

**YONGE
CHARLOTTE
MARY**

THE HERD BOY AND HIS
HERMIT

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Содержание

CHAPTER I. – IN THE MOSS	4
CHAPTER II. – THE SNOW-STORM	11
CHAPTER III. – OVER THE MOOR	23
CHAPTER IV. – A SPORTING PRIORESS	32
CHAPTER V. – MOTHER AND SON	42
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	49

Charlotte M. Yonge

The Herd Boy and His Hermit

CHAPTER I. – IN THE MOSS

I can conduct you, lady, to a low
But loyal cottage where you may be safe
Till further quest.

—MILTON.

On a moorland slope where sheep and goats were dispersed among the rocks, there lay a young lad on his back, in a stout canvas cassock over his leathern coat, and stout leathern leggings over wooden shoes. Twilight was fast coming on; only a gleam of purple light rested on the top of the eastern hills, but was gradually fading away, though the sky to the westward still preserved a little pale golden light by the help of the descending crescent moon.

‘Go away, horned moon,’ murmured the boy. ‘I want to see my stars come out before Hob comes to call me home, and the goats are getting up already. Moon, moon, thou mayst go quicker. Thou wilt have longer time to-morrow—and be higher in the sky, as well as bigger, and thou mightst let me see my star to-

night! Ah! there is one high in the sunset, pale and fair, but not mine! That's the evening star—one of the wanderers. Is it the same as comes in the morning betimes, when we do not have it at night? Like that it shines with steady light and twinkles not. I would that I knew! There! there's mine, my own star, far up, only paling while the sun glaring blazes in the sky; mine own, he that from afar drives the stars in Charles's Wain. There they come, the good old twinkling team of three, and the four of the Wain! Old Billy Goat knows them too! Up he gets, and all in his wake "Ha-ha-ha" he calls, and the Nannies answer. Ay, and the sheep are rising up too! How white they look in the moonshine! Piers—deaf as he is—waking at their music. Ba, they call the lambs! Nay, that's no call of sheep or goat! 'Tis some child crying, all astray! Ha! Hilloa, where beest thou? Tarry till I come! Move not, or thou mayst be in the bogs and mosses! Come, Watch'—to a great unwieldy collie puppy—'let us find her.'

A feeble piteous sound answered him, and following the direction of the reply, he strode along, between the rocks and thorn-bushes that guarded the slope of the hill, to a valley covered with thick moss, veiling treacherously marshy ground in which it was easy to sink.

The cry came from the further side, where a mountain stream had force enough to struggle through the swamp. There were stepping-stones across the brook, which the boy knew, and he made his way from one to the other, calling out cheerily to the little figure that he began to discern in the fading light, and

who answered him with tones evidently girlish, 'O come, come, shepherd! Here I am! I am lost and lorn! They will reward thee! Oh, come fast!'

'All in good time, lassie! Haste is no good here! I must look to my footing.'

Presently he was by the side of the wanderer, and could see that it was a maiden of ten or twelve years old, who somehow, even in the darkness, had not the air of one of the few inhabitants of that wild mountain district.

'Lost art thou, maiden,' he said, as he stood beside her; 'where is thine home?'

'I am at Greystone Priory,' replied the girl. 'I went out hawking to-day with the Mother Prioress and the rest. My pony fell with me when we were riding after a heron. No one saw me or heard me, and my pony galloped home. I saw none of them, and I have been wandering miles and miles! Oh take me back, good lad; the Mother Prioress will give thee—'

'Tis too far to take thee back to-night,' he said. 'Thou must come with me to Hob Hogward, where Doll will give thee supper and bed, and we will have thee home in the morning.'

'I never lay in a hogward's house,' she said primly.

'Belike, but there be worse spots to be harboured in. Here, I must carry thee over the burn, it gets wider below! Nay, 'tis no use trying to leap it in the dark, thou wouldst only sink in. There!'

And as he raised her in his arms, the touch of her garment was delicate, and she on her side felt that his speech, gestures and

touch were not those of a rustic shepherd boy; but nothing was said till he had waded through the little narrow stream, and set her down on a fairly firm clump of grass on the other side. Then she asked, 'What art thou, lad?—Who art thou?'

'They call me Hal,' was the answer; 'but this is no time for questions. Look to thy feet, maid, or thou wilt be in a swamp-hole whence I may hardly drag thee out.'

He held her hand, for he could hardly carry her farther, since she was almost as tall as himself, and more plump; and the rest of the conversation for some little time consisted of, 'There!' 'Where?' 'Oh, I was almost down!' 'Take heed; give me thy other hand! Thou must leap this!' 'Oh! what a place! Is there much more of it?' 'Not much! Come bravely on! There's a good maid.' 'Oh, I must get my breath.' 'Don't stand still. That means sinking. Leap! Leap! That's right. No, not that way, turn to the big stair.' 'Oh—h!' 'That's my brave wench! Not far now.' 'I'm down, I'm down!' 'Up! Here, this is safe! On that white stone! Now, here's sound ground! Hark!' Wherewith he emitted a strange wild whoop, and added, 'That's Hob come out to call me!' He holloaed again. 'We shall soon be at home now. There's Mother Doll's light! Her light below, the star above,' he added to himself.

By this time it was too dark for the two young people to see more than dim shapes of one another, but the boy knew that the hand he still held was a soft and delicate one, and the girl that those which had grasped and lifted her were rough with country labours. She began to assert her dignity and say again, 'Who art

thou, lad? We will guerdon thee well for aiding me. The Lord St. John is my father. And who art thou?’

‘I? Oh, I am Hob Hogward’s lad,’ he answered in an odd off-hand tone, before whooping again his answer to the shouts of Hob, which were coming nearer.

‘I am so hungry!’ said the little lady, in a weak, famished tone. ‘Hast aught to eat?’

‘I have finished my wallet, more’s the pity!’ said the boy, ‘but never fear! Hold out but a few steps more, and Mother Doll will give thee bite and sup and bed.’

‘Alack! Is it much further! My feet! they are so sore and weary —’

‘Poor maiden, let me bear thee on!’

Hal took her up again, but they went more slowly, and were glad to see a tall figure before them, and hear the cry, ‘How now, Hal boy, where hast been? What hast thou there?’

‘A sorely weary little lady, Daddy Hob, lost from the hawking folk from the Priory,’ responded Hal, panting a little as he set his burthen down, and Hob’s stronger arms received her.

Hal next asked whether the flock had come back under charge of Piers, and was answered that all were safely at home, and after ‘telling the tale’ Hob had set out to find him. ‘Thou shouldst not stray so far,’ he said.

‘I heard the maid cry, and went after her,’ said Hal, ‘all the way to the Blackreed Moss, and the springs, and ‘twas hard getting over the swamp.’

‘Well indeed ye were not both swallowed in it,’ said Hob; ‘God be praised for bringing you through! Poor wee bairn! Thou hast come far! From whence didst say?’

‘From Greystone Priory,’ wearily said the girl, who had her head down on Hob’s shoulder, and seemed ready to fall asleep there.

‘Her horse fell with her, and they were too bent on their sport to heed her,’ explained the boy, as he trudged along beside Hob and his charge, ‘so she wandered on foot till by good hap I heard her moan.’

‘Ay, there will be a rare coil to-night for having missed her,’ said Hob; ‘but I’ve heard tell, my Lady Prioress heeds her hawks more than her nuns! But be she who she may, we’ll have her home, and Mother Doll shall see to her, for she needs it sure, poor bairn. She is asleep already.’

So she was, with her head nestled into the shepherd’s neck, nor did she waken when after a tramp of more than a mile the bleatings of the folded sheep announced that they were nearly arrived, and in the low doorway there shone a light, and in the light stood a motherly form, in a white woollen hood and dark serge dress. Tired as he was, Hal ran on to her, exclaiming ‘All well, Mammy Doll?’

‘Ah well!’ she answered, ‘thank the good God! I was in fear for thee, my boy! What’s that Daddy hath? A strayed lamb?’

‘Nay, Mammy, but a strayed maiden! ‘Twas that kept me so long. I had to bear her through the burn at Blackreed, and drag

her on as best I might, and she is worn out and weary.'

'Ay,' said Hob, as he came up. 'How now, my bit lassie?' as he put her into the outstretched arms of his wife, who sat down on the settle to receive her, still not half awake.

'She is well-nigh clemmed,' said Hal. 'She has had no bite nor sup all day, since her pony fell with her out a-hawking, and all were so hot on the chase that none heeded her.'

Mother Doll's exclamations of pity were profuse. There was a kettle of broth on the peat fire, and after placing the girl in a corner of the settle, she filled three wooden bowls, two of which she placed before Hal and the shepherd, making signs to the heavy-browed Piers to wait; and getting no reply from her worn-out guest, she took her in her arms, and fed her from a wooden spoon. Though without clear waking, mouthfuls were swallowed down, till the bowl was filled again and set before Piers.

'There, that will be enough this day!' said the good dame. 'Poor bairn! 'Twas scurvy treatment. Now will we put her to bed, and in the morn we will see how to deal with her.'

Hal insisted that the little lady should have his own bed—a chaff-stuffed mattress, covered with a woollen rug, in the recess behind the projecting hearth—a strange luxury for a farm boy; and Doll yielded very unwillingly when he spoke in a tone that savoured of command. The shaggy Piers had already curled himself up in a corner and gone to sleep.

CHAPTER II. – THE SNOW-STORM

Yet stay, fair lady, rest awhile
Beneath the cottage wall;
See, through the hawthorns blows the cold wind,
And drizzling rain doth fall.

—*OLD BALLAD.*

Though Hal had gone to sleep very tired the night before, and only on a pile of hay, curled up with Watch, having yielded his own bed to the strange guest, he was awake before the sun, for it was the decline of the year, and the dawn was not early.

He was not the first awake—Hob and Piers were already busy on the outside, and Mother Doll had emerged from the box bed which made almost a separate apartment, and was raking together the peat, so as to revive the slumbering fire. The hovel, for it was hardly more, was built of rough stone and thatched with reeds, with large stones to keep the roof down in the high mountain blasts. There was only one room, earthen floored, and with no furniture save a big chest, a rude table, a settle and a few stools, besides the big kettle and a few crocks and wooden bowls. Yet whereas all was clean, it had an air of comfort and civilisation beyond any of the cabins in the neighbourhood, more especially as there was even a rude chimney-piece projecting far

into the room, and in the niche behind this lay the little girl in her clothes, fast asleep.

Very young and childish she looked as she lay, her lips partly unclosed, her dark hair straying beyond her hand, and her black lashes resting on her delicate brunette cheeks, slightly flushed with sleep. Hal could not help standing for a minute gazing at her in a sort of wondering curiosity, till roused by the voice of Mother Doll.

‘Go thy ways, my bairn, to wash in the burn. Here’s thy comb. I must have the lassie up before the shepherd comes back, though ‘tis amost a pity to wake her! There, she is stirring! Best be off with thee, my bonnie lad.’

It was spoken more in the tone of nurse to nursling than of mother to son, still less that of mistress to farm boy; but Hal obeyed, only observing, ‘Take care of her.’

‘Ay, my pretty, will not I,’ murmured the old woman, as the child turned round on her pillow, put up a hand, rubbed her eyes, and disclosed a pair of sleepy brown orbs, gazed about, and demanded, ‘What’s this? Who’s this?’

‘Tis Hob Hogward’s hut, my bonnie lamb, where you are full welcome! Here, take a sup of warm milk.’

‘I mind me now,’ said the girl, sitting up, and holding out her hands for the bowl. ‘They all left me, and the lad brought me—a great lubber lout—’

‘Nay, nay, mistress, you’ll scarce say so when you see him by day—a well-grown youth as can bear himself with any.’

‘Where is he?’ asked the girl, gazing round; ‘I want him to take me back. This place is not one for me. The Sisters will be seeking me! Oh, what a coil they must be in!’

‘We will have you back, my bairn, so soon as my goodman can go with you, but now I would have you up and dressed, ay, and washed, ere he and Hal come in. Then after meat and prayer you will be ready to go.’

‘To Greystone Priory,’ returned the girl. ‘Yea, I would have thee to know,’ she added, with a little dignity that sat drolly on her bare feet and disordered hair and cap as she rose out of bed, ‘that the Sisters are accountable for me. I am the Lady Anne St. John. My father is a lord in Bedfordshire, but he is gone to the wars in Burgundy, and bestowed me in a convent at York while he was abroad, but the Mother thought her house would be safer if I were away at the cell at Greystone when Queen Margaret and the Red Rose came north.’

‘And is that the way they keep you safe?’ asked the hostess, who meanwhile was attending to her in a way that, if the Lady Anne had known it, was like the tendance of her own nurse at home, instead of that of a rough peasant woman.

‘Oh, we all like the chase, and the Mother had a new cast of hawks that she wanted to fly. There came out a heron, and she threw off the new one, and it went careering up—and up—and we all rode after, and just as the bird was about to pounce down, into a dyke went my pony, Imp, and not one of them saw! Not Bertram Selby, the Sisters, nor the groom, nor the rabble rout that

had come out of Greystone; and before I could get free they were off; and the pony, Imp of Evil that he is, has not learnt to know me or my voice, and would not let me catch him, but cantered off—either after the other horses or to the Priory. I knew not where I was, and halloaed myself hoarse, but no one heard, and I went on and on, and lost my way!’

‘I did hear tell that the Lady Prioress minded her hawks more than her Hours,’ said Mother Doll.

‘And that’s sooth,’ said the Lady Anne, beginning to prove herself a chatterbox. ‘The merlins have better hoods than the Sisters; and as to the Hours, no one ever gets up in the night to say Nocturns or even Matins but old Sister Scholastica, and she is as strict and cross as may be.’

Here the flow of confidence was interrupted by the return of Hal, who gazed eagerly, though in a shamefaced way, at the guest as he set down a bowl of ewe milk. She was a well-grown girl of ten, slender, and bearing herself like one high bred and well trained in deportment; and her face was delicately tinted on an olive skin, with fine marked eyebrows, and dark bright eyes, and her little hunting dress of green, and the hood, set on far back, became the dark locks that curled in rings beneath.

She saw a slender lad, dark-haired and dark-eyed, ruddy and embrowned by mountain sun and air; and the bow with which he bent before her had something of the rustic lout, and there was a certain shyness over him that hindered him from addressing her.

‘So, shepherd,’ she said, ‘when wilt thou take me back to

Greystone?’

‘Father will fix that,’ interposed the housewife; ‘meanwhile, ye had best eat your porridge. Here is Father, in good time with the cows’ milk.’

The rugged broad-shouldered shepherd made his salutation duly to the young lady, and uttered the information that there was a black cloud, like snow, coming up over the fells to the south-west.

‘But I must fare back to Greystone!’ said the damsel. ‘They will be in a mighty coil what has become of me.’

‘They would be in a worse coil if they found your bones under a snow wreath.’

Hal went to the door and spied out, as if the tidings were rather pleasant to him than otherwise. The goodwife shivered, and reached out to close the shutter, and there being no glass to the windows, all the light that came in was through the chinks.

‘It would serve them right for not minding me better,’ said the maiden composedly. ‘Nay, it is as merry here as at Greystone, with Sister Margaret picking out one’s broidery, and Father Cuthbert making one pore over his crabbed parchments.’

‘Oh, does this Father teach Latin?’ exclaimed Hal with eager interest.

‘Of course he doth! The Mother at York promised I should learn whatever became a damsel of high degree,’ said the girl, drawing herself up.

‘I would he would teach me!’ sighed the boy.

‘Better break thy fast and mind thy sheep,’ said the old woman, as if she feared his getting on dangerous ground; and placing the bowl of porridge on the rough table, she added, ‘Say the Benedicite, lad, and fall to.’ Then, as he uttered the blessing, she asked the guest whether she preferred ewes’ milk or cows’ milk, a luxury no one else was allowed, all eating their porridge contentedly with a pinch of salt, Hob showing scant courtesy, the less since his guest’s rank had been made known.

By the time they had finished, snowflakes—an early autumn storm—were drifting against the shutter, and a black cloud was lowering over the hills. Hob foretold a heavy fall of snow, and called on Hal to help him and Piers fold the flock more securely, sleepy Watch and his old long-haired collie mother rising at the same call. Lady Anne sprang up at the same time, insisting that she must go and help to feed the poor sheep, but she was withheld, much against her will, by Mother Dolly, though she persisted that snow was nothing to her, and it was a fine jest to be out of the reach of the Sisters, who mewed her up in a cell, like a messan dog. However, she was much amused by watching, and thinking she assisted in, Mother Dolly’s preparations for ewe milk cheese-making; and by-and-by Hal came in, shaking the snow off the sheepskin he had worn over his leathern coat. Hob had sent him in, as the weather was too bad for him, and he and Anne crouched on opposite sides of the wide hearth as he dried and warmed himself, and cosseted the cat which Anne had tried to caress, but which showed a decided preference for the older

friend.

‘Our Baudrons at Greystone loves me better than that,’ said Anne. ‘She will come to me sooner than even to Sister Scholastica!’

‘My Tib came with us when we came here. Ay, Tib! purr thy best!’ as he held his fingers over her, and she rubbed her smooth head against him.

‘Can she leap? Baudrons leaps like a horse in the tilt-yard.’

‘Cannot she! There, my lady pussy, show what thou canst do to please the demoiselle,’ and he held his arms forward with clasped hands, so that the grey cat might spring over them, and Lady Anne cried out with delight.

Again and again the performance was repeated, and pussy was induced to dance after a string dangled before her, to roll over and play in apparent ecstasy with a flake of wool, as if it were a mouse, and Watch joined in the game in full amity. Mother Dolly, busy with her distaff, looked on, not displeased, except when she had to guard her spindle from the kitten’s pranks, but she was less happy when the children began to talk.

‘You have seen a tilt-yard?’

‘Yea, indeed,’ he answered dreamily. ‘The poor squire was hurt—I did not like it! It is gruesome.’

‘Oh, no! It is a noble sport! I loved our tilt-yard at Bletso. Two knights could gallop at one another in the lists, as if they were out hunting. Oh! to hear the lances ring against the shields made one’s heart leap up! Where was yours?’

Here Dolly interrupted hastily, 'Hal, lad, gang out to the shed and bring in some more sods of turf. The fire is getting low.'

'Here's a store, mother—I need not go out,' said Hal, passing to a pile in the corner. 'It is too dark for thee to see it.'

'But where was your castle?' continued the girl. 'I am sure you have lived in a castle.'

Insensibly the two children had in addressing one another changed the homely singular pronoun to the more polite, if less grammatical, second person plural. The boy laughed, nodded his head, and said, 'You are a little witch.'

'No great witchcraft to hear that you speak as we do at home in Bedfordshire, not like these northern boors, that might as well be Scots!'

'I am not from Bedfordshire,' said the lad, looking much amused at her perplexity.

'Who art thou then?' she cried peremptorily.

'I? I am Hal the shepherd boy, as I told thee before.'

'No shepherd boy are you! Come, tell me true.'

Dolly thought it time to interfere. She heard an imaginary bleat, and ordered Hal out to see what was the matter, hindering the girl by force from running after him, for the snow was coming down in larger flakes than ever. Nevertheless, when her husband was heard outside she threw a cloak over her head and hurried out to speak with him. 'That maid will make our lad betray himself ere another hour is over their heads!'

'Doth she do it wittingly?' asked the shepherd gravely.

‘Nay, ‘tis no guile, but each child sees that the other is of gentle blood, and women’s wits be sharp and prying, and the maid will never rest till she has wormed out who he is.’

‘He promised me never to say, nor doth he know.’

‘Thee! Much do the hests of an old hogherd weigh against the wiles of a young maid!’

‘Lord Hal is a lad of his word. Peace with thy lords and ladies, woman, thou’lt have the archers after him at once.’

‘She makes no secret of being of gentle blood—a St. John of Bletso.’

‘A pestilent White Rose lot! We shall have them on the scent ere many days are over our head! An unlucky chance this same snow, or I should have had the wench off to Greystone ere they could exchange a word.’

‘Thou wouldst have been caught in the storm. Ill for the maid to have fallen into a drift!’

‘Well for the lad if she never came out of it!’ muttered the gruff old shepherd. ‘Then were her tongue stilled, and those of the clacking wenches at York—Yorkists every one of them.’

Mother Dolly’s eyes grew round. ‘Mind thee, Hob!’ she said; ‘I ken thy bark is worse than thy bite, but I would have thee to know that if aught befall the maid between this and Greystone, I shall hold thee—and so will my Lady—guilty of a foul deed.’

‘No fouler than was done on the stripling’s father,’ muttered the shepherd. ‘Get thee in, wife! Who knows what folly those two may be after while thou art away? Mind thee, if the maid gets an

inking of who the boy is, it will be the worse for her.'

'Oh!' murmured the goodwife, 'I moaned once that our Piers there should be deaf and well-nigh dumb, but I thank God for it now! No fear of perilous word going out through him, or I durst not have kept my poor sister's son!'

Mother Doll trusted that her husband would never have the heart to leave the pretty dark-haired girl in the snow, but she was relieved to find Hal marking down on the wide flat hearth-stone, with a bit of charcoal, all the stars he had observed. 'Hob calls that the Plough—those seven!' he said; 'I call it Charles's Wain!'

'Methinks I have seen that!' she said, 'winter and summer both.'

'Ay, he is a meuseful husbandman, that Charles! And see here! This middle mare of the team has a little foal running beside her'—he made a small spot beside the mark that stood for the central star of what we call the Bear's Tail.

'I never saw that!'

'No, 'tis only to be seen on a clear bright night. I have seen it, but Hob mocks at it. He thinks the only use of the Wain is to find the North Star, up beyond there, pointing by the back of the Plough, and go by it when you are lost.'

'What good would finding the North Star do? It would not have helped me home if you had not found me!'

'Look here, Lady Anne! Which way does Greystone lie?'

'How should I tell?'

'Which way did the sun lie when you crossed the moor?'

Anne could not remember at first, but by-and-by recollected that it dazzled her eyes just as she was looking for the runaway pony; and Hal declared that it proved that the convent must have been to the south of the spot of her fall; but his astronomy, though eagerly demonstrated, was not likely to have brought her back to Greystone. Still Doll was thankful for the safe subject, as he went on to mark out what he promised that she should see in the winter—the swarm of glow-worms, as he called the Pleiades; and ‘Our Lady’s Rock,’ namely, distaff, the northern name for Orion; and then he talked of the stars that so perplexed him, namely, the planets, that never stayed in their places.

By-and-by, when Mother Dolly’s work was over the kettle was on the fire, and she was able to take out her own spinning, she essayed to fill up the time by telling them lengthily the old stories and ballads handed down from minstrel to minstrel, from nurse to nurse, and they sat entranced, listening to the stories, more than even Hal knew she possessed, and holding one another by the hand as they listened.

Meantime the snow had ceased—it was but a scud of early autumn on the mountains—the sun came out with bright slanting beams before his setting, there was a soft south wind; and Hob, when he came in, growled out that the thaw had set in, and he should be able to take the maid back in the morning. He sat scowling and silent during supper, and ordered Hal about with sharp sternness, sending him out to attend to the litter of the cattle, before all had finished, and manifestly treated him as the

shepherd's boy, the drudge of the house, and threatening him with a staff if he lingered, soon following himself. Mother Dolly insisted on putting the little lady to bed before they should return, and convent-bred Anne had sufficient respect for proprieties to see that it was becoming. She heard no more that night.

CHAPTER III. – OVER THE MOOR

In humblest, simplest habit clad,
But these were all to me.

—*GOLDSMITH.*

‘Hal! What is your name?’

She stood at the door of the hovel, the rising sun lighting up her bright dark eyes, and smiling in the curly rings of her hair while Hal stood by, and Watch bounded round them.

‘You have heard,’ he said, half smiling, and half embarrassed.

‘Hal! That’s no name.’

‘Harry, an it like you better.’

‘Harry what?’ with a little stamp of her foot.

‘Harry Hogward, as you see, or Shepherd, so please you.’

‘You are no Hogward, nor shepherd! These folk be no kin to you, I can see. Come, an you love me, tell me true! I told you true who I am, Red Rose though I see you be! Why not trust me the same?’

‘Lady, I verily ken no name save Harry. I would trust you, verily I would, but I know not myself.’

‘I guess! I guess!’ she cried, clapping her hands, but at the moment Dolly laid a hand on her shoulder.

‘Do not guess, maiden,’ she said. ‘If thou wouldst not bring

evil on the lad that found thee, and the roof that sheltered thee, guess not, yea, and utter not a word save that thou hast lain in a shepherd's hut. Forget all, as though thou hadst slept in the castle on the hill that fades away with the day.'

She ended hastily, for her husband was coming up with a rough pony's halter in his hand. He was in haste to be off, lest a search for the lost child might extend to his abode, and his gloomy displeasure and ill-masked uneasiness reduced every-one to silence in his presence.

'Up and away, lady wench!' he said. 'No time to lose if you are to be at Greystone ere night! Thou Hal, thou lazy lubber, go with Piers and the sheep—'

'I shall go with you,' replied Hal, in a grave tone of resolution. 'I will only go within view of the convent, but go with you I will.'

He spoke with a decided tone of authority, and Hob Hogward muttered a little to himself, but yielded.

Hal assisted the young lady to mount, and they set off along the track of the moss, driving the cows, sheep, and goats before them—not a very considerable number—till they came to another hut, much smaller and more rude than that where they had left Mother Doll.

Piers was a wild, shaggy-haired lad, with a sheepskin over his shoulders, and legs bare below the knee, and to him the charge of the flock was committed, with signs which he evidently understood and replied to with a gruff 'Ay, ay!' The three went on the way, over the slope of a hill, partly clothed with heather,

holly and birch trees, as it rose above the moss. Hob led the pony, and there was something in his grim air and manner that hindered any conversation between the two young people. Only Hal from time to time gathered a flower for the young lady, scabious and globe flowers, and once a very pink wild rose, mingled with white ones. Lady Anne took them with a meaning smile, and a merry gesture, as though she were going to brush Hal's face with the petals. Hal laughed, and said, 'You will make them shed.'

'Well and good, so the disputes be shed,' said Anne, with more meaning than perhaps Hal understood. 'And the white overcomes the red.'

'May be the red will have its way with spring—'

But there Hob looked round on them, and growled out, 'Have done with that folly! What has a herd boy like thee to do with roses and frippery? Come away from the lady's rein. Thou art over-held to thrust thyself upon her.'

Nevertheless, as Hal fell back, the dark eyes shot a meaning glance at him, and the party went on in silence, except that now and then Hob launched at Hal an order that he endeavoured to render savagely contemptuous and harsh, so that Lady Anne interfered to say, 'Nay, the poor lad is doing no harm.'

'Scathe enough,' answered Hob. 'He always will be doing ill if he can. Heed him not, lady, it only makes him the more malapert.'

'Malapert,' repeated Anne, not able to resist a little teasing of the grim escort; 'that's scarce a word of the dales. 'Tis more like

a man-at-arms.'

This Hob would not hear, and if he did, it produced a rough imprecation on the pony, and a sharp cut with his switch.

They had crossed another burn, travelled through the moss, and mounted to the brow of another hill, when, far away against the sky, on the top of yet another height, were to be seen moving figures, not cattle, but Anne recognised them at once. 'Men-at-arms! archers! lances! A search party for me! The Prioress must have sent to the Warden's tower.'

'Off with thee, lad!' said Hob, at once turning round upon Hal. 'I'll not have thee lingering to gape at the men-at-arms! Off I say, or—'

He raised his stout staff as though to beat the boy, who looked up in his face with a laugh, as if in very little alarm at his threat, smiled up in the young lady's face, and as she held out her hand with 'Farewell, Hal; I'll keep your rose-leaves in my breviary,' he bent over and kissed the fingers.

'How now! This impudence passes! As if thou wert of the same blood as the damsel!' exclaimed Hob in considerable anger, bringing down his stick. 'Away with thee, ill-bred lubber! Back to thy sheep, thou lazy loiterer! Get thee gone and thy whelp with thee!'

Hal obeyed, though not without a parting grin at Anne, and had sped away down the side of the hill, among the hollies and birches, which entirely concealed him and the bounding puppy.

Hob went on in a gruff tone: 'The insolence of these loutish

lads! See you, lady, he is a stripling that I took up off the roadside out of mere charity, and for the love of Heaven—a mere foundling as you may say, and this is the way he presumes!

‘A foundling, sayest thou?’ said Anne, unable to resist teasing him a little, and trying to gratify her own curiosity.

‘Ay, you may say so! There’s a whole sort of these orphans, after all the bad luck to the land, to be picked up on every wayside.’

‘On Towton Moor, mayhap,’ said Anne demurely, as she saw her surly guide start. But he was equal to the occasion, and answered:

‘Ay, ay, Towton Moor; ‘twas shame to see such bloody work; and there were motherless and fatherless children, stray lambs, to be met with, weeping their little hearts out, and starving all around unless some good Christian took pity on them.’

‘Was Hal one of these?’ asked Lady Anne.

‘I tell you, lady, I looked into a church that was full of weeping and wailing folk, women and children in deadly fear of the cruel, bloody-minded York folk, and the Lord of March that is himself King Edward now, a murrain on him!’

‘Don’t let those folk hear you say so!’ laughed Lady Anne. ‘They would think nothing of hauling thee off for a black traitor, or hanging thee up on the first tree stout enough to bear thee.’

She said it half mischievously, but the only effect was a grunt, and a stolid shrug of his shoulders, nor did he vouchsafe another word for the rest of the way before they came through the valley,

and through the low brushwood on the bank, and were in sight of the search party, who set up a joyful halloo of welcome on perceiving her.

A young man, the best mounted and armed, evidently an esquire, rode forward, exclaiming, 'Well met, fair Lady Anne! Great have been the Mother Prioress's fears for you, and she has called up half the country side, lest you should be fallen into the hands of Robin of Redesdale, or some other Lancastrian rogue.'

'Much she heeded me in comparison with hawk and heron!' responded Anne. 'Thanks for your heed, Master Bertram.'

'I must part from thee and thy sturdy pony. Thanks for the use of it,' added she, as the squire proceeded to take her from the pony. He would have lifted her down, but she only touched his hand lightly and sprang to the ground, then stood patting its neck. 'Thanks again, good pony. I am much beholden to thee, Gaffer Hob! Stay a moment.'

'Nay, lady, it would be well to mount you behind Archie. His beast is best to carry a lady.'

Archie was an elderly man, stout but active, attached to the service of the convent. He had leapt down, and was putting on a belt, and arranging a pad for the damsel, observing, 'Ill hap we lost you, damsel! I saw you not fall.'

'Ay,' returned Anne, 'your merlin charmed you far more. Master Bertram, the loan of your purse. I would reward the honest man who housed me.'

Bertram laughed and said, tossing up the little bag that hung to

his girdle, 'Do you think, fair damsel, that a poor Border squire carries about largesse in gold and silver? Let your clown come with us to Greystone, and thence have what meed the Prioress may bestow on him, for a find that your poor servant would have given worlds to make.'

'Hearest thou, Hob?' said Anne. 'Come with us to the convent, and thou shalt have thy guerdon.'

Hob, however, scratched his head, with a more boorish air than he had before manifested, and muttered something about a cow that needed his attention, and that he could not spare the time from his herd for all that the Prioress was like to give him.

'Take this, then,' said Anne, disengaging a gold clasp from her neck, and giving it to him. 'Bear it to the goodwife and bid her recollect me in her prayers.'

'I shall come and redeem it from thee, sulky carle as thou art,' said Bertram. 'Such jewels are not for greasy porridge-fed housewives. Hark thee, have it ready for me! I shall be at thy hovel ere long'—as Anne waved to Hob when she was lifted to her seat.

But Hob had already turned away, and Anne, as she held on by Archie's leathern belt, in her gay tone was beginning to defend him by declaring that porridge and grease did not go together, so the nickname was not rightly bestowed on the kindly goodwife.

'Ay! Greasy from his lord's red deer,' said Bertram, 'or his tainted mutton. Trust one of these herds, and a sheep is tainted whenever he wants a good supper. Beshrew me but that stout

fellow looks lusty and hearty enough, as if he lived well.'

'They were good and kind, and treated me well,' said Anne. 'I should be dead if they had not succoured me.'

'The marvel is you are not dead with the stench of their hovel, and the foulness of their food.'

'It was very good food—milk, meat, and oaten porridge,' replied Anne.

'Marvellous, I say!' cried Bertram with a sudden thought. 'Was it not said that there were some of those traitorous Lancastrian folk lurking about the mountains and fells? That rogue had the bearing of a man-at-arms, far more than of a mere herd. Deemedst thou not so, Archie?' to the elderly man who rode before the young damsel.

'Herdsmen here are good with the quarter-staff. They know how to stand against the Scots, and do not get bowed like our Midland serfs,' put in Anne, before Archie could answer, which he did with something of a snarl, as Bertram laughed somewhat jeeringly, and declared that the Lady Anne had become soft-hearted. She looked down at her roses, but in the dismounting and mounting again the petals of the red rose had floated away, and nothing was left of it save a slender pink bud enclosed within a dark calyx.

Archie, hard pressed, declared, 'There are poor fellows lurking about here and there, but bad blood is over among us. No need to ferret about for them.'

'Eh! Not when there may be a lad among them for whose

head the king and his brothers would give the weight of it in gold nobles?’

Anne shivered a little at this, but she cried out, ‘Shame on you, Master Bertram Selby, if you would take a price for the head of a brave foe! You, to aspire to be a knight!’

‘Nay, lady, I was but pointing out to Archie and the other grooms here, how they might fill their pouches if they would. I verily believe thou knowst of some lurking-place, thou art so prompt to argue! Did I not see another with thee, who made off when we came in view? Say! Was he a blood-stained Clifford? I heard of the mother having married in these parts.’

‘He was Hob Hogward’s herd boy,’ answered Anne, as composedly as she could. ‘He hied him back to mind his sheep.’

Nor would Anne allow another word to be extracted from her ere the grey walls of the Priory of Greystone rose before her, and the lay Sister at the gate shrieked for joy at seeing her riding behind Archie.

CHAPTER IV. – A SPORTING PRIORESS

Yet nothing stern was she in cell,
And the nuns loved their abbess well.

—SCOTT.

The days of the Wars of the Roses were evil times for the discipline of convents, which, together with the entire Western Church, suffered from the feuds of the Popes with the Italian princes.

Small remote houses, used as daughters or auxiliaries to the large convents, were especially apt to fall into a lax state, and in truth the little priory of Greystone, with its half-dozen of Sisters, had been placed under the care of the Lady Agnes Selby because she was too highly connected to be dealt with sharply, and too turbulent and unmanageable for the soberminded house at York. So there she was sent, with the deeply devout and strict Sister Scholastica, to keep the establishment in order, and deal with the younger nuns and lay Sisters. Being not entirely out of reach of a raid from the Scottish border, it was hardly a place for the timid, although the better sort of moss troopers generally spared monastic houses. Anne St. John had been sent thither at the time when Queen Margaret was making her attempt in the

north, where the city of York was Lancastrian, as the Mother Abbess feared that her presence might bring vengeance upon the Sisterhood.

There was no great harm in the Mother Agnes, only she was a maiden whom nothing but family difficulties could have forced into a monastic life—a lively, high-spirited, out-of-door creature, whom the close conventionalities of castle life and even whipping could not tame, and who had been the despair of her mother and of the discreet dames to whom her first childhood had been committed, to say nothing of a Lady Abbess or two. Indeed, from the Mother of Sopwell, Dame Julian Berners, she had imbibed nothing but a vehement taste for hawk, horse, and hound. The recluses of St. Mary, York, after being heartily scandalised by her habits, were far from sorry to have a good excuse for despatching her to their outlying cell, where, as they observed, she would know how to show a good face in case the Armstrongs came over the Border.

She came flying down on the first rumour of Lady Anne's return, her veil turned back, her pace not at all accordant with the solemn gait of a Prioress, her arms outstretched, her face, not young nor handsome, but sunburnt, weather-beaten and healthy, and full of delight. 'My child, my Nan, here thou art! I was just mounting to seek for thee to the west, while Bertram sought again over the mosses where we sent yester morn. Where hast thou been in the snow?'

'A shepherd took me to his hut, Lady Mother,' answered Anne

rather coldly.

‘Little didst thou think of our woe and grief when thy palfrey was found standing riderless at the stable door, and Sister Scholastica told us that there he had been since nones! And she had none to send in quest but Cuddie, the neatherd.’

‘My palfrey fell with me when you were in full chase of hawk and heron, ‘and none ever turned a head towards me nor heard me call.’

‘Poor maid! But it was such a chase as never you did watch. On and on went the heron, the falcon ever mounting higher and higher, till she was but a speck in the clouds, and Tam Falconer shouting and galloping, mad lest she should go down the wind. Methought she would have been back to Norroway, the foul jade!’

‘Did you capture her, Mother?’ asked Anne.

‘Ay, she pounced at last, and well-nigh staked herself on the heron’s beak! But we had a long ride, and were well-nigh at the Tyne before we had caught her. Full of pranks, but a noble hawk, as I shall write to my brother by the next messenger that comes our way. I call it a hawk worth her meat that leads one such a gallop.’

‘What would you have done, reverend Mother, if she had crossed the Border?’ asked Bertram.

‘Ridden after her. No Scot would touch a Lady Prioress on the chase,’ responded Mother Agnes, looking not at all like a reverend Mother. ‘Now, poor Anne, thou must be hungered.

Thou shalt eat with Master Bertram and me in the refectory anon. Take her, Sister Joan, and make her ready to break her fast with us.'

Anne quickly went to her chamber. It was not quite a cell, the bare stone walls being hung with faded woollen tapestry, the floor covered with a deerskin, the small window filled with dark green glass, a chest serving the double purpose of seat and wardrobe, and further, a bed hung with thick curtains, in which she slept with the lay Sister, Joan, who further fetched a wooden bowl of water from the fountain in the court that she might wash her face and hands. She changed her soiled riding-dress for a tight-fitting serge garment of dark green with long hanging sleeves, assisted by Joan, who also arranged her dark hair in two plaits, and put over it a white veil, fastened over a framework to keep it from hanging too closely.

All the time Joan talked, telling of the fright the Mother had been in when the loss of the Lady Anne had been discovered, and how it was feared that she had been seized by Scottish reivers, or lost in the snow on the hills, or captured by the Lancastrians.

'For there be many of the Red Rose rogues about on the mosses—comrades, 'tis said, of that noted thief Robin of Redesdale.'

'I was with good folk, in a shepherd's sheiling,' replied Anne.

'Ay, ay. Out on the north hill, methinks.'

'Nay. Beyond Deadman's Pool,' said Anne. 'By Blackreed Moss. That was where the pony fell.'

‘Blackreed Moss! That moor belongs to the De Vescis, the blackest Lancaster fellow of all! His daughter is the widow of the red-handed Clifford, who slew young Earl Edmund on Wakefield Bridge. They say her young son is in hiding in some moss in his lands, for the King holds him in deadly feud for his brother’s death.’

‘He was a babe, and had nought to do with it,’ said Anne.

‘He is of his father’s blood,’ returned Sister Joan, who in her convent was still a true north country woman. ‘Ay, Lady Anne, you from your shires know nought of how deep goes the blood feud in us of the Borderland! Ay, lady, was not mine own grandfather slain by the Musgrave of Leit Hill, and did not my father have his revenge on his son by Solway Firth? Yea, and now not a Graeme can meet a Musgrave but they come to blows.’

‘Nay, but that is not what the good Fathers teach,’ Anne interposed.

‘The Fathers have neither chick nor child to take up their quarrel. They know nought about blood crying for blood! If King Edward caught that brat of Clifford he would make him know what ‘tis to be born of a bloody house.’

Anne tried to say something, but the lay Sister pushed her along. ‘There, there, go you down—you know nothing about what honour requires of you! You are but a south country maid, and have no notion of what is due to them one came from.’

Joan Graeme was only a lay Sister, her father a small farmer when not a moss trooper; but all the Border, on both sides, had

the strongest ideas of persistent vendetta, such as happily had never been held in the midland and southern counties, where there was less infusion of Celtic blood. Anne was a good deal shocked at the doctrine propounded by the attendant Sister, a mild, good-natured woman in daily life, but the conversation confirmed her suspicions, and put her on her guard as she remembered Hob's warning. She had liked the shepherd lad far too much, and was far too grateful to him, to utter a word that might give him up to the revengers of blood.

At the foot of the stone stairs that led into the quadrangle she met the black-robed, heavily hooded Sister Scholastica on her way to the chapel. The old nun held out her arms. 'Safely returned, my child! God be thanked! Art thou come to join thy thanksgiving with ours at this hour of nones?'

'Nay, I am bound to break my fast with the Mother and Master Bertram.'

'Ah! thou must needs be hungered! It is well! But do but utter thy thanks to Him Who kept thee safe from the storm and from foul doers.'

Anne did not break away from the good Sister, but went as far as the chapel porch, was touched with holy water, and bending her knee, uttered in a low voice her 'Gratias ago,' then hastened across the court to the refectory, where the Prioress received her with a laugh and, 'So Sister Scholastica laid hands on thee; I thought I should have to come and rescue thee ere the grouse grew cold.'

Bertram, as a courteous squire of dames, came forward bowing low, and the party were soon seated at the board—literally a board, supported upon trestles, only large enough to receive the Prioress, the squire and the recovered girl, but daintily veiled in delicate white napery.

It was screened off from the rest of the refectory, where the few Sisters had already had their morning's meal after Holy Communion; and from it there was a slight barrier, on the other side of which Bertram Selby ought to have been, but rules sat very lightly on the Prioress Selby. Bertram was of kin to her, and she had no demur as to admitting him to her private table. He was, in fact, a squire of the household of the Marquess of Montagu, brother of the Kingmaker and had been despatched with letters to the south. He had made a halt at his cousin's priory, had been persuaded to join in flying the new hawks, and then had first been detained by the snow-storm, and then joined in the quest for the lost Lady Anne St. John.

No doubt had then arisen that the Nevils were firm in their attachment to Edward IV., and, as a consequence, in enmity to the House of Clifford, and both these scions of Selby had been excited at a rumour that the widow of the Baron who had slain young Edmund of York had married Sir Lancelot Threlkeld of Threlkeld, and that her eldest son, the heir of the line, might be hidden somewhere on the De Vesci estates.

Bertram had already told the Prioress that his men had spied a lad accompanying the shepherd who escorted the lady, and who,

he thought, had a certain twang of south country speech; and no sooner had he carved for the ladies, according to the courtly duty of an esquire, than the inquiry began as to who had found the maiden and where she had been lodged. Prioress Agnes, who had already broken her fast, sat meantime with the favourite hawk on her wrist and a large dog beside her, feeding them alternately with the bones of the grouse.

‘Come, tell us all, sweet Nan! Where wast thou in that untimely snow-storm? In a cave, starved with cold, eh?’

‘I was safe in a cabin with a kind old gammer.’

‘Eh! And how cam’st thou there? Wandering thither?’

‘Nay, the shepherd heard me call.’

‘The shepherd! What, the churl that came with thee?’

‘He carried me to the hut.’

Anne was on her guard, though Bertram probed her well. Was there only one shepherd? Was there not a boy with her on the hill-side where Bertram met her? The shepherd lad in sooth! What became of him? The shepherd sent him back, he had been too long away from his flock. What was his name? What was the shepherd’s name? Who was his master? Anne did not know—she had heard no names save Hob and Hal, she had seen no arms, she had heard nothing southland. The lad was a mere herd-boy, ordered out to milk ewes and tend the sheep. She answered briefly, and with a certain sullenness, and young Selby at last turned on her. ‘Look thee here, fair lady, there’s a saying abroad that the heir of the red-handed House of Clifford is lurking here,

on the look-out to favour Queen Margaret and her son. Couldst thou put us on the scent, King Edward would favour thee and make thee a great dame, and have thee to his Court—nay, maybe give thee what is left of the barony of Clifford.’

‘I know nothing of young lords,’ sulkily growled Anne, who had been hitherto busy with her pets, striking her hand on the table.

‘And I tell thee, Bertram Selby,’ exclaimed the Prioress, ‘that if thou art ware of a poor fatherless lad lurking in hiding in these parts, it is not the part of an honest man to seek him out for his destruction, and still less to try to make the maid he rescued betray him. Well done, little Anne, thou knowest how to hold thy tongue.’

‘Reverend Mother,’ expostulated Bertram, ‘if you knew what some would give to be on the scent of the wolf-cub!’

‘I know not, nor do I wish to know, for what price a Selby would sell his honour and his bowels of mercy,’ said Mother Agnes. ‘Come away, Nan; thou hast done well.’

Bertram muttered something about having thought her a better Yorkist, women not understanding, and mischief that might be brewing; but the Prioress, taking Anne by the hand, went her way, leaving Bertram standing confused.

‘Oh, mother,’ sighed Anne, ‘do you think he will go after him? He will think I was treacherous!’

‘I doubt me whether he will dare,’ said the Prioress. ‘Moreover, it is too late in the day for a search, and another snow-shower

seems coming up again. I cannot turn the youth, my kinsman, from my door, and he is safer here than on his quest, but he shall see no more of thee or me to-night. I may hold that Edward of March has the right, but that does not mean hunting down an orphan child.'

'Mother, mother, you are good indeed!' cried Anne, almost weeping for joy.

Bertram, though hurt and offended, was obliged by advance of evening to remain all night in the hospitium, with only the chaplain to bear him company, and it was reported that though he rode past Blackpool, no trace of shepherd or hovel was found.

CHAPTER V. – MOTHER AND SON

My own, my own, thy fellow-guest
I may not be, but rest thee, rest—
The lowly shepherd's life is best.

—*WORDSWORTH.*

The Lady Threlkeld stood in the lower storey of her castle, a sort of rough-built hall or crypt, with a stone stair leading upward to the real castle hall above, while this served as a place where she met her husband's retainers and the poor around, and administered to their wants with her own hands, assisted by the maidens of her household.

Among the various hungry and diseased there limped in a sturdy beggar with a wallet on his back, and a broad shady hat, as though on pilgrimage. He was evidently a stranger among the rest, and had his leg and foot bound up, leaning heavily on a stout staff.

'Italy pilgrim, what ails thee?' demanded the lady, as he approached her.

'Alack, noble dame! we poor pilgrims must ever be moving on, however much it irks foot and limb, over these northern stones,' he answered, and his accent and tone were such that a thrill seemed to pass over the lady's whole person, but she

controlled it, and only said, 'Tarry till these have received their alms, then will I see to thee and thy maimed foot. Give him a stool, Alice, while he waits.'

The various patients who claimed the lady's assistance were attended to, those who needed food were relieved, and in due time the hall was cleared, excepting of the lady, an old female servant, and Hob, who had sat all the time with his foot on a stool, and his back against the wall, more than half asleep after the toils and long journey of the night.

Then the Lady Threlkeld came to him, and making him a sign not to rise, said aloud, 'Good Gaffer, let me see what ails thy leg.' Then kneeling down and busying herself with the bandages, she looked up piteously in his face, with the partly breathed inquiry, 'My son?'

'Well, my lady, and grown into a stalwart lad,' was Hob's answer, with an eye on the door, and in a voice as low as his gruff tones would permit.

'And wherefore? What is it?' she asked anxiously. 'Be they on the track of my poor boy?'

'They may be,' answered Hob, 'wherefore I deemed it well to shift our quarters. As hap would have it, the lad fell upon a little wench lost in the mosses, and there was nothing for it but to bring her home for the night. I would have had her away as soon as day dawned, and no questions asked, but the witches, or the foul fiend himself, must needs bring up a snow-storm, and there was nothing for it but to let her bide in the cot all day, giving tongue

as none but womenfolk can do; and behold she is the child of the Lord St. John of Bletso.'

'Nay, what should bring her north?'

'She wonnes at Greystone with the wild Prioress Selby, who lost her out hawking. Her father is a black Yorkist. I saw him up to his stirrups in blood at St. Albans!'

'But sure my boy did not make himself known to her?' exclaimed the lady.

'I trow not. He has been well warned, and is a lad of his word; but the two bairns, left to themselves, could scarce help finding out that each was of gentle blood and breeding, and how much more my goodwife cannot tell. I took the maid back so soon as it was safe yester morn, and sent back my young lord, much against his will, half-way to Greystone. And well was it I did so, for he was scarce over the ridge when a plump of spears came in sight on the search for him, and led by the young squire of Selby.'

'Ah! and if the damsel does but talk, even if she knows nought, the foe will draw their conclusions!' said the lady, clasping her hands. 'Oh, would that I had sent him abroad with his little brothers!'

'Nay, then might he have fallen into the hands of Bletso himself, and they say Burgundy is all for the Yorkists now,' said Hob. 'This is what I have done, gracious lady. I bade my good woman carry off all she could from the homestead and burn the rest; and for him we wot on, I sent him and his flock off westward, appointing each of them the same trysting-place—on

the slope beneath Derwent Hill, my lady—whence I thought, if it were your will and the good knight Sir Lancelot's, we might go nigher to the sea and the firth, where the Selby clan have no call, being at deadly feud with the Ridleys. So if the maiden's tongue goes fast, and the Prioress follows up the quest with young Selby, they will find nought for their pains.'

'Thou art a good guardian, Hob! Ah! where would my boy be save for thee? And thou sayest he is even now at the very border of the forest ground! Sure, there can be no cause that I should not go and see him. My heart hungers for my children. Oh, let me go with thee!'

'Sir Lancelot—' began Hob.

'He is away at the Warden's summons. He will scarce be back for a week or more. I will, I must go with thee, good Hob.'

'Not in your own person, good madam,' stipulated Hob. 'As thou knowest, there are those in Sir Lancelot's following who might be too apt to report of secret visits, and that were as ill as the Priory folk.'

It was then decided that the lady should put on the disguise of a countrywoman bringing eggs and meat to sell at the castle, and meet Hob near the postern, whence a path led to Penrith.

Hob, having received a lump of oatcake and a draught of very small ale, limped out of the court, and, so soon as he could find a convenient spot behind the gorse bushes, divested himself of his bandages, and changed the side of his shepherd's plaid to one much older and more weather-beaten; also his pilgrim's hat for

one in his pouch—a blue bonnet, more like the national Scottish head-gear, hiding the hat in the gorse.

Then he lay down and waited, where he could see a window, whence a red kerchief was to be fluttered to show when the lady would be ready for him to attend her. He waited long, for she had first to disarm suspicion by presiding at the general meal of the household, and showing no undue haste.

At last, though not till after he had more than once fallen asleep and feared that he had missed the signal, or that his wife and ‘Hal’ might be tempted to some imprudence while waiting, he beheld the kerchief waving in the sunset light of the afternoon, and presently, shrouded in such a black and white shepherd’s maud as his own, and in a russet gown with a basket on her arm, his lady came forth and joined him.

His first thought was how would she return again, when the darkness was begun, but her only answer was, ‘Heed not that! My child, I must see.’

Indeed, she was almost too breathless and eager with haste, as he guided her over the rough and difficult path, or rather track, to answer his inquiries as to what was to be done next. Her view, however, agreed with his, that they must lurk in the borders of the woodland for a day or two till Sir Lancelot’s return, when he would direct them to a place where he could put them under the protection of one of the tenants of his manor. It was a long walk, longer than Hob had perhaps felt when he had undertaken to conduct the lady through it, for ladies, though inured to many

dangers in those days, were unaccustomed to travelling on their own feet; but the mother's heart seemed to heed no obstacle, though moments came when she had to lean heavily on her companion, and he even had to lift her over brooks or pools; but happily the sun had not set when they made their way through the tangles of the wood, and at last saw before them the fitful glow of a fire of dead leaves, branches and twigs, while the bark of a dog greeted the rustling, they made.

'Sweetheart, my faithful!' then shouted Hob, and in another moment there was a cry, 'Ha! Halloa! Master Hob—beest there?'

'His voice!—my son's!' gasped the lady, and sank for a moment of overwhelming joy against the faithful retainer, while the shaggy dog leapt upon them both.

'Ay, lad, here—and some one else.'

The boy crashed through the underwood, and stood on the path in a moment's hesitation. Mother and son were face to face!

The years that had passed had changed the lad from almost a babe into a well-grown strong boy but the mother was little altered, and as she held out her arms no word was wasted ere he sprang into them, and his face was hidden on her neck as when he knew his way into her embrace of old!

When the intense rapturous hold was loosed they were aware of Goodwife Dolly looking on with clasped hands and streaming eyes, giving thanks for the meeting of her dear lady and the charge whom she and her husband had so faithfully kept.

When the mother and son had leisure to look round, and there

was a pleased survey of the boy's height and strength, Goodwife Dolly came forward to beg the lady to come to her fire, and rest under the gipsy tent which she and nephew Piers—her *real* herd-boy, a rough, shaggy, almost dumb and imbecile lad—had raised with branches, skins and canvas, to protect their few articles of property. There was a smouldering fire, over which Doll had prepared a rabbit which the dog had caught, and which she had intended for Hal's supper and that of her husband if he came home in time. While the lady lavished thanks upon her for all she had done for the boy she was intent on improving the rude meal, so as to strengthen her mistress after her long walk, and for the return. The lady, however, could see and think of nothing but her son, while he returned her tearful gaze with open eyes, gathering up his old recollections of her.

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