom and goodness. "The idle boy!" she would say to herself; "Why did God give him such a foolish head that he must needs come fancying me?" And sometimes she was angry because of his dulness and that he would not see; though, indeed, she could not speak quite plainly.

"You should think," said she, on this occasion, with some sharpness, "that these idle verses that you send me are read by Prudence. Well, doubtless, she may not heed that – "

"Why should she heed, Judith?" said he. "'Tis but an innocent part she takes in the matter – a kindness, merely."

She dared not say more, and she was vexed with him for putting this restraint upon her. She turned upon him with a glance of sudden and rather unfriendly scrutiny.

"What is this now that I hear of you?" said she. "Another brawl! A tavern brawl! I marvel you have escaped so long with a whole skin."

"I know not who carries tales of me to you, Judith," said he, somewhat warmly, "but if you yourself were more friendly you would take care to choose a more friendly messenger. It is always the worst that you hear. If there was a brawl, it was none of my seeking. And if my skin is whole, I thank God I can look after that for myself; I am not one that will be smitten on one cheek and turn the other – like your parson friend."

This did not mend matters much.

"My parson friend?" said she, with some swift color in her cheeks. "My parson friend is one that has respect for his office, and has a care for his reputation, and lives a peaceable, holy life. Would you have him frequent ale-houses, and fight with drawers and tapsters? Marry and amen! but I find no fault with the parson's life."

"Nay, that is true, indeed," said he, bitterly: "you can find no fault in the parson – as every one says. But there are others that see with other eyes, and would tell you in what he might amend – "

"I care not to know," said she.

"It were not amiss," said he, for he was determined to speak – "it were not amiss if Sir Parson showed a little more honesty in his daily walk – that were not amiss, for one thing."

"In what is he dishonest, then?" said she, instantly, and she turned and faced him with indignant eyes.

Well, he did not quail. His blood was up. This championship of the parson, that he had scarce expected of her, only fired anew certain secret suspicions of his; and he had no mind to spare his rival, whether he were absent or no.

"Why, then, does he miscall the King, and eat the King's bread?" said he, somewhat hotly. "Is it honest to conform in public, and revile in private? I say, let him go forth, as others have been driven forth, if the state of affairs content him not. I say that they who speak against the King – marry, it were well done to chop the rogues' ears off! – I say they should be ashamed to eat the King's bread."

"He eats no King's bread?" said Judith. – and alas! her eyes had a look in them that pierced him to the heart: it was not the glance he would fain have met with there. "He eats the bread of the Church, that has been despoiled of its possessions again and again by the Crown and the lords; and why should he go forth? He is a minister; is there harm that he should wish to see the services reformed? He is at his post; would you have him desert it, or else keep silent? No, he is no such coward, I warrant you. He will speak his mind; it were ill done of him else?"

"Nay, he can do no harm at all – in your judgment," said he, somewhat sullenly, "if it all be true that they say."

"And who is it, then, that should speak of idle tales and the believing of them?" said she, with indignant reproach. "You say I welcome evil stories about you? And you? Are you so quick to put away the idle gossip they bring you about me? Would you not rather believe it? I trow you would as lief believe it as not. That it is to have friends! That it is to have those who should defend you in your absence; but would rather listen to slander against you! But when they speak about women's idle tongues, they know little; it is men who are the readiest to listen, and to carry evil reports and lying!"

"I meant not to anger you, Judith," said he, more humbly.

"Yes, but you have angered me," said she (with her lips becoming tremulous, but only for a second). "What concern have I with Parson Blaise? I would they that spake against him were as good men and honest as he – "

"Indeed, they speak no ill of him, Judith," said he (for he was grieved that they were fallen out so, and there was nothing he would not have retracted that so he might win back to her favor again, in however small a degree), "except that he is disputatious, and would lead matters no one knows whither. 'Tis but a few minutes ago that your grandmother there was saying that we should never have peace and quiet in Church affairs till the old faith was restored – "

Here, indeed, she pricked up her ears; but she would say no more. She had not forgiven him yet; and she was proud and silent.

"And though I do not hold with that – for there would be a bloody struggle before the Pope could be master in England again – nevertheless, I would have the ministers men of peace, as they profess to be, and loyal to the King, who is at the head of the Church as well as of the realm. However, let it pass. I wish to have no quarrel with you, Judith."

"How does your business?" said she, abruptly changing the subject.

"Well – excellently well; it is not in that direction that I have any anxiety about the future."

"Do you give it your time? You were best take heed, for else it is like to slip away from you," she said; and he thought she spoke rather coldly, and as if her warning were meant to convey something more than appeared.

And then she added:

"You were at Wilmecote on Tuesday?"

"You must have heard why, Judith," he said. "Old Pike was married again that day, and they would have me over to his wedding."

"And on the Wednesday, what was there at Bidford, then, that you must needs be gone when my mother sent to you?"

"At Bidford?" said he (and he was sorely puzzled as to whether he should rejoice at these questions as betraying a friendly interest in his affairs, or rather regarded them as conveying covert reproof, and expressing her dissatisfaction with him, and distrust of him). "At Bidford, Judith – well, there was business as well as pleasure there. For you must know that Daniel Hutt is come home for a space from the new settlements in Virginia, and is for taking back with him a number of laborers that are all in due time to make their fortunes there. Marry, 'tis a good chance for some of them, for broken men are as welcome as any, and there are no questions asked as to their having been intimate with the constable and the justice. So there was a kind of merry-meeting of Daniel's old friends, that was held at the Falcon at Bidford – and the host is a good customer of mine, so it was prudent of me to go thither – and right pleasant was it to hear Daniel Hutt tell of his adventures by sea and shore. And he gave us some of the tobacco that he had brought with him. And to any that will go back with him to Jamestown he promises allotments of land, though at first there will be tough labor, as he says, honestly. Oh, a worthy man is this Daniel Hutt, though, as yet his own fortune seems not so secure."

"With such junketings," said she, with ever so slight a touch of coldness, "'tis no wonder you could not spare the time to come and see my father on the evening of his getting home."

"There, now, Judith!" he exclaimed. "Would you have me break in upon him at such a busy season, when even you yourself are careful to refrain? It had been ill-mannered of me to do such a thing; but 'twas no heedlessness that led to my keeping away, as you may well imagine."

"It is difficult to know the reasons when friends hold aloof," said she. "You have not been near the house for two or three weeks, as I reckon."

And here again he would have given much to know whether her speech – which was curiously reserved in tone – meant that she had marked these things out of regard for him, or that she wished to reprove him.

"I can give you the reason for that, Judith," said this tall and straight young fellow, who from time to time regarded his companion's face with some solicitude, as if he fain would have found some greater measure of friendliness there. "I have not been often to New Place of late because of one I thought I might meet there who would be no better pleased to see me than I him; and – and perhaps because of another – that I did not know whether she might be the better pleased to have me there or find me stay away –"

"Your reasons are too fine," said she. "I scarce understand them."

"That is because you won't understand; I think I have spoken plain enough ere now, Judith, I make bold to say."

She flushed somewhat at this; but it was no longer in anger. She seemed willing to be on good terms with him, but always in that measured and distant way.

"Willie!" she called. "Come hither, sweetheart!"

With some difficulty her small cousin made his way back to her, dragging the reluctant spaniel so that its head seemed to be in jeopardy.

"He *will* go after the birds, Cousin Judith; you will never teach him to follow you."

"I?" she said.

"Willie knows I want you to have the dog, Judith," her companion said, quickly. "I got him for you when I was at Gloucester. 'Tis a good breed – true Maltese, I can warrant him; and the fashionable ladies will scarce stir abroad without one to follow them, or to carry with them in their coaches when they ride. Will you take him Judith?"

She was a little embarrassed.

"'Tis a pretty present," said she, "but you have not chosen the right one to give it to."

"What mean you?" said he.

"Nay, now, have not I the Don?" she said, with greater courage. "He is a sufficient companion if I wish to walk abroad. Why should you not give this little spaniel to one that has no such companion – I mean to Prudence Shaw?"

"To Prudence!" said he, regarding her; for this second introduction of Judith's friend seemed strange, as well as the notion that he should transfer this prized gift to her.

"There, now, is one so gentle and kind to every one and everything that she would tend the little creature with care," she continued. "It would be more fitting for her than for me."

"You could be kind enough, Judith – if you chose," said he, under his breath, for Willie Hart was standing by.

"Nay, I have the Don," said she, "that is large, and worldly, and serious, and clumsy withal. Give this little playfellow to Prudence, who is small and neat and gentle like itself; surely that were fitter."

"I had hoped you would have accepted the little spaniel from me, Judith," said he, with very obvious disappointment.

"Moreover," said she, lightly, "two of a trade would never agree: we should have this one and the Don continually quarrelling, and sooner or later the small one would lose its head in the Don's great jaws."

"Why, the mastiff is always chained, and at the barn gate, Judith," said he. "This one would be within-doors, as your playfellow. But I care not to press a gift."

"Nay, now, be not displeased," said she, gently enough. "I am not unthankful; I think well of your kindness, but it were still better done if you were to change your intention and give the spaniel to one that would have a gentler charge over it, and think none the less of it, as I can vouch for. Pray you give it to Prudence."

"A discarded gift is not worth the passing on," said he; and as they were now come quite near to the town, where there was a dividing of ways, he stopped as though he would shake hands and depart.

"Will you not go on to the house? You have not seen my father since his coming home," she said.

"No, not to-night, Judith," he said. "Doubtless he is still busy, and I have affairs elsewhere."

She glanced at him with one of those swift keen glances of hers.

"Where go you to spend the evening, if I may make so bold?" she said.

"Not to the ale-house, as you seem to suspect," he answered, with just a trifle of bitterness; and then he took the string to lead away the spaniel, and he bade her farewell – in a kind of half-hearted and disappointed and downcast way – and left.

She looked after him a second or so, as she fastened a glove-button that had got loose. And then she sighed as she turned away.

"Sweetheart Willie," said she, putting her hand softly on the boy's shoulder, as he walked beside her, "I think you said you loved me?"

"Why, you know I do, Cousin Judith," said he.

"What a pity it is, then," said she, absently, "that you cannot remain always as you are, and keep your ten years forever and a day, so that we should always be friends as we are now!"

He did not quite know what she meant, but he was sufficiently well pleased and contented when he was thus close by her side; and when her hand was on his shoulder or on his neck it was to him no burden, but a delight. And so walking together, and with some gay and careless prattle between them, they went on and into the town.

CHAPTER IX. THROUGH THE MEADOWS

Some two or three days after that, and toward the evening, Prudence Shawe was in the church-yard, and she was alone, save that now and again some one might pass along the gravelled pathway, and these did not stay to interrupt her. She had with her a basket, partly filled with flowers, also a small rake and a pair of gardener's shears, and she was engaged in going from grave to grave, here putting a few fresh blossoms to replace the withered ones, and there removing weeds, or cutting the grass smooth, and generally tending those last resting-places with a patient and loving care. It was a favorite employment with her when she had a spare afternoon; nor did she limit her attention to the graves of those whom she had known in life; her charge was a general one, and when they who had friends or relatives buried there came to the church on a Sunday morning, and perhaps from some distance, and when they saw that some gentle hand had been employed there in the interval, they knew right well that that hand was the hand of Prudence Shawe. It was a strange fancy on the part of one who was so averse from all ornament or decoration in ordinary life that nothing was too beautiful for a grave. She herself would not wear a flower, but her best, and the best she could beg or borrow anywhere, she freely gave to those that were gone away; she seemed to have some vague imagination that our poor human nature was not worthy of this beautifying care until it had become sanctified by the sad mystery of death.

It was a calm, golden-white evening, peaceful and silent; the rooks were cawing in the dark elms above her; the swallows dipping and darting under the boughs; the smooth-flowing yellow river was like glass, save that now and again the perfect surface was broken by the rising of a fish. Over there in the wide meadows beyond the stream a number of boys were playing at rounders or prisoner's-base, or some such noisy game; but the sound of their shouting was softened by the distance; so quiet was it here, as she continued at her pious task, that she might almost have heard herself breathing. And once or twice she looked up, and glanced toward the little gate as if expecting some one.

It was Judith, of course, that she was expecting; and at this moment Judith was coming along to the church-yard to seek her out. What a contrast there was between these two – this one pale and gentle and sad-eyed, stooping over the mute graves in the shadow of the elms; that other coming along through the warm evening light with all her usual audacity of gait, the peach-bloom of health on her cheek, carelessness and content in her clear-shining eyes, and the tune of "Green Sleeves" ringing through a perfectly idle brain. Indeed, what part of her brain may not have been perfectly idle was bent solely on mischief. Prudence had been away for two or three days, staying with an ailing sister. All that story of the adventure with the unfortunate young gentleman had still to be related to her. And again and again Judith had pictured to herself Prudence's alarm and the look of her timid eyes when she should hear of such doings, and had resolved that the tale would lose nothing in the telling. Here, indeed, was something for two country maidens to talk about. The even current of their lives was broken but by few surprises, but here was something more than surprise – something with suggestions of mystery and even danger behind it. This was no mere going out to meet a wizard. Any farm wench might have an experience of that kind; any ploughboy, deluded by the hope of digging up silver in one of his master's fields. But a gentleman in hiding – one that had been at court – one that had seen the King sitting in his chair of state, while Ben Jonson's masque was opened out before the great and noble assemblage – this was one to speak about, truly, one whose fortunes and circumstances were like to prove a matter of endless speculation and curiosity.

But when Judith drew near to the little gate of the church-yard, and saw how Prudence was occupied, her heart smote her.

Green sleeves was all my joy,
Green sleeves was my delight,

went clear out of her head. There was a kind of shame on her face; and when she went along to her friend she could not help exclaiming, "How good you are, Prue!"

"I!" said the other, with some touch of wonder in the upturned face. "I fear that cannot be said of any of us, Judith."

"I would I were like you, sweetheart," was the answer, with a bit of a sigh.

"Like me, Judith?" said Prudence, returning to her task (which was nearly ended now, for she had but few more flowers left). "Nay, what makes you think that? I wish I were far other than I am."

"Look, now," Judith said, "how you are occupied at this moment. Is there another in Stratford that has such a general kindness? How many would think of employing their time so? How many would come away from their own affairs –"

"It may be I have more idle time than many," said Prudence, with a slight flush. "But I commend not myself for this work; in truth, no; 'tis but a pastime; 'tis for my own pleasure."

"Indeed, then, good Prue, you are mistaken, and that I know well," said the other, peremptorily. "Your own pleasure? Is it no pleasure, then, think you, for them that come from time to time, and are right glad to see that some one has been tending the graves of their friends or kinsmen? And do you think, now, it is no pleasure to the poor people themselves – I mean them that are gone – to look at you as you are engaged so, and to think that they are not quite forgotten? Surely it must be a pleasure to them. Surely they cannot have lost all their interest in what happens here – in Stratford – where they lived; and surely they must be grateful to you for thinking of them, and doing them this kindness? I say it were ill done of them else. I say they ought to be thankful to you. And no doubt they are, could we but learn."

"Judith! Judith! you have such a bold way of regarding what is all a mystery to us," said her gentle-eyed friend. "Sometimes you frighten me."

"I would I knew, now," said the other, looking absently across the river to the boys that were playing there, "whether my little brother Hamnet – had you known him you would have loved him as I did, Prudence – I say I wish I knew whether he is quite happy and content where he is, or whether he would not rather be over there now with the other boys. If he looks down and sees them, may it not make him sad sometimes – to be so far away from us? I always think of him as being alone there, and he was never alone here. I suppose he thinks of us sometimes. Whenever I hear the boys shouting like that at their play I think of him; but indeed he was never noisy and unruly. My father used to call him the girl-boy, but he was fonder of him than of all us others; he once came all the way from London when he heard that Hamnet was lying sick of a fever."

She turned to see how Prudence was getting on with her work; but she was in no hurry; and Prudence was patient and scrupulously careful; and the dead, had they been able to speak, would not have bade her cease and go away, for a gentler hand never touched a grave.

"I suppose it is Grandmother Hathaway who will go next," Judith continued, in the same absent kind of way; "but indeed she says she is right well content either to go or to stay; for now, as she says, she has about as many kinsfolk there as here, and she will not be going among strangers. And well I know she will make for Hamnet as soon as she is there, for like my father's love for Bess Hall was her love for the boy while he was with us. Tell me, Prudence, has he grown up to be of my age? You know we were twins. Is he a man now, so that we should see him as some one different? Or is he still our little Hamnet, just as we used to know him?"

"How can I tell you, Judith?" the other said, almost in pain. "You ask such bold questions; and all these things are hidden from us and behind a veil."

"But these are what one would like to know," said Judith, with a sigh. "Nay, if you could but tell me of such things, then you might persuade me to have a greater regard for the preachers; but

when you come and ask about such real things, they say it is all a mystery; they cannot tell; and would have you be anxious about schemes of doctrine, which are but strings of words. My father, too: when I go to him – nay, but it is many a day since I tried – he would look at me and say, 'What is in your brain now? To your needle, wench, to your needle!'"

"But naturally, Judith! Such things are mercifully hidden from us now, but they will be revealed when it is fitting for us to know them. How could our ordinary life be possible if we knew what was going on in the other world? We should have no interest in the things around us, the greater interest would be so great."

"Well, well, well," said Judith, coming with more practical eyes to the present moment, "are you finished, sweet mouse, and will you come away? What, not satisfied yet? I wonder if they know the care you take. I wonder if one will say to the other: 'Come and see. She is there again. We are not quite forgotten.' And will you do that for me, too, sweet Prue? Will you put some pansies on my grave, too? – and I know you will say out of your charity, 'Well, she was not good and pious, as I would have had her to be; she had plenty of faults; but at least she often wished to be better than she was.' Nay, I forgot," she added, glancing carelessly over to the church; "they say we shall lie among the great people, since my father bought the tithes – that we have the right to be buried in the chancel; but indeed I know I would a hundred times liefer have my grave in the open here, among the grass and the trees."

"You are too young to have such thoughts as these, Judith," said her companion, as she rose and shut down the lid of the now empty basket. "Come; shall we go?"

"Let us cross the foot-bridge, sweet Prue," Judith said, "and go through the meadows and round by Clopton's bridge, and so home; for I have that to tell you will take some time; pray Heaven it startle you not out of your senses withal!"

It was not, however, until they had got away from the church-yard, and were out in the clear golden light of the open, that she began to tell her story. She had linked her arm within that of her friend. Her manner was grave; and if there was any mischief in her eyes, it was of a demure kind, not easily detected. She confessed that it was out of mere wanton folly that she had gone to the spot indicated by the wizard, and without any very definite hope or belief. But as chance would have it, she did encounter a stranger – one, indeed, that was coming to her father's house. Then followed a complete and minute narrative of what the young man had said – the glimpses he had given her of his present condition, both on the occasion of that meeting and on the subsequent one, and how she had obtained his permission to state these things to this gentle gossip of hers. Prudence listened in silence, her eyes cast down; Judith could not see the gathering concern on her face. Nay, the latter spoke rather in a tone of raillery; for, having had time to look back over the young gentleman's confessions, and his manner, and so forth, she had arrived at a kind of assurance that he was in no such desperate case. There were many reasons why a young man might wish to lie perdu for a time; but this one had not talked as if any very imminent danger threatened him; at least, if he had intimated as much, the impression produced upon her was not permanent. And if Judith now told the story with a sort of careless bravado – as if going forth in secret to meet this stranger was a thing of risk and hazard – it was with no private conviction that there was any particular peril in the matter, but rather with the vague fancy that the adventure looked daring and romantic, and would appear as something terrible in the eyes of her timid friend.

But what now happened startled her. They were going up the steps of the foot-bridge, Prudence first, and Judith, following her, had just got to the end of her story. Prudence suddenly turned round, and her face, now opposed to the westering light, was, as Judith instantly saw, quite aghast.

"But, Judith, you do not seem to understand!" she exclaimed. "Was not that the very stranger the wizard said you would meet? – the very hour, the very place? In good truth, it must have been so! Judith, what manner of man have you been in company with?"

For an instant a flush of color overspread Judith's face, and she said, with a sort of embarrassed laugh:

"Well, and if it were so, sweet mouse? If that were the appointed one, what then?"

She was on the bridge now. Prudence caught her by both hands, and there was an anxious and piteous appeal in the loving eyes.

"Dear Judith, I beseech you, be warned! Have nothing to do with the man! Did I not say that mischief would come of planting the charm in the church-yard, and shaming a sacred place with such heathenish magic? And now look already – here is one that you dare not speak of to your own people; he is in secret correspondence with you. Heaven alone knows what dark deeds he may be bent upon, or what ruin he may bring upon you and yours. Judith, you are light-hearted and daring, and you love to be venturesome; but I know you better than you know yourself, sweetheart. You would not willingly do wrong, or bring harm on those that love you; and for the sake of all of us, Judith, have nothing to do with this man."

Judith was embarrassed, and perhaps a trifle remorseful; she had not expected her friend to take this adventure so very seriously.

"Dear Prue, you alarm yourself without reason," she said (but there was still some tell-tale color in her face). "Indeed, there is no magic or witchery about the young man. Had I seen a ghost, I should have been frightened, no doubt, for all that Don Roderigo was with me; and had I met one of the Stratford youths at the appointed place, I should have said that perhaps the good wizard had guessed well; but this was merely a stranger coming to see my father; and the chance that brought us together – well, what magic was in that? – it would have happened to you had you been walking in the lane: do you see that, dear mouse? – it would have happened to yourself had you been walking in the lane, and he would have asked of you the question that he asked of me. Nay, banish that fancy, sweet Prue, else I should be ashamed to do anything further for the young man that is unfortunate, and very grateful withal for a few words of friendliness. And so fairly spoken a young man, too; and so courtly in his bearing; and of such a handsome presence – "

"But, dear Judith, listen to me! – do not be led into such peril! Know you not that evil spirits can assume goodly shapes – the Prince of Darkness himself – "

She could not finish what she had to say, her imagination was so filled with terror.

"Sweet Puritan," said Judith, with a smile, "I know well that he goeth about like a raging lion, seeking whom he may devour; I know it well; but believe me it would not be worth his travail to haunt such a lonely and useless place as the lane that goes from Shottery to the Bidford road. Nay, but I will convince you, good mouse, by the best of all evidence, that there is nothing ghostly or evil about the young man; you shall see him, Prue – indeed you must and shall. When that he comes back to his hiding, I will contrive that you shall see him and have speech with him, and sure you will pity him as much as I do. Poor young gentleman, that he should be suspected of being Satan! Nay, how could he be Satan, Prue, and be admitted to the King's court? Hath not our good King a powerful insight into the doings of witches and wizards and the like? and think you he would allow Satan in person to come into the very Banqueting-hall to see a masque?"

"Judith! Judith!" said the other, piteously, "when you strive against me with your wit, I cannot answer you; but my heart tells me that you are in exceeding danger. I would warn you, dear cousin; I were no true friend to you else."

"But you are the best and truest of friends, you dearest Prue," said Judith, lightly, as she released her hands from her companion's earnest grasp. "Come, let us on, or we shall go supperless for the evening."

She passed along and over the narrow bridge, and down the steps on the other side. She did not seem much impressed by Prudence's entreaties; indeed, she was singing aloud:

Hey, good fellow, I drink to thee,

Pardonnez moi, je vous en prie;
To all good fellows, where'er they be,
With never a penny of money!

Prudence overtook her.

"Judith," said she, "even if he be not of that fearful kind – even if he be a real man, and such as he represents himself, bethink you what you are doing! There may be another such gathering as that at Dunchurch; and would you be in correspondence with a plotter and murderer? Nay, what was't you asked of me the other day?" she added, suddenly; and she stood still to confront her friend, with a new alarm in her eyes. "Did you not ask whether your father was well affected toward the Papists? Is there another plot? – another treason against the King? – and you would harbor one connected with such a wicked, godless, and bloodthirsty plan?"

"Nay, nay, sweet mouse! Have I not told you? He declares he has naught to do with any such enterprise; and if you would but see him, Prudence, you would believe him. Sure I am that you would believe him instantly. Why, now, there be many reasons why a young gentleman might wish to remain concealed – "

"None, Judith, none!" the other said, with decision. "Why should an honest man fear the daylight?"

"Oh, as for that," was the careless answer, "there be many an honest man that has got into the clutches of the twelve-in-the-hundred rogues; and when the writs are out against such a one, I hold it no shame that he would rather be out of the way than be thrown among the wretches in Bocardo. I know well what I speak of; many a time have I heard my father and your brother talk of it; how the rogues of usurers will keep a man in prison for twelve years for a matter of sixteen shillings – what is it they call it? – making dice of his bones? And if the young gentleman fear such treatment and the horrible company of the prisons, I marvel not that he should prefer the fresh air of Bidford, howsoever dull the life at the farm may be."

"And if that were all, why should he fear to bring the letter to your father?" the other said, with a quick glance of suspicion: she did not like the way in which Judith's ready brain could furnish forth such plausible conjectures and excuses. "Answer me that, Judith. Is your father one likely to call aloud and have the man taken, if that be all that is against him? Why should he be afraid to bring the letter from your father's friend? Nay, why should he be on the way to the house with it, and thereafter stop short and change his mind? There is many a mile betwixt London and Stratford; 'tis a marvellous thing he should travel all that way, and change his mind within a few minutes of being in the town. I love not such dark ways, Judith; no good thing can come of them, but evil; and it were ill done of you – even if you be careless of danger to yourself, as I trow you mostly are – I say it is ill done of you to risk the peace of your family by holding such dangerous converse with a stranger, and one that may bring harm to us all."

Judith was not well pleased; her mouth became rather proud.

"Marry, if this be your Christian charity, I would not give a penny ballad for it!" said she, with some bitterness of tone. "I had thought the story had another teaching – I mean the story of him who fell among thieves and was beaten and robbed and left for dead – and that we were to give a helping hand to such, like the Samaritan. But now I mind me 'twas the Priest that passed by on the other side – yes, the Priest and the Levite – the godly ones who would preserve a whole skin for themselves, and let the other die of his wounds, for aught they cared! And here is a young man in distress – alone and friendless – and when he would have a few words of cheerfulness, or a message, or a scrap of news as to what is going on in the world – no, no, say the Priest and the Levite – go not near him – because he is in misfortune he is dangerous – because he is alone he is a thief and a murderer – perchance a pirate, like Captain Ward and Dansekar, or even Catesby himself come alive again. I say, God keep us all from such Christian charity!"

"You use me ill, Judith," said the other, and then was silent.

They walked on through the meadows, and Judith was watching the play of the boys. As she did so, a leather ball, struck a surprising distance, came rolling almost to her feet, and forthwith one of the lads came running after it. She picked it up and threw it to him – threw it awkwardly and clumsily, as a girl throws, but nevertheless she saved him some distance and time, and she was rewarded with many a loud "Thank you! thank you!" from the side who were out. But when they got past the players and their noise, Prudence could no longer keep silent; she had a forgiving disposition, and nothing distressed her so much as being on unfriendly terms with Judith.

"You know I meant not that, dear Judith," said she. "I only meant to shield you from harm."

As for Judith, all such trivial and temporary clouds of misunderstanding were instantly swallowed up in the warm and radiant sunniness of her nature. She broke into a laugh.

"And so you shall, dear mouse," said she, gayly; "you shall shield me from the reproach of not having a common and ordinary share of humanity; that shall you, dear Prue, should the unfortunate young gentleman come into the neighborhood again; for you will read to me the message that he sends me, and together we will devise somewhat on his behalf. No? Are you afraid to go forth and meet the pirate Dansekar? Do you expect to find the ghost of Gamaliel Ratsey walking on the Evesham road? Such silly fears, dear Prue, do not become you: you are no longer a child."

"You are laying too heavy a burden on me, Judith," the other said, rather sadly. "I know not what to do; and you say I may not ask counsel of any one. And if I do nothing, I am still taking a part."

"What part, then, but to read a few words and hold your peace?" said her companion, lightly. "What is that? But I know you will not stay there, sweet mouse. No, no; your heart is too tender. I know you would not willingly do any one an injury, or harbor suspicion and slander. You shall come and see the young gentleman, good Prue, as I say; and then you will repent in sackcloth and ashes for all that you have urged against him. And perchance it may be in New Place that you shall see him –"

"Ah, Judith, that were well!" exclaimed the other, with a brighter light on her face.

"What? Would you desire to see him, if he were to pay us a visit?" Judith said, regarding her with a smile.

"Surely, surely, after what you have told me: why not, Judith?" was the placid answer.

"There would be nothing ghostly about him then?"

"There would be no secret, Judith," said Prudence, gravely, "that you have to keep back from your own people."

"Well, well, we will see what the future holds for us," said Judith, in the same careless fashion. "And if the young gentleman come not back to Stratford, why, then, good fortune attend him, wherever he may be! for one that speaks so fair and is so modest sure deserves it. And if he come not back, then shall your heart be all the lighter, dear Prue; and as for mine, mine will not be troubled – only, that I wish him well, as I say, and would fain hear of his better estate. So all is so far happily settled, sweet mouse; and you may go in to supper with me with untroubled eyes and a free conscience: marry, there is need for that, as I bethink me; for Master Parson comes this evening, and you know you must have a pure and joyful heart with you, good Prudence, when you enter into the congregation of the saints."

"Judith, for my sake!"

"Nay, I meant not to offend, truly; it was my wicked, idle tongue, that I must clap a bridle on now – for, listen! –"

They were come to New Place. There was singing going forward within; and one or two of the casements were open; but perhaps it was the glad and confident nature of the psalm that led to the words being so clearly heard without:

The man is blest that hath not bent
To wicked rede his ear;

Nor led his life as sinners do,
Nor sat in scorner's chair.
But in the law of God the Lord
Doth set his whole delight,
And in that law doth exercise
Himself both day and night.

He shall be like the tree that groweth
Fast by the river's side;
Which bringeth forth most pleasant fruit
In her due time and tide;
Whose leaf shall never fade nor fall,
But flourish still and stand:
Even so all things shall prosper well
That this man takes in hand.

And so, having waited until the singing ceased, they entered into the house, and found two or three neighbors assembled there, and Master Walter was just about to begin his discourse on the godly life, and the substantial comfort and sweet peace of mind pertaining thereto.

Some few days after this, and toward the hour of noon, the mail-bearer came riding post-haste into the town; and in due course the contents of his saddle-bags were distributed among the folk entitled to them. But before the news-letters had been carefully spelled out to the end, a strange rumor got abroad. The French king was slain, and by the hand of an assassin. Some, as the tidings passed quickly from mouth to mouth, said the murderer was named Ravelok, others Havelok; but as to the main fact of the fearful crime having been committed, there was no manner of doubt. Naturally the bruit of this affair presently reached Julius Shawe's house; and when the timid Prudence heard of it – and when she thought of the man who had been in hiding, and who had talked with Judith, and had been so suddenly and secretly summoned away – her face grew even paler than its wont, and there was a sickly dread at her heart. She would go to see Judith at once; and yet she scarcely dared to breathe even to herself the terrible forebodings that were crowding in on her mind.

CHAPTER X. A PLAY-HOUSE

But Judith laughed aside these foolish fears; as it happened, far more important matters were just at this moment occupying her mind.

She was in the garden. She had brought out some after-dinner fragments for the Don; and while the great dun-colored beast devoured these, she had turned from him to regard Matthew gardener; and there was a sullen resentment on her face; for it seemed to her imagination that he kept doggedly and persistently near the summer-house, on which she had certain dark designs. However, the instant she caught sight of Prudence, her eyes brightened up; and, indeed, became full of an eager animation.

"Hither, hither, good Prue!" she exclaimed, hurriedly. "Quick! quick! I have news for you."

"Yes, indeed, Judith," said the other; and at the same moment Judith came to see there was something wrong – the startled pale face and frightened eyes had a story to tell.

"Why, what is to do?" said she.

"Know you not, Judith? Have you not heard? The French king is slain – murdered by an assassin!"

To her astonishment the news seemed to produce no effect whatever.

"Well, I am sorry for the poor man," Judith said, with perfect self-possession. "They that climb high must sometimes have a sudden fall. But why should that alarm you, good Prue? Or have you other news that comes more nearly home?"

And then, when Prudence almost breathlessly revealed the apprehensions that had so suddenly filled her mind, Judith would not even stay to discuss such a monstrous possibility. She laughed it aside altogether. That the courteous young gentleman who had come with a letter from Ben Jonson should be concerned in the assassination of the King of France was entirely absurd and out of the question.

"Nay, nay, good Prue," said she, lightly, "you shall make him amends for these unjust suspicions; that you shall, dear mouse, all in good time. But listen now: I have weightier matters; I have eggs on the spit, beshrew me else! Can you read me this riddle, sweet Prue? Know you by these tokens what has happened? My father comes in to dinner to-day in the gayest of humors; there is no absent staring at the window, and forgetting of all of us; it is all merriment this time; and he must needs have Bess Hall to sit beside him; and he would charge her with being a witch; and reproach her for our simple meal, when that she might have given us a banquet like that of a London Company, with French dishes and silver flagons of Theologicum, and a memorial to tell each of us what was coming. And then he would miscall your brother – which you know, dear Prudence, he never would do were he in earnest – and said he was chamberlain now, and was conspiring to be made alderman, only that he might sell building materials to the Corporation and so make money out of his office. And I know not what else of jests and laughing; but at length he sent to have the Evesham roan saddled; and he said that when once he had gone along to the sheep-wash to see that the hurdles were rightly up for the shearing, he would give all the rest of the day to idleness – to idleness wholly; and perchance he might ride over to Broadway to see the shooting-match going forward there. Now, you wise one, can you guess what has happened? Know you what is in store for us? Can you read me the riddle?"

"I see no riddle, Judith," said the other, with puzzled eyes. "I met your father as I came through the house; and he asked if Julius were at home: doubtless he would have him ride to Broadway with him."

"Dear mouse, is that your skill at guessing? But listen now" – and here she dropped her voice as she regarded Goodman Matthew, though that personage seemed busily enough occupied with his watering-can. "This is what has happened: I know the signs of the weather. Be sure he has finished the play – the play that the young prince Mamillius was in: you remember, good Prue? – and the

large fair copy is made out and locked away in the little cupboard, against my father's next going to London; and the loose sheets are thrown into the oak chest, along with the others. And now, good Prue, sweet Prue, do you know what you must manage? Indeed, I dare not go near the summer-house while that ancient wiseman is loitering about; and you must coax him, Prue; you must get him away; sometimes I see his villain eyes watching me, as if he had suspicion in his mind – "

"'Tis your own guilty conscience, Judith," said Prudence, but with a smile; for she had herself connived at this offence ere now.

"By fair means or foul, sweet mouse, you must get him away to the other end of the garden," said she, eagerly; "for now the Don has nearly finished his dinner, and goodman-wiseman-fool will wonder if we stay longer here. Nay, I have it, sweet Prue: you must get him along to the corner where my mother grows her simples; and you must keep him there for a space, that I may get out the right papers; and this is what you must do: you will ask him for something that sounds like Latin – no matter what nonsense it may be; and he will answer you that he knows it right well, but has none of it at the present time; and you will say that you have surely seen it among my mother's simples, and thus you will lead him away to find it and the longer you seek the better. Do you understand, good Prue? – and quick! quick!"

Prudence's pale face flushed.

"You ask too much, Judith. I cannot deceive the poor man so."

"Nay, nay, you are too scrupulous, dear mouse. A trifle – a mere trifle."

And then Prudence happened to look up, and she met Judith's eyes; and there was such frank self-confidence and audacity in them, and also such a singular and clear-shining beauty, that the simple Puritan was in a manner bedazzled. She said, with a quiet smile, as she turned away her head again:

"Well, I marvel not, Judith, that you can bewitch the young men, and bewilder their understanding. 'Tis easy to see – if they have eyes and regard you, they are lost; but how you have your own way with all of us, and how you override our judgment, and do with us what you please, that passes me. Even Dr. Hall: for whom else would he have brought from Coventry the green silk stockings and green velvet shoes? – you know such vanities find little favor in his own home – "

"Quick, quick, sweetheart, muzzle me that gaping ancient!" said Judith, interrupting her. "The Don has finished; and I will dart into the summer-house as I carry back the dish. Detain him, sweet Prue; speak a word or two of Latin to him; he will swear he understands you right well, though you yourself understand not a word of it – "

"I may not do all you ask, Judith," said the other, after a moment's reflection (and still with an uneasy feeling that she was yielding to the wiles of a temptress), "but I will ask the goodman to show me your mother's simples, and how they thrive."

A minute or two thereafter Judith had swiftly stolen into the summer-house – which was spacious and substantial of its kind, and contained a small black cupboard fixed up in a corner of the walls, a table and chair, and a long oak chest on the floor. It was this last that held the treasure she was in search of; and now, the lid having been raised, she was down on one knee, carefully selecting from a mass of strewn papers (indeed, there were a riding-whip, a sword and sword-belt, and several other articles mixed up in this common receptacle) such sheets as were without a minute mark which she had invented for her own private purposes. These secured and hastily hidden in her sleeve, she closed the lid, and went out into the open again, calling upon Prudence to come to her, for that she was going into the house.

They did not, however, remain within-doors at New Place, for that might have been dangerous; they knew of a far safer resort. Just behind Julius Shawe's house, and between that and the garden, there was a recess formed by the gable of a large barn not quite reaching the adjacent wall. It was a three-sided retreat; overlooked by no window whatsoever; there was a frail wooden bench on two sides of it, and the entrance to it was partly blocked up by an empty cask that had been put there to

be out of the way. For outlook there was nothing but a glimpse of the path going into the garden, a bit of greensward, and two apple-trees between them and the sky. It was not a noble theatre, this little den behind the barn; but it had produced for these two many a wonderful pageant; for the empty barrel and the bare barn wall and the two trees would at one time be transformed into the forest of Arden, and Rosalind would be walking there in her pretty page costume, and laughing at the love-sick Orlando; and again they would form the secret haunts of Queen Titania and her court, with the jealous Oberon chiding her for her refusal; and again they would become the hall of a great northern castle, with trumpets and cannon sounding without as the King drank to Hamlet. Indeed, the elder of these two young women had an extraordinarily vivid imagination; she saw the things and people as if they were actually there before her; she realized their existence so intensely that even Prudence was brought to sympathize with them, and to follow their actions now with hot indignation, and now with triumphant delight over good fortune come at last. There was no stage-carpenter there to distract them with his dismal expedients; no actor to thrust his physical peculiarities between them and the poet's ethereal visions; the dream-world was before them, clear and filled with light; and Prudence's voice was gentle and of a musical kind. Nay, sometimes Judith would leap to her feet. "You shall not! – you shall not!" she would exclaim, as if addressing some strange visitant that was showing the villainy of his mind; and tears came quickly to her eyes if there was a tale of pity; and the joy and laughter over lovers reconciled brought warm color to her face. They forgot that these walls that enclosed them were of gray mud; they forgot that the prevailing odor in the air was that of the malt in the barn for now they were regarding Romeo in the moonlight, with the dusk of the garden around, and Juliet uttering her secrets to the honeyed night; and again they were listening to the awful voices of the witches on the heath, and guessing at the sombre thoughts passing through the mind of Macbeth; and then again they were crying bitterly when they saw before them an old man, gray-haired, discrowned, and witless, that looked from one to the other of those standing by, and would ask who the sweet lady was that sought with tears for his benediction. They could hear the frail and shaken voice:

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