

GEORGE MEREDITH

THE ADVENTURES OF
HARRY RICHMOND.
VOLUME 2

George Meredith

**The Adventures of Harry
Richmond. Volume 2**

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CHAPTER VII

A FREE LIFE ON THE ROAD

I woke very early, though I had taken kindly to my pillow, as I found by my having an arm round my companion's neck, and her fingers intertwined with mine. For awhile I lay looking at her eyes, which had every imaginable light and signification in them; they advised me to lie quiet, they laughed at my wonder, they said, 'Dear little fellow!' they flashed as from under a cloud, darkened, flashed out of it, seemed to dip in water and shine, and were sometimes like a view into a forest, sometimes intensely sunny, never quite still. I trusted her, and could have slept again, but the sight of the tent stupefied me; I fancied the sky had fallen, and gasped for air; my head was extremely dizzy too; not one idea in it was kept from wheeling. This confusion of my head flew to my legs when, imitating her, I rose to go forth. In a fit of horror I thought, 'I 've forgotten how to walk!'

Summoning my manful resolution, I made the attempt to step across the children swaddled in matting and straw and old gowns or petticoats. The necessity for doing it with a rush seized me after the first step. I pitched over one little bundle, right on to the figure of a sleeping woman. All she did was to turn round, murmuring, 'Naughty Jackie.' My companion pulled me along gravely, and once in the air, with a good breath of it in my chest, I felt tall and strong, and knew what had occurred. The tent where I had slept struck me as more curious than my own circumstances. I lifted my face to the sky; it was just sunrise, beautiful; bits of long and curling cloud brushed any way close on the blue, and rosy and white, deliciously cool; the grass was all grey, our dell in shadow, and the tops of the trees burning, a few birds twittering.

I sucked a blade of grass.

'I wish it was all water here,' I said.

'Come and have a drink and a bathe,' said my companion.

We went down the dell and over a juniper slope, reminding me of my day at John Salter's house and the last of dear Heriot. Rather to my shame, my companion beat me at running; she was very swift, and my legs were stiff.

'Can you swim?' she asked me.

'I can row, and swim, and fence, and ride, and fire a pistol,' I said.

'Oh, dear,' said she, after eyeing me enviously. I could see that I had checked a recital of her accomplishments.

We arrived at a clear stream in a gentleman's park, where grass rolled smooth as sea-water on a fine day, and cows and horses were feeding.

'I can catch that horse and mount him,' she said.

I was astonished.

'Straddle?'

She nodded down for 'Yes.'

'No saddle?'

She nodded level for 'No.'

My respect for her returned. But she could not swim.

'Only up to my knees,' she confessed.

'Have a look at me,' said I; and I stripped and shot into the water, happy as a fish, and thinking how much nicer it was than champagne. My enjoyment made her so envious that she plucked off

her stockings, and came in as far as she dared. I called to her. 'You're like a cow,' and she showed her teeth, bidding me not say that.

'A cow! a cow!' I repeated, in my superior pleasure.

She spun out in a breath, 'If you say that, I'll run away with every bit of your clothes, and you'll come out and run about naked, you will.'

'Now I float,' was my answer, 'now I dive'; and when I came up she welcomed me with a big bright grin.

A smart run in the heat dried me. I dressed, finding half my money on the grass. She asked me to give her one of those bits-a shilling. I gave her two, upon which she asked me, invitingly, if ever I tossed. I replied that I never tossed for money; but she had caught a shilling, and I could not resist guessing 'heads,' and won; the same with her second shilling. She handed them to me sullenly, sobbing, yet she would not take them back.

'By-and-by you give me another two,' she said, growing lively again. We agreed that it would be a good thing if we entered the village and bought something. None of the shops were open. We walked through the churchyard. I said, 'Here's where dead people are buried.'

'I'll dance if you talk about dead people,' said she, and began whooping at the pitch of her voice. On my wishing to know why she did it, her reply was that it was to make the dead people hear. My feelings were strange: the shops not open, and no living people to be seen. We climbed trees, and sat on a branch talking of birds' eggs till hunger drove us to the village street, where, near the public-house, we met the man-tramp, who whistled.

He was rather amusing. He remarked that he put no questions to me, because he put no question to anybody, because answers excited him about subjects that had no particular interest to him, and did not benefit him to the extent of a pipe of 'tobacco; and all through not being inquisitive, yesterday afternoon he had obtained, as if it had been chucked into his lap, a fine-flavoured fat goose honourably for his supper, besides bottles of ale, bottles of ginger-pop, and a fair-earned half-crown. That was through his not being inquisitive, and he was not going to be inquisitive now, knowing me for a gentleman: my master had tipped him half-a-crown.

Fortunately for him, and perhaps for my liberty, he employed a verb marvellously enlightening to a schoolboy. I tipped him another half-crown. He thanked me, observing that there were days when you lay on your back and the sky rained apples; while there were other days when you wore your fingers down to the first joint to catch a flea. Such was Fortune!

In a friendly manner he advised me to go to school; if not there, then to go home. My idea, which I had only partly conceived, was to have a look at Riversley over a hedge, kiss my aunt Dorothy unaware, and fly subsequently in search of my father. Breakfast, however, was my immediate thought. He and the girl sat down to breakfast at the inn as my guests. We ate muttonchops and eggs, and drank coffee. After it, though I had no suspicions, I noticed that the man grew thoughtful. He proposed to me, supposing I had no objection against slow travelling, to join company for a couple of days, if I was for Hampshire, which I stated was the county I meant to visit.

'Well then, here now, come along, d'ye see, look,' said he, 'I mustn't be pounced on, and no missing young gentleman in my society, and me took half-a-crown for his absence; that won't do. You get on pretty well with the gal, and that 's a screaming farce: none of us do. Lord! she looks down on such scum as us. She's gipsy blood, true sort; everything's sausages that gets into their pockets, no matter what it was when it was out. Well then, now, here, you and the gal go t' other side o' Bed'Iming, and you wait for us on the heath, and we 'll be there to comfort ye 'fore dark. Is it a fister?'

He held out his hand; I agreed; and he remarked that he now counted a breakfast in the list of his gains from never asking questions.

I was glad enough to quit the village in a hurry, for the driver of the geese, or a man dreadfully resembling him, passed me near the public-house, and attacked my conscience on the cowardly side, which is, I fear, the first to awaken, and always the liveliest half while we are undisciplined. I would

have paid him money, but the idea of a conversation with him indicated the road back to school. My companion related her history. She belonged to a Hampshire gipsy tribe, and had been on a visit to a relative down in the East counties, who died on the road, leaving her to be brought home by these tramps: she called them mumpers, and made faces when she spoke of them. Gipsies, she said, were a different sort: gipsies camped in gentlemen's parks; gipsies, horses, fiddles, and the wide world—that was what she liked. The wide world she described as a heath, where you looked and never saw the end of it I let her talk on. For me to talk of my affairs to a girl without bonnet and boots would have been absurd. Otherwise, her society pleased me: she was so like a boy, and unlike any boy I knew.

My mental occupation on the road was to calculate how many hill-tops I should climb before I beheld Riversley. The Sunday bells sounded homely from village to village as soon as I was convinced that I heard no bells summoning boarders to Rippenger's school. The shops in the villages continued shut; however, I told the girl they should pay me for it next day, and we had an interesting topic in discussing as to the various things we would buy. She was for bright ribands and draper's stuff, I for pastry and letter-paper. The smell of people's dinners united our appetites. Going through a village I saw a man carrying a great baked pie, smelling overpoweringly, so that to ask him his price for it was a natural impulse with me. 'What! sell my Sunday dinner?' he said, and appeared ready to drop the dish. Nothing stopped his staring until we had finished a plateful a-piece and some beer in his cottage among his family. He wanted to take me in alone. 'She's a common tramp,' he said of the girl.

'That's a lie,' she answered.

Of course I would not leave her hungry outside, so in the end he reluctantly invited us both, and introduced us to his wife.

'Here's a young gentleman asks a bit o' dinner, and a young I-d'n-know- what 's after the same; I leaves it to you, missus.'

His wife took it off his shoulders in good humour, saying it was lucky she made the pie big enough for her family and strays. They would not accept more than a shilling for our joint repast. The man said that was the account to a farthing, if I was too proud to be a poor man's guest, and insisted on treating him like a public. Perhaps I would shake hands at parting? I did cordially, and remembered him when people were not so civil. They wanted to know whether we had made a runaway match of it. The fun of passing a boys'-school and hearing the usher threaten to punish one fellow for straying from ranks, entertained me immensely. I laughed at them just as the stupid people we met laughed at me, which was unpleasant for the time; but I knew there was not a single boy who would not have changed places with me, only give him the chance, though my companion was a gipsy girl, and she certainly did look odd company for a gentleman's son in a tea-garden and public-house parlour. At nightfall, however, I was glad of her and she of me, and we walked hand in hand. I narrated tales of Roman history. It was very well for her so say, 'I'll mother you,' as we lay down to sleep; I discovered that she would never have hooted over churchyard graves in the night. She confessed she believed the devil went about in the night. Our bed was a cart under a shed, our bed-clothes fern-leaves and armfuls of straw. The shafts of the cart were down, so we lay between upright and level, and awakening in the early light I found our four legs hanging over the seat in front. 'How you have been kicking!' said I. She accused me of the same. Next minute she pointed over the side of the cart, and I saw the tramp's horse and his tents beneath a broad roadside oak-tree. Her face was comical, just like a boy's who thinks he has escaped and is caught. 'Let's run,' she said. Preferring positive independence, I followed her, and then she told me that she had overheard the tramp last night swearing I was as good as a fistful of half-crowns lost to him if he missed me. The image of Rippenger's school overshadowed me at this communication. With some melancholy I said: 'You'll join your friends, won't you?'

She snapped her fingers: 'Mumpers !' and walked on carelessly.

We were now on the great heaths. They brought the memory of my father vividly; the smell of the air half inclined me to turn my steps toward London, I grew so full of longing for him. Nevertheless I resolved to have one gaze at Riversley, my aunt Dorothy, and Sewis, the old grey- brown butler, and

the lamb that had grown a sheep; wonderful contrasts to my grand kings of England career. My first clear recollection of Riversley was here, like an outline of a hill seen miles away. I might have shed a tear or two out of love for my father, had not the thought that I was a very queer boy displaced his image. I could not but be a very queer boy, such a lot of things happened to me. Suppose I joined the gipsies? My companion wished me to. She had brothers, horse-dealers, beautiful fiddlers. Suppose I learnt the fiddle? Suppose I learnt their language and went about with them and became king of the gipsies? My companion shook her head; she could not encourage this ambitious idea because she had never heard of a king of the gipsies or a queen either. 'We fool people,' she said, and offended me, for our school believed in a gipsy king, and one fellow, Hackman, used to sing a song of a gipsy king; and it was as much as to say that my schoolfellows were fools, every one of them. I accused her of telling lies. She grinned angrily. 'I don't tell 'em to friends,' she said. We had a quarrel. The truth was, I was enraged at the sweeping out of my prospects of rising to distinction among the gipsies. After breakfast at an inn, where a waiter laughed at us to our faces, and we fed scowling, shy, and hungry, we had another quarrel. I informed her of my opinion that gipsies could not tell fortunes.

'They can, and you come to my mother and my aunt, and see if they can't tell your fortune,' said she, in a fury.

'Yes, and that's how they fool people,' said I. I enjoyed seeing the flash of her teeth. But my daring of her to look me in the eyes and swear on her oath she believed the fortunes true ones, sent her into a fit of sullenness.

'Go along, you nasty little fellow, your shadow isn't half a yard,' she said, and I could smile at that; my shadow stretched half across the road. We had a quarrelsome day wherever we went; rarely walking close together till nightfall, when she edged up to my hand, with, 'I say, I'll keep you warm to-night, I will.' She hugged me almost too tight, but it was warm and social, and helped to the triumph of a feeling I had that nothing made me regret running away from Rippenger's school.

An adventure befell us in the night. A farmer's wife, whom we asked for a drink of water after dark, lent us an old blanket to cover us in a dry ditch on receiving our promise not to rob the orchard. An old beggar came limping by us, and wanted to share our covering. My companion sank right under the blanket to peer at him through one of its holes. He stood enormous above me in the moonlight, like an apparition touching earth and sky.

'Cold, cold,' he whined: 'there's ne'er a worse off but there's a better off. Young un!' His words dispersed the fancy that he was something horrible, or else my father in disguise going to throw off his rags, and shine, and say he had found me. 'Are ye one, or are ye two?' he asked.

I replied that we were two.

'Then I'll come and lie in the middle,' said he.

'You can't; there's no room,' I sang out.

'Lord,' said he, 'there's room for any reckoning o' empty stomachs in a ditch.'

'No, I prefer to be alone: good-night,' said I.

'Why!' he exclaimed, 'where ha' you been t' learn language? Halloa !'

'Please, leave me alone; it's my intention to go to sleep,' I said, vexed at having to conciliate him; he had a big stick.

'Oho!' went the beggar. Then he recommenced:

'Tell me you've stole nothing in your life! You've stole a gentleman's tongue, I knows the ring o' that. How comes you out here? Who's your mate there down below? Now, see, I'm going to lift my stick.'

At these menacing words the girl jumped out of the blanket, and I called to him that I would rouse the farmer.

'Why . . . because I'm goin' to knock down a apple or two on your head?' he inquired, in a tone of reproach. 'It's a young woman you've got there, eh? Well, odd grows odder, like the man who

turned three shillings into five. Now, you gi' me a lie under your blanket, I 'll knock down a apple apiece. If ever you've tasted gin, you 'll say a apple at night's a cordial, though it don't intoxicate.'

The girl whispered in my ear, 'He's lame as ducks.' Her meaning seized me at once; we both sprang out of the ditch and ran, dragging our blanket behind us. He pursued, but we eluded him, and dropped on a quiet sleeping-place among furzes. Next morning, when we took the blanket to the farm-house, we heard that the old wretch had traduced our characters, and got a breakfast through charging us with the robbery of the apple- tree. I proved our innocence to the farmer's wife by putting down a shilling. The sight of it satisfied her. She combed my hair, brought me a bowl of water and a towel, and then gave us a bowl of milk and bread, and dismissed us, telling me I had a fair face and dare-devil written on it: as for the girl, she said of her that she knew gipsies at a glance, and what God Almighty made them for there was no guessing. This set me thinking all through the day, 'What can they have been made for?' I bought a red scarf for the girl, and other things she fixed her eyes on, but I lost a great deal of my feeling of fellowship with her. 'I dare say they were made for fun,' I thought, when people laughed at us now, and I laughed also.

I had a day of rollicking laughter, puzzling the girl, who could only grin two or three seconds at a time, and then stared like a dog that waits for his master to send him off again running, the corners of her mouth twitching for me to laugh or speak, exactly as a dog might wag his tail. I studied her in the light of a harmless sort of unaccountable creature; witness at any rate for the fact that I had escaped from school.

We loitered half the morning round a cricketers' booth in a field, where there was moderately good cricketing. The people thought it of first- rate quality. I told them I knew a fellow who could bowl out either eleven in an hour and a half. One of the men frightened me by saying, 'By Gerge! I'll in with you into a gig, and off with you after that ther' faller.' He pretended to mean it, and started up. I watched him without flinching. He remarked that if I 'had not cut my lucky from school, and tossed my cap for a free life, he was —' whatever may be expressed by a slap on the thigh. We played a single-wicket side game, he giving me six runs, and crestfallen he was to find himself beaten; but, as I let him know, one who had bowled to Heriot for hours and stood against Saddlebank's bowling, was a tough customer, never mind his age.

This man offered me his friendship. He made me sit and eat beside him at the afternoon dinner of the elevens, and sent platefuls of food to the girl, where she was allowed to squat; and said he, 'You and I'll tie a knot, and be friends for life.'

I replied, 'With pleasure.'

We nodded over a glass of ale. In answer to his questions, I stated that I liked farms, I would come and see his farm, I would stay with him two or three days, I would give him my address if I had one, I was on my way to have a look at Riversley Grange.

'Hey!' says he, 'Riversley Grange! Well, to be sure now! I'm a tenant of Squire Beltham's, and a right sort of landlord, too.'

'Oh!' says I, 'he's my grandfather, but I don't care much about him.'

'Lord!' says he. 'What! be you the little boy, why, Master Harry Richmond that was carried off in the night, and the old squire shut up doors for a fortnight, and made out you was gone in a hearse! Why, I know all about you, you see. And back you are, hurrah! The squire 'll be hearty, that he will. We've noticed a change in him ever since you left. Gout's been at his leg, off and on, a deal shrewder. But he rides to hounds, and dines his tenants still, that he does; he's one o' th' old style. Everything you eat and drink's off his estate, the day he dines his tenants. No humbug 'bout old Squire Beltham.'

I asked him if Sewis was alive.

'Why, old Sewis,' says he, 'you're acquainted with old Sewis? Why, of course you are. Yes, old Sewis 's alive, Master Harry. And you bet me at single-wicket! That 'll be something to relate to 'em all. By Gerge, if I didn't think I'd got a nettle in my fist when I saw you pitch into my stumps. Dash it! thinks I. But th' old squire 'll be proud of you, that he will. My farm lies three miles away. You

look at a crow flying due South-east five minutes from Riversley, and he's over Throckham farm, and there I 'll drive ye to-night, and to-morrow, clean and tidy out o' my wife's soap and water, straight to Riversley. Done, eh? My name's Eckerthy. No matter where you comes from, here you are, eh, Master Harry? And I see you last time in a donkey-basket, and here you come in breeches and defy me to singlewicket, and you bet me too!"

He laughed for jollity. An extraordinary number of emotions had possession of me: the most intelligible one being a restless vexation at myself, as the principal person concerned, for not experiencing anything like the farmer's happiness. I preferred a gipsy life to Riversley. Gipsies were on the road, and that road led to my father. I endeavoured to explain to Farmer Eckerthy that I was travelling in this direction merely to have a short look at Riversley; but it was impossible; he could not understand me. The more I tried, the more he pressed me to finish my glass of ale, which had nothing to do with it. I drank, nevertheless, and I suppose said many funny things in my anxiety that the farmer should know what I meant; he laughed enough.

While he was fielding against the opposite eleven, the tramp came into the booth, and we had a match of cunning.

'Schoolmaster's out after you, young gentleman,' said he, advising me to hurry along the road if I sought to baffle pursuit.

I pretended alarm, and then said, 'Oh, you'll stand by me,' and treated him to ale.

He assured me I left as many tracks behind me as if I went spilling a box of lucifer-matches. He was always for my hastening on until I ordered fresh ale for him. The girl and he grimaced at one another in contempt. So we remained seeing the game out. By the time the game ended, the tramp had drunk numbers of glasses of ale.

'A fine-flavoured fat goose,' he counted his gains since the commencement of our acquaintance, 'bottles of ale and ginger-pop, two half-crowns, more ale, and more to follow, let's hope. You only stick to your friends, young gentleman, won't you, sir? It's a hard case for a poor man like me if you don't. We ain't got such chances every morning of our lives. Do you perceive, sir? I request you to inform me, do you perceive, sir? I'm muddled a bit, sir, but a man must look after his interests.'

I perceived he was so muddled as to be unable to conceal that his interests were involved in my capture; but I was merry too. Farmer Eckerthy dealt the tramp a scattering slap on the back when he returned to the booth, elated at having beaten the enemy by a single run.

'Master Harry Richmond go to Riversley to his grandfather in your company, you scoundrel!' he cried in a rage, after listening to him.

'I mean to drive him over. It 's a comfortable ten-mile, and no more.

But I say, Master Harry, what do you say to a peck o' supper?'

He communicated to me confidentially that he did not like to seem to slink away from the others, who had made up their minds to stop and sup; so we would drive home by moonlight, singing songs. And so we did. I sat beside the farmer, the girl scrambled into the hinder part of the cart, and the tramp stood moaning, 'Oh dear! oh dear! you goes away to Riversley without your best friend.'

I tossed him a shilling. We sang beginnings and ends of songs. The farmer looked at the moon, and said, 'Lord! she stares at us!' Then he sang:

'The moon is shining on Latworth lea,
And where'll she see such a jovial three
As we, boys, we? And why is she pale?
It's because she drinks water instead of ale.'

'Where 's the remainder? There's the song!—

"Oh! handsome Miss Gammon

Has married Lord Mammon,
And jilted her suitors,
All Cupid's sharpshooters,
And gone in a carriage
And six to her marriage,
Singing hey! for I've landed my salmon, my salmon!"

Where's the remainder? I heard it th' only time I ever was in London town, never rested till I'd learnt it, and now it's clean gone. What's come to me?"

He sang to 'Mary of Ellingmere' and another maid of some place, and a loud song of Britons.

It was startling to me to wake up to twilight in the open air and silence, for I was unaware that I had fallen asleep. The girl had roused me, and we crept down from the cart. Horse and farmer were quite motionless in a green hollow beside the roadway. Looking across fields and fir plantations, I beheld a house in the strange light of the hour, and my heart began beating; but I was overcome with shyness, and said to myself, 'No, no, that's not Riversley; I'm sure it isn't'; though the certainty of it was, in my teeth, refuting me. I ran down the fields to the park and the bright little river, and gazed. When I could say, 'Yes, it is Riversley!' I turned away, hurt even to a sense of smarting pain, without knowing the cause. I dare say it is true, as the girl declared subsequently, that I behaved like one in a fit. I dropped, and I may have rolled my body and cried. An indefinite resentment at Riversley was the feeling I grew conscious of after very fast walking. I would not have accepted breakfast there.

About mid-day, crossing a stubble-field, the girl met a couple of her people-men. Near evening we entered one of their tents. The women set up a cry, 'Kiomi! Kiomi!' like a rising rookery. Their eyes and teeth made such a flashing as when you dabble a hand in a dark waterpool. The strange tongue they talked, with a kind of peck of the voice at a word, rapid, never high or low, and then a slide of similar tones all round, —not musical, but catching and incessant,—gave me an idea that I had fallen upon a society of birds, exceedingly curious ones. They welcomed me kindly, each of them looking me in the face a bright second or so. I had two helps from a splendid pot of broth that hung over a fire in the middle of the tent.

Kiomi was my companion's name. She had sisters Adeline and Eveleen, and brothers Osric and William, and she had a cousin a prizefighter. 'That's what I'll be,' said I. Fiddling for money was not a prospect that charmed me, though it was pleasant lying in Kiomi's arms to hear Osric play us off to sleep; it was like floating down one of a number of visible rivers; I could see them converging and breaking away while I floated smoothly, and a wonderful fair country nodded drowsy. From that to cock-crow at a stride. Sleep was no more than the passage through the arch of a canal. Kiomi and I were on the heath before sunrise, jumping gravel-pits, chasing sandpipers, mimicking pewits; it seemed to me I had only just heard the last of Osric's fiddle when yellow colour filled in along the sky over Riversley. The curious dark thrill of the fiddle in the tent by night seemed close up behind the sun, and my quiet fancies as I lay dropping to sleep, followed me like unobtrusive shadows during daylight, or, to speak truthfully, till about dinner-time, when I thought of nothing but the great stew-pot. We fed on plenty; nicer food than Rippenger's, minus puddings. After dinner I was ready for mischief. My sensations on seeing Kiomi beg of a gentleman were remarkable. I reproached her. She showed me sixpence shining in the palm of her hand. I gave her a shilling to keep her from it. She had now got one and sixpence, she said: meaning, I supposed upon reflection, that her begging had produced that sum, and therefore it was a good thing. The money remaining in my pocket amounted to five shillings and a penny. I offered it to Kiomi's mother, who refused to accept it; so did the father, and Osric also. I might think of them, they observed, on my return to my own house: they pointed at Riversley. 'No,' said I, 'I shan't go there, you may be sure.' The women grinned, and the men yawned. The business of the men appeared to be to set to work about everything as if they had a fire inside them, and then to stretch out their legs and lie on their backs, exactly as if the fire had gone

out. Excepting Osric's practice on the fiddle, and the father's bringing in and leading away of horses, they did little work in my sight but brown themselves in the sun. One morning Osric's brother came to our camp with their cousin the prizefighter—a young man of lighter complexion, upon whom I gazed, remembering John Thresher's reverence for the heroical profession. Kiomi whispered some story concerning her brother having met the tramp. I did not listen; I was full of a tempest, owing to two causes: a studious admiration of the smart young prizefighter's person, and wrathful disgust at him for calling Kiomi his wife, and telling her he was prepared to marry her as soon as she played her harp like King David. The intense folly of his asking a girl to play like David made me despise him, but he was splendidly handsome and strong, and to see him put on the gloves for a spar with big William, Kiomi's brother, and evade and ward the huge blows, would have been a treat to others besides old John of Dipwell Farm. He had the agile grace of a leopard; his waistcoat reminded me of one; he was like a piece of machinery in free action. Pleased by my enthusiasm, he gave me a lesson, promising me more.

'He'll be champion some day,' said Kiomi, at gnaw upon an apple he had given her.

I knocked the apple on the ground, and stamped on it. She slapped my cheek. In a minute we stood in a ring. I beheld the girl actually squaring at me.

'Fight away,' I said, to conceal my shame, and imagining I could slip from her hits as easily as the prizefighter did from big William's. I was mistaken.

'Oh! you think I can't defend myself,' said Kiomi; and rushed in with one, two, quick as a cat, and cool as a statue.

'Fight, my merry one; she takes punishment,' the prizefighter sang out. 'First blood to you, Kiomi; uncork his claret, my duck; straight at the nozzle, he sees more lamps than shine in London, I warrant. Make him lively, cook him; tell him who taught you; a downer to him, and I'll marry you to-morrow!'

I conceived a fury against her as though she had injured me by appearing the man's property—and I was getting the worst of it; her little fists shot straight and hard as bars of iron; she liked fighting; she was at least my match. To avoid the disgrace of seriously striking her, or of being beaten at an open exchange of blows, I made a feint, and caught her by the waist and threw her, not very neatly, for I fell myself in her grip. They had to pluck her from me by force.

'And you've gone a course of tuition in wrestling, squire?' the prizefighter said to me rather savagely.

The others were cordial, and did not snarl at me for going to the ropes, as he called it. Kiomi desired to renew the conflict. I said aloud:

'I never fight girls, and I tell you I don't like their licking me.'

'Then you come down to the river and wash your face,' said she, and pulled me by the fingers, and when she had washed my face clear of blood, kissed me. I thought she tasted of the prizefighter.

Late in the afternoon Osric proposed that he and I and the prizefighter should take a walk. I stipulated for Kiomi to be of the party, which was allowed, and the gipsy-women shook my hand as though I had been departing on a long expedition, entreating me not to forget them, and never to think evil of poor gipsy-folk.

'Why, I mean to stay with you,' said I.

They grinned delightedly, and said I must be back to see them break up camp in the evening. Every two or three minutes Kiomi nudged my elbow and pointed behind, where I saw the women waving their coloured neckerchiefs. Out of sight of our tents we came in view of the tramp. Kiomi said, 'Hide!' I dived into a furze dell. The tramp approached, calling out for news of me. Now at Rippenger's school, thanks to Heriot, lying was not the fashion; still I had heard boys lie, and they can let it out of their mouths like a fish, so lively, simple, and solid, that you could fancy a master had asked them for it and they answered, 'There it is.' But boys cannot lie in one key spontaneously, a number of them to the same effect, as my friends here did. I was off, they said; all swung round

to signify the direction of my steps; my plans were hinted at; particulars were not stated on the plea that there should be no tellings; it was remarked that I ought to have fair play and 'law.' Kiomi said she hoped he would not catch me. The tramp winced with vexation, and the gipsies chaffed him. I thanked them in my heart for their loyal conduct. Creeping under cover of the dell I passed round to the road over a knoll of firs as quick as my feet could carry me, and had just cried, 'Now I'm safe'; when a lady stepping from a carriage on the road, caught me in her arms and hugged me blind. It was my aunt Dorothy.

CHAPTER VIII

JANET ILCHESTER

I was a prisoner, captured by fraud, and with five shillings and a penny still remaining to me for an assurance of my power to enjoy freedom. Osric and Kiomi did not show themselves on the road, they answered none of my shouts.

'She is afraid to look me in the face,' I said, keeping my anger on Kiomi.

'Harry, Harry,' said my aunt, 'they must have seen me here; do you grieve, and you have me, dear?'

Her eager brown eyes devoured me while I stood panting to be happy, if only I might fling my money at Kiomi's feet, and tell her, 'There, take all I have; I hate you!' One minute I was curiously perusing the soft shade of a moustache on my aunt's upper lip; the next, we jumped into the carriage, and she was my dear aunt Dorothy again, and the world began rolling another way.

The gipsies had made an appointment to deliver me over to my aunt; Farmer Eckerthy had spoken of me to my grandfather; the tramp had fetched Mr. Rippenger on the scene. Rippenger paid the tramp, I dare say; my grandfather paid Rippenger's bill and for Saddlebank's goose; my aunt paid the gipsies, and I think it doubtful that they handed the tramp a share, so he came to the end of his list of benefits from not asking questions.

I returned to Riversley more of a man than most boys of my age, and more of a child. A small child would not have sulked as I did at Kiomi's behaviour; but I met my grandfather's ridiculous politeness with a man's indifference.

'So you're back, sir, are you!'

'I am, sir.'

'Ran like a hare, 'stead of a fox, eh?'

'I didn't run like either, sir.'

'Do you ride?'

'Yes, sir; a horse.'

That was his greeting and how I took it. I had not run away from him, so I had a quiet conscience.

He said, shortly after, 'Look here; your name is Harry Richmond in my house—do you understand? My servants have orders to call you Master Harry Richmond, according to your christening. You were born here, sir, you will please to recollect. I'll have no vagabond names here'—he puffed himself hot, muttering, 'Nor vagabond airs neither.'

I knew very well what it meant. A sore spirit on my father's behalf kept me alive to any insult of him; and feeling that we were immeasurably superior to the Beltham blood, I merely said, apart to old Sewis, shrugging my shoulders, 'The squire expects me to recollect where I was born. I'm not likely to forget his nonsense.'

Sewis, in reply, counselled me to direct a great deal of my attention to the stables, and drink claret with the squire in the evening, things so little difficult to do that I moralized reflectively, 'Here 's a way of gaining a relative's affection!' The squire's punctilious regard for payments impressed me, it is true. He had saved me from the disgrace of owing money to my detested schoolmaster; and, besides, I was under his roof, eating of his bread. My late adventurous life taught me that I incurred an obligation by it. Kiomi was the sole victim of my anger that really seemed to lie down to be trampled on, as she deserved for her unpardonable treachery.

By degrees my grandfather got used to me, and commenced saying in approval of certain of my performances, 'There's Beltham in that—Beltham in that!' Once out hunting, I took a nasty hedge

and ditch in front of him; he bawled proudly, 'Beltham all over!' and praised me. At night, drinking claret, he said on a sudden, 'And, egad, Harry, you must jump your head across hedges and ditches, my little fellow. It won't do, in these confounded days, to have you clever all at the wrong end. In my time, good in the saddle was good for everything; but now you must get your brains where you can—pick here, pick there—and sell 'em like a huckster; some do. Nature's gone—it's damned artifice rules, I tell ye; and a squire of our country must be three parts lawyer to keep his own. You must learn; by God, sir, you must cogitate; you must stew at books and maps, or you'll have some infernal upstart taking the lead of you, and leaving you nothing but the whiff of his tail.' He concluded, 'I'm glad to see you toss down your claret, my boy.'

Thus I grew in his favour, till I heard from him that I was to be the heir of Riversley and his estates, but on one condition, which he did not then mention. If I might have spoken to him of my father, I should have loved him. As it was, I liked old Sewis better, for he would talk to me of the night when my father carried me away, and though he never uttered the flattering words I longed to hear, he repeated the story often, and made the red hall glow with beams of my father's image. My walks and rides were divided between the road he must have followed toward London, bearing me in his arms, and the vacant place of Kiomi's camp. Kiomi stood for freedom, pointing into the darkness I wished to penetrate that I might find him. If I spoke of him to my aunt she trembled. She said, 'Yes, Harry, tell me all you are thinking about, whatever you want to know'; but her excessive trembling checked me, and I kept my feelings to myself—a boy with a puzzle in his head and hunger in his heart. At times I rode out to the utmost limit of the hour giving me the proper number of minutes to race back and dress for dinner at the squire's table, and a great wrestling I had with myself to turn my little horse's head from hills and valleys lying East; they seemed to have the secret of my father. Blank enough they looked if ever I despaired of their knowing more than I. My Winter and Summer were the moods of my mind constantly shifting. I would have a week of the belief that he was near Riversley, calling for me; a week of the fear that he was dead; long dreams of him, as travelling through foreign countries, patting the foreheads of boys and girls on his way; or driving radiantly, and people bowing. Radiantly, I say: had there been touches of colour in these visions, I should have been lured off in pursuit of him. The dreams passed colourlessly; I put colouring touches to the figures seen in them afterward, when I was cooler, and could say, 'What is the use of fancying things?' yet knew that fancying things was a consolation. By such means I came to paint the mystery surrounding my father in tender colours. I built up a fretted cathedral from what I imagined of him, and could pass entirely away out of the world by entering the doors.

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