

Weyman Stanley John

Shrewsbury: A Romance



Stanley Weyman
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CHAPTER I

That the untimely death at the age of fifty-eight of that great prince, Charles, Duke of Shrewsbury, my most noble and generous patron, has afflicted me with a sorrow which I may truly call *acerbus et ingens*, is nothing to the world; which from one in my situation could expect no other, and, on the briefest relation of the benefits I had at his hands, might look for more. Were this all, therefore, or my task confined to such a relation, I should supererogate indeed in making this appearance. But I am informed that my lord Duke's death has revived in certain quarters those rumours to his prejudice which were so industriously put about at the time of his first retirement; and which, refuted as they were at the moment by the express declaration of his Sovereign, and at leisure by his own behaviour, as well as by the support which at two great crises he gave to the Protestant succession, formed always a proof of the malice, as now of the persistence, of his enemies.

Still, such as they are, and though, not these circumstances only, but a thousand others have time after time exposed them, I am instructed that they are again afloat; and find favour in circles where to think ill of public men is held the first test of experience. And this being the case, and my affection for my lord such as is natural, I perceive a clear duty. I do not indeed suppose that anyone can at this time of day effect that which the sense of all good men failed to effect while he lived-I mean the final killing of those rumours; nor is a plain tale likely to persuade those, with whom idle reports, constantly furbished up, of letters seen in France, weigh more than a consistent life. But my lord's case is now, as I take it, removed to the Appeal Court of Posterity; which nevertheless, a lie constantly iterated may mislead. To provide somewhat to correct this, and wherefrom future historians may draw, I who knew him well, and was in his confidence and in a manner in his employment at the time of Sir John Fenwick's case-of which these calumnies were always compact-propose to set down my evidence here; shrinking from no fulness, at times even venturing on prolixity, and always remembering a saying of Lord Somers', that often the most material part of testimony is that on which the witness values himself least. To adventure on this fulness, which in the case of many, and perhaps the bulk of writers, might issue in the surfeit of their readers, I feel myself emboldened by the possession of a brief and concise manner of writing; which, acquired in the first place in the circumstances presently to appear, was later improved by constant practice in the composition of my lord's papers.

And here some will expect me to proceed at once to the events of the year 1696, in which Sir John suffered, or at least 1695. But softly, and a little if you please *ab ovo*; still the particulars which enabled my lord's enemies to place a sinister interpretation on his conduct in those years had somewhat, and, alas, too much, to do with me. Therefore, before I can clear the matter up from every point of view, I am first to say who I am, and how I came to fall in the way of that great man and gain his approbation; with other preliminary matters, relating to myself, whereof some do not please at this distance, and yet must be set down, if with a wry face.

Of which, I am glad to say, that the worst-with one exception-comes first, or at least early. And with that, to proceed; premising always that, as in all that follows I am no one, and the tale is my lord's, I shall deal very succinctly with my own concerns and chancings, and where I must state them for clearness of narration, will do so *currente calamo* (as the ancients were wont to say) and so forthwith to those more important matters with which my readers desire to be made acquainted.

Suffice it, then, that I was born near Bishop's Stortford on the borders of Hertfordshire, in that year so truly called the *Annus Mirabilis*, 1666; my father, a small yeoman, my mother of no better stock, she being the daughter of a poor parson in that neighbourhood. In such a station she was not

likely to boast much learning, yet she could read, and having served two years in a great man's still-room, had acquired notions of gentility that went as ill with her station as they were little calculated to increase her contentment. Our house lay not far from the high road between Ware and Bishop's Stortford, which furnished us with frequent opportunities of viewing the King and Court, who were in the habit of passing that way two or three times in the year to Newmarket to see the horse-races. On these occasions we crowded with our neighbours to the side of the road, and gaped on the pageant, which lacked no show of ladies, both masked and unmasked, and gentlemen in all kinds of fripperies, and mettlesome horses that hit the taste of some among us better than either. On these excursions my mother was ever the foremost and the most ready; yet it was not long before I learned to beware of her hand for days after, and expect none but gloomy looks and fretful answers; while my father dared no more spell duty for as much as a week, than refuse the King's taxes.

Nevertheless, and whatever she was as a wife-and it is true she could ding my father's ears, and, for as handsome as she was, there were times when he would have been happier with a plainer woman-I am far from saying that she was a bad mother. Indeed, she was a kind, if fickle, and passionate one, wiser at large and in intention than in practice and in small matters. Yet if for one thing only, and putting aside natural affection-in which I trust I am not deficient-she deserved to be named by me with undying gratitude. For having learned to read, but never to write, beyond, that is, the trifle of her maiden name, she valued scholarship both by that she had, and that she had not; and in the year after I was breeched, prevailed on my father who, for his part, good man, never advanced beyond the Neck Verse, to bind me to the ancient Grammar School at Bishop's Stortford, then kept by a Mr. G-.

I believe that there were some who thought this as much beyond our pretensions, as our small farm fell below the homestead of a man of substance; and for certain, the first lesson I learned at that school was to behave myself lowly and reverently to all my betters, being trounced on arrival by three squires' sons, and afterwards, in due order and gradation, by all who had or affected gentility. To balance this I found that I had the advantage of my master's favour, and that for no greater a thing than the tinge of my father's opinions. For whereas the commonalty in that country, as in all the eastern counties, had been for the Parliament in the late troubles, and still loved a patriot, my father was a King's man; which placed him high in Mr. G-'s estimation, who had been displaced by the Rump and hated all of that side, and not for the loss of his place only, but, and in a far greater degree, for a thing which befell him later, after he had withdrawn to Oxford. For being of St. John's College, and seeing all that rich and loyal foundation at stake, he entered himself in a body of horse which was raised among the younger collegians and servants; and probably if he had been so lucky as to lose an eye or an arm in the field of honour, he would have forgiven Oliver all, and not the King's sufferings only, but his own. But in place of that it was his ill-chance to be one of a troop that, marching at night by the river near Wallingford, took fright at nothing and galloped to Abingdon without drawing rein; for which reason, and because an example was needed, they were disbanded. True, I never heard that the fault on that occasion lay with our master, nor that he was a man of less courage than his neighbours; but he took the matter peculiarly to heart, and never forgave the Roundheads the slur they had unwittingly cast on his honour; on the contrary, and in the event, he regularly celebrated the thirtieth of January by flogging the six boys who stood lowest in each form, and afterwards reading the service of the day over their smarting tails. By some, indeed, it was alleged that the veriest dunces, if of loyal stock, might look to escape on these occasions; but I treat this as a calumny.

That the good man did in truth love and favour loyalty, however, and this without sparing the rod in season, I am myself a bright and excellent example. For though I never attained to the outward flower of scholarship by proceeding to the learned degree of arts at either of the Universities, I gained the root and kernel of the matter at Bishop's Stortford, being able at the age of fourteen to write a fine hand, and read Eutropius, and Cæsar, and teach the horn-book and Christ-Cross to younger boys. These attainments, and the taste for polite learning, which, as these pages will testify, I have never ceased to cultivate, I owe rather to the predilection which he had for me than to my own gifts;

which, indeed, though doubtless I was always a boy of parts, I do not remember to have been great at the first. *Sub ferula*, however, and with encouragement, I so far advanced that he presently began to consider the promoting me to the place of usher, with a cane *in commendam*; and, doubtless, he would have done it but for a fit that took him at the first news of the Rye House Plot, and the danger his Sacred Majesty had run thereby-which a friend imprudently brought to him when he was merry after dinner-and which caused an illness that at one and the same time carried him off, and deprived me of the best of pedagogues.

After that, and learning that his successor had a son whom he proposed to promote to the place I desired, I returned to the school no more, but began to live at home; at first with pleasure, but after no long interval with growing chagrin and tedium. Our house possessed none of the comforts that are necessary to idleness, and therefore when the east wind drove me indoors from swinging on the gate, or sulking in the stack-yard, I found it neither welcome nor occupation. My younger brother had seized on the place of assistant to my father, and having got thews and experience *ambulando*, found fresh ground every day for making mock of my uselessness. Did I milk, the cows kicked over the bucket, while I thought of other things; did I plough, my furrows ran crooked; when I thrashed, the flail soon wearied my arms. In the result, therefore, the respect with which my father had at first regarded my learning, wore off, and he grew to hate the sight of me whether I hung over the fire or loafed in the doorway, my sleeves too short for my chapped arms, and my breeches barely to my knees. Though my mother still believed in me, and occasionally, when she was in an ill-humour with my father, made me read to her, her support scarcely balanced the neighbours' sneers. Nor when I chanced to displease her-which, to do her justice, was not often, for I was her favourite-was she above joining in the general cry, and asking me, while she cuffed me, whether I thought the cherries fell into the mouth, and meant to spend all my life with my hands in my pockets.

To make a long story short, at the end of twelve months, whereof every day of the last ten increased my hatred of our home surroundings, the dull strip of common before the door, the duck-pond, the grey horizon, and the twin ash-trees on which I had cut my name so often, I heard through a neighbour that an usher was required in a school at Ware. This was enough for me; while, of my family, who saw me leave with greater relief on their own account than hope on mine, only my mother felt or affected regret. With ten shillings in my pocket, her parting gift, and my scanty library of three volumes packed among my clothes on my back, I plodded the twelve miles to Ware, satisfied the learned Mr. D- that I had had the small-pox, would sleep three in a bed, and knew more than he did; and the same day was duly engaged to teach in his classical seminary, in return for my board, lodging, washing, and nine guineas a year.

He had trailed a pike in the wars, and was an ignorant, but neither a cruel, nor, save in the pretence of knowledge, a dishonest man; it might be supposed, therefore, that, after the taste of idleness and dependence I had had, I should here find myself tolerably placed, and in the fair way of promotion. But I presently found that I had merely exchanged a desert for a prison, wherein I had not only the shepherding of the boys to do, both by night and day, which in a short time grew inconceivably irksome, so that I had to choose whether I would be tyrant or slave; but also the main weight of teaching, and there no choice at all but to be a drudge. And this without any alleviation from week's end to week's end, either at meals or at any other time! for my employer's wife had high notions, and must keep a separate house, though next door, and with communications; sitting down with us only on Sundays, and then at dinner, when woe betide the boy who gobbled his food or choked over the pudding-balls. Having satisfied herself on my first coming that my father was neither of the Quorum nor of Justice's kin, and, in fact, a mere rustic nobody, she had no more to say to me, but when she was not scolding her husband, addressed herself solely to one of the boys, who by virtue of an uncle who was a Canon, had his seat beside her. Insensibly, her husband, who at first, with an eye to my knowledge and his own deficiencies, had been more civil to me, took the same tone; and not only that, but, finding that I was to be trusted, he came less and less into school,

until at last he would only appear for a few minutes in the day, and to carve when we had meat, and to see the lights extinguished at night. This without any added value for me; so that the better I served him-and for a year I managed his school for him-the less he favoured me, and at last thought a nod all the converse he owed me in the day.

Consigned to this solitary life by those above me, it was not likely that I should find compensation in the society of lads to whom I stood in an odious light, and of whom the oldest was no more than fourteen. For what was our life? Such hours as we did not spend in the drudgery of school, or in our beds, we passed in a yard on the dank side of the house, a grassless place, muddy in winter and dusty in summer, overshadowed by one skeleton tree; and wherein, since all violent games and sports were forbidden by the good lady's scruples (who belonged to the fanatical party) as savouring of Popery, we had perforce to occupy ourselves with bickerings and complaints and childish plays. Abutting on the garden of her house, this yard presented on its one open side a near prospect of water-butts, and drying clothes, so that to this day I profess that I hold it in greater horror than any other place or thing at that school.

It is true we walked out in the country at rare intervals; but as three sides of the town were forbidden to us by a great man, whose property lay in that quarter, and who feared for his game, our excursions were always along one road, which afforded neither change nor variety. Moreover, I had a particular reason for liking these excursions as little as possible, which was that they exposed me to frequent meetings with gay young sparks of my own age, whose scornful looks as they rode by, with the contemptuous names they called after me, asking who dressed the boys' hair and the like, I found it difficult to support-even with the aid of those reflections on the dignity of learning and the Latin tongue which I had imbibed from my late master.

Be it remembered (in palliation of that which I shall presently tell) that at this time I was only eighteen, an age at which the passions and ambitions awake, and that this was my life. At a time when youth demands change and excitement and the fringe of ornament, my days and weeks went by in a plain round, as barren of wholesome interests as it was unadorned by any kindly aid or companionship. To rise, to teach, to use the cane, to move always in a dull atmosphere of routine; for diversion to pace the yard I have described, always with shrill quarrellings in my ears-these with the weekly walk made up my life at Ware, and must form my excuse. How the one came to an abrupt end, how I came to have sore need of the other, it is now my business to tell; but of these in the next chapter; wherein also I propose to show, without any moralities, another thing that shall prove them to the purpose, namely, how these early experiences, which I have thus curtly described, led me *per viam dolorosam* to my late lord, and mingled my fortunes with his, under circumstances not unworthy of examination by those who take mankind for their study.

CHAPTER II

To begin, Mrs. D-, my master's better-half, though she seldom condescended to our house, and when engaged in her kitchen premises affected to ignore the proximity of ours, enjoyed in Ware the reputation of a shrewd and capable house-wife. Whether she owed this solely to the possession of a sharp temper and voluble voice, I cannot say; but only that during all the time I was there I scarcely ever passed an hour in our miserable playground without my ears being deafened and my brain irritated by the sound of her chiding. She had the advantage, when I first came to the school, of an elderly servant, who went about her work under an even flow of scolding, and, it may be, had become so accustomed to the infliction as to be neither the better nor worse for it. But about the time of which I am writing, when, as I have said, I had been there twelve months, I remarked a change in Mrs. D-'s voice, and judged from the increased acerbity and rising shrillness of her tone that she had passed from drilling an old servant to informing a new one. To confirm this theory, before long, "Lazy slut!" and "Dirty baggage!" and "Take that, Insolence," were the best of the terms I heard; and these so frequently mingled with blows and slaps, and at times with the sound of sobbing, that my gall rose. I had listened indifferently enough, and if with irritation, without much pain, to the chiding of the old servant; and I knew no more of this one. But by the instinct which draws youth to youth, or by reason of Mrs. D-'s increased severity, I began to feel for her, to pity her, and at last to wonder what she was like, and her age, and so forth.

Nothing more formidable than a low paling separated the garden of Mrs. D-'s house from our yard; but that her eyes might not be offended by the ignoble sight of the trade by which she lived, four great water-butts were ranked along the fence, which, being as tall as a man, and nicely arranged, and strengthened on the inner side by an accumulation of rubbish and so forth, formed a pretty effective screen. The boys indeed had their spyholes, and were in the habit of peeping when I did not check them; but in only one place, at the corner farthest from the house, was it possible to see by accident, as it were, and without stooping or manifest prying, a small patch of the garden. This gap in the corner I had hitherto shunned, for Mrs. D- had more than once sent me from it with a flea in my ear and hot cheeks: now, however, it became a favourite with me, and as far as I could, without courting the notice of the wretched urchins who whined and squabbled round me, I began to frequent it; sometimes leaning against the abutting fence with my back to the house, as in a fit of abstraction, and then slowly turning-when I did not fail to rake the aforesaid patch with my eyes; and sometimes taking that corner for the limit of a brisk walk to and fro, which made it natural to pause and wheel at that point.

Notwithstanding these ruses, however, and though Mrs. D-'s voice, raised in anger, frequently bore witness to her neighbourhood, it was some time before I caught a glimpse of the person, whose fate, more doleful than mine, yet not dissimilar, had awakened my interest. At length I espied her, slowly crossing the garden, with her back to me and a yoke on her shoulders. Two pails hung from the yoke, I smelled swill; and in a trice seeing in her no more than a wretched drab, in clogs and a coarse sacking-apron, I felt my philanthropy brought to the test; and without a second glance turned away in disgust. And thought no more of her.

After that I took a distaste for the gap, and I do not remember that I visited it for a week or more; when, at length, chance or custom taking me there again, I saw the same woman hanging clothes on the line. She had her back to me as on the former occasion; but this time I lingered watching her, and whether she knew or not that I was there, her work presently brought her towards the place in the fence beside the water-barrels, at which I stood gazing. Still, I could not see her face, in part because she did not turn my way, and more because she wore a dirty limp sun-bonnet, which obscured her features. But I continued to watch; and by-and-by she had finished her hanging, and took up the empty basket to go in again; and thereon, suddenly in the act of rising from stooping, she looked directly at me, not being more than two, or at the most three, paces from me. It was but one look, and

it lasted, I suppose, two seconds or so; but it touched something in me that had never been touched before, and to this time of writing, and though I have been long married and have children, my body burns at the remembrance of it. For not only was the face that for those two seconds looked into mine a face of rare beauty, brown and low-browed, with scarlet, laughing lips, and milk-white teeth, and eyes of witchery, brighter than a queen's jewels, but in the look, short as it was and passing, shone a something that I had never seen in a woman's face before, a something, God knows what, appeal or passion or temptation, that on the instant fired my blood. I suppose, nay, I know now, that the face that flashed that look at me from under the dirty sun-bonnet could change to a marvel; and in a minute, and as by a miracle, become dull and almost ugly, or the most beautiful in the world. But then, that and all such things were new to me who knew no women, and had never spoken to a woman in the way of love nor thought of one when her back was turned; so new, that when it was over and she gone without a second glance, I went back to the house another man, my heart thumping in my breast, and my cheeks burning, and my whole being oppressed with desire and bashfulness and wonder and curiosity, and a hundred other emotions that would not permit me to be at ease until I had hidden myself from all eyes.

Well, to be brief, that, in less than the time I have taken to tell it, changed all. I was eighteen; the girl's shining eyes burned me up, as flame burns stubble. In an hour, a week, a day, I can no more say within what time than I can describe what befel me before I was born-for if that was a sleeping, this was a dream, and passed swift and confused as one-I was madly and desperately in love. Her face brilliant, mischievous, alluring, rose before the thumbed grammar by day, and the dim casement of the fetid, crowded bedroom by night, and filled the slow, grey dawns, now with joy and now with despair. For the time, I thought only of her, lived for her, did my work in dreams of her. I kept no count of time, I gave no heed to what passed round me; but I went through the routine of my miserable life, happy as the slave that, rich in the possession of some beneficent drug, defies the pains of labour and the lash. I say my miserable life; but I say it, so great was the change, in a figure only and in retrospect. Mrs. D- might scorn me now, and the boys squabble round me, yet that life was no longer miserable nor dull, whereof every morning flattered me with hopes of seeing my mistress, and every third day or so fulfilled the promise.

With all this, and though from the moment her eyes met mine across the fence, her beauty possessed me utterly, a full fortnight elapsed before I spoke with her. In the interval I saw her three times, and always in the wretched guise in which she had first appeared to me; which, so far from checking my passion, now augmented it by the full measure of the mystery with which the sordidness of her dress, in contrast with her beauty, invested her in my mind. But, for speaking with her, that was another matter, and one presenting so many difficulties (whereof, as the boys' constant presence and Mrs. D-'s temper were the greatest, so my bashfulness was not the least) that I think we might have gone another fortnight, and perhaps a third to that, and not come to it, had not a certain privilege on which Mr. D-'s good lady greatly prided herself, come to our aid in the nick of time, and by bringing us into the same room (a thing which had never occurred before, and of itself threw me into a fever) combined with fortune to aid my hopes.

This privilege-so Mrs. D- invariably styled it-was the solemn gathering of the household on one Sunday in each month to listen to a discourse which, her husband sitting meekly by, she read to us from the works of some Independent divine. On these occasions she delivered herself so sonorously and with so much gusto, that I do not doubt she found compensation in them for the tedium of the sermon on Passive Obedience, or on the fate of the Amalekite, to which, in compliance with the laws against Dissent, she had perforce listened earlier in the day. The master and mistress and the servant sat on one side of the room, I with the boys on the other; and hitherto I am unable to say which of us had suffered more under the infliction. But the appearance of my sweet martyr-so, when Madam's voice rang shrillest and most angrily over the soapsuds, I had come to think of her-in a place behind her master and mistress (being the same in which the old servant had nodded and grunted every

sermon evening since my coming), put a new complexion on the matter. For her, she entered, as if unconscious of my presence, and took her seat with downcast eyes and hands folded, and that dull look on her face which, when she chose, veiled three-fourths of its beauty. But my ears flamed, and the blood surged to my head; and I thought that all must read my secret in my face.

With Mrs. D-, however, this was the one hour in the month when the suspicions natural in one of her carping temper, slept, and she tasted a pleasure comparatively pure. Majestically arrayed in a huge pair of spectacles-which on this occasion, and in the character of the family priest, her vanity permitted and even incited her to wear-and provided with a couple of tall tallow candles, which it was her husband's duty to snuff, she would open the dreaded quarto and prop it firmly on the table before her. Then, after giving out her text in a tone that need not have disgraced Hugh Peters or the most famous preacher of her persuasion, it was her custom to lift her eyes and look round to assure herself that all was cringing attention; and this was the trying moment; woe to the boy whose gaze wandered-his back would smart for it before he slept. These preliminaries at an end, however, and the discourse begun, the danger was over for the time; for, in the voluptuous roll of the long wordy sentences, and the elections and damnations, and free wills that plentifully bestrewed them, she speedily forgot all but the sound of her own voice; and, nothing occurring to rouse her, might be trusted to read for the hour and half with pleasure to herself and without risk to others.

So it fell out on this occasion. As soon, therefore, as the steady droning of her voice gave me courage to look up, I had before me the same scene with which a dozen Sunday evenings had made me familiar; the dull circle of yellow light; within it Madam's horn-rimmed glasses shining over the book, while her finger industriously followed the lines; a little behind, her husband, nodding and recovering himself by turns. Not now was this all, however: now I saw also *imprimis*, a dim oval face, framed in the background behind the two old people; and that, now in shadow now in light, gleamed before my fascinated eyes with unearthly beauty. Once or twice, fearing to be observed, I averted my gaze and looked elsewhere; guiltily and with hot temples. But always I returned to it again. And always, the longer I let my eyes dwell on the vision-for a vision it seemed in the halo of the candles-and the more monotonous hung the silence, broken only by Mrs. D-'s even drone, the more distinctly the beautiful face stood out, and the more bewitching and alluring appeared the red lips and smiling eyes and dark clustering hair, that moment by moment drew my heart from me, and kindled my ripening brain and filled my veins with fever!

"Seventhly, and under this head, of the sin of David!"

So Mrs. D- booming on, in her deep voice, to all seeming endlessly; while the air of the dingy whitewashed room grew stale, and the candles guttered and burned low, and the boys, poor little wretches, leaned on one another's shoulders and sighed, and it was difficult to say whether Mr. D-'s noddings or his recoveries went nearer to breaking his neck. At last-or was it only my fancy? – I thought I made out a small brown hand gliding within the circle of light. Then-or was I dreaming? – one of the candles began to move; but to move so little and so stealthily, that I could not swear to it; nor ever could have sworn, if Mr. D-'s wig had not a moment later taken fire with a light flame, and a stench, and a frizzling sound, that in a second brought him, still half-asleep, but swearing, to his feet.

Mrs. D-, her mouth open, and the volume lifted, halted in the middle of a word, and glared as if she had been shot; her surprise at the interruption so great-and no wonder-that she could not for a while find words. But the stream of her indignation, so checked, only gathered volume; and in a few seconds broke forth.

"Mr. D-!" she cried, slamming the book down on the table. "You disgusting beast! Do you know that the boys are here?"

"My wig is on fire!" he cried for answer. He had taken it off, and now held it at arm's length, looking at it so ruefully that the boys, though they knew the danger, could scarcely restrain their laughter.

"And serve you right for a weak-kneed member!" his wife answered in a voice that made us quake. "If you had not guzzled at dinner, sir, and swilled small beer you would have remained awake instead of spoiling a good wig, and staining your soul! Ay, and causing these little ones-"

"I never closed my eyes!" he declared, roundly.

"Rubbish!" she answered in a tone that would brook no denial. And then, "Give the wig to Jennie, sir!" she continued, peremptorily. "And put your handkerchief on your head. It is well that good Mr. Nesbit does not know what language has been used during his discourse; it would cut that excellent man to the heart. Do you hear, sir, give the wig to Jennie!" she screamed. "A handkerchief is good enough for profane swearers and filthy talkers! And too good! Too good, sir!"

He went reluctantly to obey, seeing nothing for it; but between his anger and Jennie's clumsiness, the wig, in passing from one to the other, fell under the table. This caused Mrs. D-, who was at the end of her patience, to spring up in a rage, and down went a candle. Nor was this the worst; for the grease in its fall cast a trail of hot drops on her Sunday gown, and in a flash she was on the maid and had smacked her face till the room rang.

"Take that, and that, you clumsy baggage!" she cried in a fury, her face crimson. "And that! And the next time you offer to take a gentleman's wig have better manners. This will cost you a year's wages, my fine madam! and let me hear of your stepping over the doorstep until it is earned, and I will have you jailed and whipped. Do you hear? And you," she continued, turning ferociously on her husband, "swearing on the Lord's day like a drunken, raffling, God-forsaken Tantivy! You are not much better!"

It only remains in my memory now as a coarse outburst of vixenish temper, made prominent by after events. But what I felt at the moment I should in vain try to describe. At one time I was on the point of springing on the woman, and at another all but caught the sobbing girl in my arms and challenged the world to touch her.

Fortunately, Mr. D-, now fully awakened, and the more inclined to remember decency in proportion as his wife forgot it, recalled me to myself by sternly bidding me see the boys to their beds.

Glad to escape, they needed no second order, but flocked to the door, and I with them. In our retreat, it was necessary for me to pass close to the shrinking girl, whom Mrs. D- was still abusing with all the cruelty imaginable; as I did so I heard, or dreamed that I heard, three words, breathed in the faintest possible whisper. I say, dreamed I heard, for the girl neither looked at me nor removed the apron from her face, nor by abating her sobs or any other sign betrayed that she spoke or that she was conscious of my neighbourhood.

Yet the three words, "Garden, ten minutes," so gently breathed, that I doubted while I heard, could only have come from her; and assured of that, it will be believed that I found the ten minutes I spent seeing the boys to bed by the light of one scanty rushlight the longest and most tumultuous I ever passed. If she had not spoken I should have found it a sorry time, indeed; since the moment the door was closed behind me I discerned a hundred reasons to be dissatisfied with my conduct, thought of a hundred things I should have said, and saw a hundred things I should have done; and stood a coward convicted. Now, however, all was not over; I might explain. I was about to see her, to speak with her, to pour out my indignation and pity, perhaps to touch her hand; and in the delicious throb of fear and hope and excitement with which these anticipations filled my breast, I speedily forgot to regret what was past.

CHAPTER III

Doubtless there have been men able to boast, and with truth, that they carried to their first assignation with a woman an even pulse. But as I do not presume to rank myself among these, who have been commonly men of high station (of whom my late Lord Rochester was, I believe, the chief in my time), neither-the unhappy occurrence which I am in the way to relate, notwithstanding-have I, if I may say so without disrespect, so little heart as to crave the reputation. In truth, I experienced that evening, as I crept out of the back door of Mr. D-'s house, and stole into the gloom of the whispering garden, a full share of the guilty feeling that goes with secrecy; and more than my share of the agitation of spirit natural in one who knows (and is new to the thought) that under cover of the darkness a woman stands trembling and waiting for him. A few paces from the house-which I could leave without difficulty, though at the risk of detection-I glanced back to assure myself that all was still: then shivering, as much with excitement as at the chill greeting the night air gave me, I hastened to the gap in the fence, through which I had before seen my mistress.

I felt for the gap with my hand and peered through it, and called her name softly-"Jennie! Jennie!" and listened; and after an interval called again, more boldly. Still hearing nothing, I discovered by the sinking at my heart-which was such that, for all my eighteen years, I could have sat down and cried-how much I had built on her coming. And I called again and again; and still got no answer.

Yet I did not despair. Mrs. D- might have kept her, or one of a hundred things might have happened to delay her; from one cause or another she might not have been able to slip out as quickly as she had thought. She might come yet; and so, though the more prolonged my absence, the greater risk of detection I ran, I composed myself to wait with what patience I might. The town was quiet; human noise at an end for the day; but Mr. D-'s school stood on the outskirts, with its back to the open country, and between the sighing of the wind among the poplars, and the murmur of a neighbouring brook, and those far-off noises that seem inseparable from the night, I had stood a minute or more before another sound, differing from all these, and having its origin at a spot much nearer to me, caught my ear, and set my heart beating. It was the noise of a woman weeping; and to this day I do not know precisely what I did on hearing it-when I made out what it was, I mean-or how I found courage to do it; only, that in an instant, as it seemed to me, I was on the other side of the fence, and had taken the girl in my arms, with her head on my shoulder, and her wet eyes looking into mine, while I rained kisses on her face.

Doubtless the darkness and her grief and my passion gave me boldness to do this; and to do a hundred other mad things in my ecstasy. For, as I had never spoken to her before, any more than I had ever held a woman in my arms before, so I had not thought, I had not dreamed of this! of her hand, perhaps, but no more. Therefore, and though since Adam's time the stars have looked down on many a lover's raptures, never, I verily believe, have they gazed on transports so perfect, so unlooked for, as were mine at that moment! And all the time not a word passed between us; but after a while she pushed me from her, with a kind of force that would not be resisted, and holding me at arm's length, looked at me strangely; and then thrusting me altogether from her, she bade me, almost roughly, go back.

"What? And leave you?" I cried, astonished and heart-broken.

"No, sir, but go to the other side of the fence," she answered firmly, drying her eyes and recovering something of her usual calmness. "And more, if you love me as you say you do-"

I protested. "*If?*" I cried. "If! And what then-if I do?"

"You will learn to obey," she answered, coolly, yet with an archness that transported me anew. "I am not one of your boys."

For that word, I would have caught her in my arms again, but with a power that I presently came to know, and whereof that was the first exercise, she waved me back. "Go!" she said, masterfully. "For this time, go. Do you hear me?"

My boldness of a minute before, notwithstanding, I stood in awe of her, and was easily cowed; and I crossed the fence. When I was on my side, she came to the gap, and rewarded me by giving me her hand to kiss. "Understand me," she said. "You are to come to this side, sir, only when I give you leave."

"Oh," I cried. "Can you be so cruel?"

"Or not at all, if you prefer it," she continued, drily. "More, you must go in, now, or I shall be missed and beaten. You do not want that to happen, I suppose?"

"If that hag touches you again!" I cried, boiling with rage at the thought, "I will-I will-"

"What?" she said softly, and her fingers closed on mine, and sent a thrill to my heart.

"I will strangle her!" I cried.

She laughed, a little cruelly. "Fine words," she said.

"But I mean them!" I answered, passionately. And I swore it-I swore it; what will not a boy in love promise?

"Well," she answered, whispering and leaning forward until her breath fanned my cheek, and the intoxicating scent of her hair stole away my senses, "perhaps some day I shall try you. Are you sure that you will not fail me then?"

I swore it, panting, and tried to draw her towards me by her arm; but she held back, laughing softly and as one well pleased; and then, in a moment, snatching her hand from me, she vanished in the darkness of the garden, leaving me in a seventh heaven of delight, my blood fired by her kisses, my fancy dwelling on her beauty; and without one afterthought.

Doubtless had I been less deep in love (wherein I was far over-head), or deeper in experience, I might have noted it for a curious thing that she should be so quickly comforted; and should be able to rise in a few moments, and at the touch of my lips, from passionate despair to perfect control, both of herself and of me. And starting thence, I might have gone on to suspect that she possessed her full share of the *finesse*, which is always a woman's shield and sometimes her sword. But as such suspicions are foreign to youth, so are they especially foreign to youthful love, which takes nothing lower than perfection for its idol. And this I can say for certain, that they no more entered my brain than did the consequences which were to flow from my passion.

For the time, indeed, I was in an ecstasy, a rapture. Walking a-tip-toe, and troubled by none of the things that trouble common folk; so that to this day-though long married-I look back to that period of innocent folly with a yearning and a regret, the sorer for this, that when I try to analyse the happiness I enjoyed, I fail, and make nothing of it. That all things should be changed for me, and I be changed in my own eyes-so that I walked a head taller and esteemed myself ridiculously-by the fact that a kitchen wench in a drugget petticoat and clogs had let me kiss her, and left me to believe that she loved me, seems incredible now; as incredible as that a daily glimpse of her figure flitting among the water-butts and powdering-tubs had power to transform that miserable back garden into a paradise, and Mr. D-'s school, with its dumplings, and bread and dripping, and inky fingers, into a mansion of tremulous joy!

Yet it was so. Nor did it matter anything to me, so great is the power of love when one is young, that my mistress went in rags, and had coarse hands, and spoke rustically. Touching this last, indeed, I must do her the justice to say that from the first she was as quick to note differences of speech and manner as she was apt to imitate good exemplars; and, moreover, possessed under her rags a species of refinement that matched the witchery of her face, and proved her to be, as she presently showed herself, no common girl.

Of course I, in the state of happy delirium on which I had now entered, and wherein even Mr. D- and the boys wore an amiable air, and only Mrs. D-, because she persecuted my love, had

the semblance of a female Satan, needed no proof of this; or I had had it when my Dorinda-so I christened her, feeling Jennie too low a name for so much beauty and kindness-proposed at our second rendezvous that I should teach her to read. At the first flush of the proposal I found reading a poor thing because she did not possess it; at the second I adored her for the humility that condescended to learn; but at the third I saw the convenience, as well as sense, of a proposal which was as much above the mind of an ordinary maid in love as Dorinda appeared superior to such a creature in all the qualities that render sense amiable.

Yet this much granted, how to teach her, seeing that we seldom met or conversed, and never, save under the kindly shelter of darkness? The obstacle for a time taxed all my ingenuity, but in the end I surmounted it by boldly asking Mr. D-'s leave to hold the afternoon classes in the playground. This, the approach of warm weather giving colour to the petition, was allowed; after which, as Dorinda was engaged in the back premises at that hour, and could listen while she drudged, the rest was easy. Calling up the lowest class, I would find fault with their reading, and after flying out at them in a simulated passion, would remit them again and again to the elements; so that for a fortnight or more, and, indeed, until the noise of the lads repeating the lesson annoyed Mrs. D-'s ears, the playground rang with a-b, ab; e-b, eb; c-a-t, cat; d-o-g, dog, and the like, with the alphabet and the rest of the horn-book. And all this so frequently repeated, that with this assistance, and the help of a spelling-book which I gave her, and which she studied before others awoke, my mistress at the end of two months could read tolerably, and was beginning to essay easy round-hand.

And Heaven knows how delicious were those lessons under the shabby ragged tree that shaded one half of the yard! I spoke to the yawning grubby-fingered boys, who slouched and straddled round me; but I knew to whose ears I applied myself; nor had pupil ever a more diligent master, or master an apter pupil. Once a week I had my fee of kisses, but rarely, very rarely, was permitted to cross the fence; a reserve on my Dorinda's part, that, while it augmented the esteem in which I held her, maintained my passion at a white heat. When, nevertheless, I remonstrated with her, and loverlike, complained of the rigour which in my heart I commended, she chid me for setting a low value on her; and when I persisted, "Go on," she said, drawing away from me with a wonderful air of offence. "Tell me at once, and in so many words, that you think me a low thing! That you really take me for the kitchen drudge I appear!"

Her tone was full of meaning, with a hint of mystery, but as I had never thought her aught else-and yet an angel-I was dumb.

"You did think me that?" she cried, fixing me with her eyes, and speaking in a tone that demanded an answer.

I muttered that I had never heard, had never known, that-that-and so stammered into silence, not at all understanding her.

"Then I think that hitherto we have been under a mistake," she answered, speaking very distantly, and in a voice that sent my heart into my boots. "You were fond-or said you were-of the cook-maid. She does not exist. No, sir, a little farther away, if you please," my mistress continued, haughtily, her head in the air, "and know that I come of better stock than that. If you would have my story I will tell it you. I can remember-it is almost the first thing I can remember-a day when I played, as a little child, with a necklace of gold beads, in the court-yard of a house in a great city; and wandered out, the side gate being open, and the porter not in his seat, into the streets; where," she continued dreamily, and gazing away from me, "there were great crowds, and men firing guns, and people running every way-"

I uttered an exclamation of astonishment. She noticed it only by making a short pause, and then went on in the same thoughtful tone, "As far as I can remember, it was a place where there were booths and stalls crowded together, and among them, it seems to me, a man was being hunted, who ran first one way and then another, while soldiers shot at him. At last he came where I had dropped on the ground in terror, after running child-like where the danger was greatest. He glared at me an

instant-he was running, stooping down below the level of the booths, and they had lost him for the time; then he snatched me up in his arms, and darted from his shelter, crying loudly as he held me up, 'Save the child! Save the child!' The crowd raised the same cry, and made a way for him to pass. And then-I do not remember anything, until I found myself shabbily dressed in a little inn, where, I suppose, the man, having made his escape, left me."

CHAPTER IV

At that I remember that I cried out in overwhelming excitement and amazement; cried out that I knew the man and his story, and the place whence she had been taken; that I had heard the tale from my father years before. "It was Colonel Porter who picked you up-Colonel Porter, and he saved his life by it!" I cried, quite beside myself at the wonderful discovery I had made. "It was Colonel Porter, in the great riot at Norwich."

"Ah?" she said, slowly; looking away from me, and speaking so coolly and strangely as both to surprise and damp me.

Yet I persisted. "Yes," I said, "the story is well known; at least that part of it. But-" and there and at that word I stopped, dumbfounded and gaping.

"But what?" she asked sharply, and looked at me again; the colour risen in her face.

"But-you are only eighteen," I hazarded timidly, "and the Norwich riot was in the War time. I dare say, thirty years ago."

She turned on me in a sort of passion.

"Well, sir, and what of that?" she cried. "Do you think me thirty?"

"No, indeed," I answered. And at the most she was nineteen.

"Then don't you believe me?"

I cried out too at that; but, boy-like, I was so proud of my knowledge and acuteness that I could not let the point lie. "All I mean," I explained, "is that to have been alive then, and at Norwich, you must be thirty now. And-"

"And was it I?" she answered, flying out at me in a fine fury. "Who said anything about Norwich? Or your dirty riots? Or your Porter, whose name I never heard before! Go away! I hate you! I hate you!" she continued, passionately, waving me off. "You make up things and then put them on me! I never said a word about Norwich."

"I know you did not," I protested.

"Then why did you say I did?" she wailed. "Why did you say I did? You are a wretch! I hate you!"

And with that, dissolving in tears and sobs she at one and the same time showed me another side of love, and reduced me to the utmost depths of despair; whence I was not permitted to emerge, nor reinstated in the least degree of favour until I had a hundred times abased myself before her, and was ready to curse the day when I first heard the name of Porter. Still peace was at last, and with infinite difficulty restored; and so complete was our *redintegratio amoris* that we presently ventured to recur to her tale and to the strange coincidence that had divided us; which did not seem so very remarkable, on second thought, seeing that she could not now remember that she had said a word about booths or stalls, but would have it I had inserted those particulars; the man in her case having taken refuge-she fancied, but could not at this distance of time remember very clearly-among the seats of a kind of bull-ring or circus erected in the marketplace. Which of course made a good deal of difference.

Notwithstanding this discrepancy, however, and though, taught by experience, I hastened to agree with her that the secret of her birth was not likely to be discovered in a moment, nor by so simple a process as the journey to Norwich, which I had been going to suggest, it was natural that we should often revert to the subject, and to her pretensions, and the hardship of her lot: and my curiosity and questions giving a fillip to her memory, scarcely a day passed but she recovered some new detail from the past; as at one time a service of gold-plate which she perfectly remembered she had seen on her father's sideboard; and at another time an accident that had befallen her in her childhood, through her father's coach and six horses being overturned in a slough. Such particulars (and many others as pertinent and romantic, on which I will not linger) gave us a certainty of her past consequence and her future fortune were her parents once known; and while they served to augment the respect in

which my love held her, gradually and almost imperceptibly led her to take a higher tone with me, and even on occasions to carry herself towards me with an air of mystery, as if there were still some things which she had not confided to me.

This attitude on her part-which in itself pained me extremely-and still more the fear naturally arising from it, that if she came by her own I should immediately lose her, forced me to make the acquaintance of yet another side of love; by throwing me, I mean, into such a fever of suspicion and jealousy as made me for a period the most unhappy of men. From this plight my mistress, exercising the privilege of her sex, made no haste to relieve me. On the contrary, by affecting an increased reserve and asserting that her movements were watched, she prolonged my doubts; nor when this treatment had wrought the desired end of reducing me to the lowest depths, and she at length consented to meet me, did she entirely relent or abandon her reserve; or if she did so, on rare occasions, it was only to set me some task as the price of her complaisance, or expose me to some trial by which she might prove my devotion.

In a word, while I became hopelessly enslaved, even to the flogging a boy at her word, or procuring a dress far above my station-merely that she might see me by stealth in it, and judge of my air! – which were two of her caprices, she appeared to be farther removed from me every day, and at each meeting granted me fewer privileges. Whether this treatment had its origin in the natural instinct of a woman, or was deliberately chosen as better calculated to increase my subservience, it had the latter effect; and to such an extent that when, after a long absence, she condescended to meet me, and broached a plan that earlier would have raised my hair, I asked no better than to do her bidding, and, instead of pointing out the folly of her proposal, fell in with it with scarcely a murmur.

Her plan, when she communicated it to me, which she did with an air of mystery and the same assumption of a secret withheld that had tormented me before, amounted to nothing less than an evening sally into the town on the occasion of the approaching visit of the Duke of York, who was to lie one night at the Rose at Ware on his way to Newmarket. Mr. D- had issued the strictest orders that all should keep the house during this visit; not so much out of a proper care for the boys' morality (though the gay crowd that followed the Court served for a pretext) as because, in his character of fanatic and Exclusionist, he held His Highness's religion and person in equal abhorrence. Such a restriction weighed little in the scale against love; but, infatuated as I was, I found something that sensibly shocked me in the proposal coming from Dorinda's lips; nor could I fail to foresee many dangers to which a young girl must expose herself on such an expedition in the town, and at night. But as to a youth in love nothing that his mistress chooses to do seems long amiss, so this proposal scared me for a moment only; after which it cost my mistress no more than a little rallying on my crop-eared manners, and some scolding, to make me see it in its true aspect of an innocent frolic, fraught with as much pleasure to the cavalier as novelty to the escorted.

"You will don your new suit," she said, merrily, "and I shall meet you in the garden at half past nine."

"And if the boys may miss me?" I protested feebly.

"The boys have missed you before!" she answered, mocking my tone. "Were you not here last night? And for a whole hour, sir?"

I confessed with hot cheeks that I had been there; humbly and tamely awaiting her pleasure.

"And did they tell then?" she asked scornfully. "Or are they less afraid of the birch now? But of course-if you don't care to come with me-or are afraid, sir-?"

"I am neither," I said warmly. "Only I do not quite understand, sweet, what you wish."

"They lie at the Rose," she said. "And amongst them, I am told, are the prettiest men and the most lovely women in the world. And jewels, and laces, and such dresses! Oh, I am mad to see them! And music and gaming and dancing! And dishes and plates of gold! And a Popish priest, which is a thing I have never seen, though I have heard of it. And-"

"And do you expect to see all these things through the windows?" I cried in my superior knowledge.

She did not answer at once, but with her hands on my shoulders, swayed to and fro sideways as if she already heard the music; while her gipsy face looked archly into mine, first on this side and then on that, and her hair swung to and fro on her shoulders in a beautiful abandonment which I found it impossible to resist. At last she stopped, and, "Yes," she said demurely, "through the windows, Master Richard Longface! Do you meet me here at half past nine-in your new suit, sir-and you shall see them too-through the windows."

After that, though I made a last effort to dissuade her, there was nothing more to be said. Obedient to her behest, I made my preparations, and at the appointed hour next evening rose softly from the miserable pallet on which I had just laid down; and dressing myself with shaking fingers and in the dark-that my bed-fellows might know as little as possible of my movements-stole down the stairs and into the garden.

Here I found myself first at the rendezvous. The night was dark, but an unusual light hung over the town, and the wind that stirred the poplars brought scraps and sounds of music to the ear. I had some time to wait, and time too to think what I was about to do; to weigh the chances of detection and dismissal, and even to taste the qualms that rawness and timidity mingled with my anticipations of pleasure. But, though I had my fears, no vision of the real future obtruded itself on my mind as I stood there listening: nor any forewarning of the plunge I was about to take. And before I had come to the end of my patience Dorinda stood beside me.

Dark as it was, I fancied that I discerned something strange in her appearance, and I would have investigated it; but she whispered that we were late, and evading as well my questions as the caress I offered, she bade me help her as quickly as I could over the fence. I did so; we crossed a neighbouring garden, and in a twinkling and with the least possible difficulty stood in the road. Here the strains of music came more plainly to the ear, and the glare of light hung lower and shone more brightly. This seemed enough for my mistress; she turned that way without hesitation, and set forward, the outskirts of the town being quickly passed. Between the late hour and the flux of people towards the centre of interest, the streets were vacant; and we met no one until we reached the main thoroughfare, and came upon the edge of the great crowd that moved to and fro before the Rose Inn. Here all the windows, in one of which a band of music was playing some new air, were brilliantly lighted; while below and round the door was such a throng of hurrying waiters and drawers, and such a carrying of meals and drinks, and a shouting of orders as almost turned the brain. A carriage and six that had just set down a grandee, come to pay his devoirs to the Prince, was moving off as we came up, the horses smoking, the footmen panting, and the postilions stooping in their saddles. A little to one side a cask was being staved for the troopers who had come with the Duke; and on all the noisy, moving scene and the flags that streamed from the roofs and windows, and the shifting crowd, poured the ruddy light of a great *bon-feu* that burned on the farther side of the way.

Nor, rare as were these things, were they the most pertinent or the strangest that the fire revealed to me. I had come for nothing else but to see, *clam et furtim*, as the classics say, what was to be seen; with no thought of passing beyond the uttermost ring of spectators. But as I hung back shamefacedly my companion seized my wrist and drew me on; and when I turned to her to remonstrate, as Heaven lives, I did not know her! I conceived for a moment that some madam of the court had seized me in a frolic; nor for a perceptible space could I imagine that the fine cloaked lady, whose eyes shone bright as stars through the holes in her mask, and whose raven hair, so cunningly dressed, failed to hide the brilliance of her neck, where the cloak fell loose, was my Dorinda, my mistress, the cook-maid whom I had kissed in the garden! Honestly, for an instant, I recoiled and hung back, afraid of her; nor was I quite assured of the truth, so unprepared was I for the change, until she whispered me sharply to come on.

"Whither?" I said, still hanging back in dismay. The bystanders were beginning to turn and stare, and in a moment would have jeered us.

"Within doors," she urged.

"They will not admit us!"

"They will admit me," she answered proudly, and made as if she would throw my hand from her.

Still I did not believe her, and it was that, and that only, that emboldened me; though, to be sure, I was in love and her slave. Reluctantly, and almost sulkily, I gave way, and sneaked behind her to the door. A man who stood on the steps seemed, at the first glance, minded to stop her; but, looking again, smiled and let us pass; and in a twinkling we stood in the hall among hurrying waiters, and shouting call-boys, and bloods in silk coats, whose scabbards rang as they came down the stairs, and a fair turmoil of pages, and footboys, and gentlemen, and gentlemen's gentlemen.

In such a company, elbowed this way and that by my betters, I knew neither how to carry myself, nor where to look; but Dorinda, with barely a pause, and as if she knew the house, thrust open the nearest door, and led the way into a great room that stood on the right of the hall.

Here, down the spacious floor, and lighted by shaded candles, were ranged several tables, at which a number of persons had seats, while others again stood or moved about the room. The majority of those present were men. I noticed, however, three or four women masked after the fashion of my companion, but more gorgeously dressed, and in my simplicity did not doubt that these were duchesses, the more as they talked and laughed loudly; whereas the general company—save those who sat at one table where the game was at a standstill, and all were crying persistently for a Tallier—spoke low, the rattle of dice and chink of coin, and an occasional oath, taking the place of conversation. I saw piles of guineas and half-guineas on the tables, and gold lace on the men's coats, and the women a dream of silks and furbelows, and gleaming shoulders and flashing eyes; and between awe of my company, and horror at finding myself in such a place, I took all for real that glittered. Where, therefore, a man of experience would have discerned a crowd of dubious rakes and rustic squires tempting fortune for the benefit of the Groom-Porter, whose privilege was ambulatory, I fancied I gazed on earls and barons; saw a garter on every leg, and, blind to the stained walls of the common inn-room, supplied every bully who cried the main or called the trumps with the pedigree of a Howard.

This was a delusion not unnatural, and a prey to it, I expected each moment to be my last in that company. But the fringe of spectators that stood behind the players favouring us, we fell easily into line at one of the tables, and nothing happening, and no one saying us nay, I presently breathed more freely. I could see that my companion's beauty, though hidden in the main by her mask, was the subject of general remark; and that it drew on her looks and regards more or less insolent. But as she took no heed of these, but on the contrary gazed about her unmoved and with indifference, I hoped for the best; and excited by the brilliance and movement of a scene so far above my wildest dreams, that I already anticipated the pride with which I should hereafter describe it, I began to draw a fearful joy from our escapade. Like Æneas and Ulysses, I had seen men and cities! And stood among heroes! And seen the sirens! To which thoughts I was proceeding to add others equally classical, when a gentleman behind me diverted my thoughts by touching my companion on the arm, and very politely requesting, her to lay on the table a guinea which he handed to her.

She did so, and he thanked her with a low-spoken compliment; then added with bent head, but bold eyes, "Fortune, my pretty lady, cannot surely have been unkind to one so fair!"

"I do not play," Dorinda answered, with all the bluntness I could desire.

"And yet I think I have seen you play?" he replied. And affecting to be engaged in identifying her, he let his eyes rove over her figure.

Doubtless Dorinda's mask gave her courage; yet, even this taken into the count, her wit and resource astonished me. "You do not know me, my pretty gentleman," she said, coolly, and with a proud air.

"I know that you have cost me a guinea!" he answered. "See, they have swept it off. And as I staked it for nothing else but to have an excuse to address the handsomest woman in the room-"

"You do not know what I am-behind my mask," she retorted.

"No," he replied, hardily, "and therefore I am going-I am going-"

"So am I!" my mistress answered, with a quickness that both surprised and delighted me. "Good night, good spendthrift! You are going; and I am going."

"Well hit!" he replied, with a grin. "And well content if we go together! Yet I think I know how I could keep you!"

"Yes?" she said, indifferently.

"By deserving the name," he answered. "You called me spendthrift."

On that I do not know whether she thought him too forward, or saw that I was nearly at the end of my patience-which it may be imagined was no little tried by this badinage-but she turned her shoulder to him outright, and spoke a word to me in a low tone. Then: "Give me a guinea, Dick!" she said, pretty loudly. "I think I'll play."

CHAPTER V

She spoke confidently and with a grand air, knowing that I had brought a guinea with me; so that I had neither the heart to shame her, nor the courage to displease her. Though it was the ninth part of my income therefore, and it seemed to me sheer madness or worse to stake such a sum on a single card, and win or lose it in a moment, I lugged it out and gave it to her. Even then, knowing her to have no more skill in the game than I had, I was at a stand, wondering what she would do with it; but with the tact which never fails a woman she laid it where the gentleman had placed his. With better luck; for in a twinkling, and before I thought it well begun, the deal was over, the players sat back, and swore, and the banker, giving and taking here and there, thrust a guinea over to our guinea. I was in a sweat to take both up before anyone cheated us; but she nudged me, and said with her finest air, "Let it lie, Dick! Do you hear? Let it lie."

This was almost more than I could bear, to see fortune in my grasp, and not shut my hand upon it, but she was mistress and I let it lie; and in a moment, hey presto, as the Egyptians say, the two guineas were four, and those who played next us, seeing her success, began to pass remarks on her, making nothing of debating who she was, and discussing about her shape and complexion in terms that made my cheeks burn. Whether this open admiration turned her head, or their freedom confused her, she let the money lie again; and when I would have snatched it up, not regarding her, the dealer prevented me, saying that it was too late, while she with an air, as if I had been her servant, turned and rated me sharply for a fool. This caused a little disturbance at which all the company laughed. However, the event proved me no fool, but wiser than most, for in two minutes that pretty sum, which was as much as I had ever possessed at one time in my life, was swept off; and for two guineas the richer, which we had been a moment before, we remained one, and that my only one, the poorer!

For myself, I could have cried at the misadventure, but my mistress carried it off with a shrill laugh, and tossing her head in affected contempt-whereat, I am bound to confess, the company laughed again-turned from the table. I sneaked after her as miserable as you please, and in that order we had got half way to the door, when the gentleman who had addressed her before, stepped up in front of her. "Beauty so reckless," he said, speaking with a grin, and in a tone of greater freedom than he had used previously, "needs someone to care for it! Unless I am mistaken, Mistress, you came on foot?" And with a sneering smile, he dropped his eyes to the hem of her cloak.

Alas, I looked too, and the murder was out. To be sure Dorinda had clothed herself very handsomely above, but coming to her feet had trusted to her cloak to hide the deficiency she had no means to supply. Still, and in spite of this, all might have been well if she had not in her chagrin at losing, forgotten the blot, and, unused to long skirts, raised them so high as to expose a foot, shapely indeed, but stockingless, and shod in an old broken shoe!

Her ears and neck turned crimson at the exposure, and she dropped her cloak as if it burned her hand. I fancied that if the stranger had looked to ingratiate himself by his ill-mannered jest, he had gone the wrong way about it, and I was not surprised when she answered in a voice quivering with mortification, "Yes, on foot. But you may spare your pains. I am in this gentleman's care, I thank you."

"Oh," he said, in a peculiar tone, "this gentleman?" And he looked me up and down.

I knew that it behooved me to ruffle it with him, and let him know by out-staring him that at a word I was ready to pull his nose. But I was a boy in strange company, and utterly cast down by the loss of my guinea; he a Court bully in sword and lace, bred to carry it in such and worse places. Though he seemed to be no more than thirty, he had a long and hard face under his periwig, and eyes both tired and melancholy; and he spoke with a drawl and a curling lip, and by the mere way he looked at me showed that he thought me no better than dirt. To make a long story short, I had not looked at him a moment before my eyes fell.

"Oh, this gentleman?" he said again, in a tone of cutting contempt. "Well, I hope that he has more guineas than one-or your ladyship will soon trudge it, skin to mud. As it is, I fear that I detain you. Kindly carry my compliments to Farmer Grudgen. And the pigs!"

And smiling-not laughing, for a laugh seemed alien from his face-at a jest which was too near the truth not to mortify us exceedingly, my lord-for a lord I thought he was-turned away with an ironical bow; leaving us to get out of the room with what dignity we might, and such temper as remained to us. For myself I was in such a rage, both at the loss of my guinea and at being so flouted, that I could scarcely govern myself; yet in my awe of Dorinda I said nothing, expecting and fearing an outbreak on her part, the consequences of which it was not easy to foretell. I was proportionately pleased therefore, when she made no more ado at the time, but pushing her way through the crowd in the street, turned homeward and took the road without a word.

This was so unlike her that I was at a loss to understand it, and was fain to conclude-from the fact that she two or three times paused to listen and look back-that she feared pursuit. The thought, bringing to my mind the risk of being detected and dismissed, which I ran-a risk that came home to me now that the pleasure was over, and I had only in prospect my squalid bed-room and the morrow's tasks-filled me with uneasiness. But I might have spared myself, for when she spoke I found that her thoughts were on other things.

"Dick," she said, suddenly-and halted abruptly in the road, "you must lend me a guinea."

"A guinea?" I cried, aghast, and speaking, it may be, with a little displeasure. "Why, have you not just-"

"What?" she said.

"Lost my only one."

She laughed with a recklessness that confounded me. "Well, you have got to find another one," she said. "And one to that!"

"Another guinea?" I gasped.

"Yes, another guinea, and another guinea!" she answered, mimicking my tone of consternation. "One for my shoes and stockings-oh, I wish he were dead!" And she stamped her foot passionately. "And one-"

"Yes?" I said, with a poor attempt at irony. "And one-?"

"For me to stake next Friday, when the Duke passes this way on his road home."

"He does not!"

"He does, he does!" she retorted. "And you will do too-what I say, sir! or-"

"Or what?" I cried, calling up a spirit for once.

"Or-" and she raised her voice a little, and sang:

"But alas, when I wake, and no Phyllis I find,
How I sigh to myself all alone!"

"You never loved me!" I cried, in a rage at that and her greed.

"Have it your own way!" she answered, carelessly, and sang it again; and after that there was no more talk, but we walked with all the width of the road between us; I with a sore heart and she titupping along, cool and happy, pleased, I think, that she had visited on me some of the chagrin which the stranger had caused her, and for the rest with God knows what thoughts in her heart. At least I little suspected them; yet, with the little knowledge I had, I was angry and pained; and for the time was so far freed from illusion that I would not make the overture, but hardened myself with the thought of my guinea and her selfishness; and coming to the gap in the first fence helped her over with a cold hand and no embrace such as was usual between us at such junctures.

In a word, we were like naughty children returning after playing truant; and might have parted in that guise, and this the very best thing that could have happened to me-who had no guinea, and

knew not where to get one; though I would not go so far as to say that, in the frame of mind in which I then was, it would have saved me. But in the article of parting, and when the garden fence already rose between us, yet each remained plain to the other by the light of the moon which had risen, Dorinda on a sudden raised her hands, and holding her cloak from her, stood and looked at me an instant in the most ravishing fashion—with her head thrown back and her lips parted, and her eyes shining, and the white of her neck and her bare arms, and the swell of her bosom showing. I could have sworn that even the scent of her hair reached me, though that was impossible. But what I saw was enough. I might have known that she did it only to tantalize me: I might have known that she would show me what I risked; but on the instant, oblivious of all else, I owned her beauty, and resentment and my loss alike forgotten, sprang to the fence, my blood on fire, and words bubbling on my lips: Another second, and I should have been at her feet, have kissed her shoes muddy and broken as they were; but she turned, and with a backward glance, that only the more inflamed me, fled up the garden, and to the house, whither, even at my maddest, I dared not follow her.

However, enough had passed to send me to my bed to long and lie awake; enough, the morrow come, to take all colour from the grey tasks and dull drudgery of school-time; insomuch that the hours seemed days, and the days weeks, and Mr. D-'s ignorant prosing and infliction too wearisome to be borne. What my love now lacked of reverence, it made up in passion, and passion's offspring, impatience: on which it is to be supposed my mistress counted, since for three whole days she kept within, and though every evening I flew to the rendezvous, and there cooled my heels for an hour, she never showed herself.

Once, however, I heard her on the other side of the fence, singing:

"But alas, when I wake, and no Phyllis I find,
How I sigh to myself all alone!"

And, sick at heart, I understood the threat and her attitude. Nevertheless, and though the knowledge should have cured me, by convincing me that she was utterly unworthy and had never loved me, I only consumed the more for her, and grovelled the lower in spirit before her and her beauty; and the devil presently putting in my way the means where he had already provided the motive, it was no wonder that I made but a poor resistance, and in a short time fell.

It came about in this way. In the course of the week, and before the Friday on which the Duke was to return that way, Mr. D- announced an urgent call to London; and as he was too wise to broach such a proposal without a *quid pro quo*, Mrs. D- must needs go with him. The stage-wagon, which travelled three days in the week, would serve next morning, and all was hasty preparation; clothes were packed and mails got out; a gossip, one Mrs. Harris, was engaged to take Mrs. D-'s place, and the boys were entrusted to me, with strict instructions to see all lights out at night, and no waste. That these injunctions might be the more deeply impressed on me, I was summoned to Mrs. D-'s parlour to receive them; but unluckily with the instructions given to me were mingled housekeeping directions to Mrs. Harris, who was also present; the result being that when I retired from the room I carried with me the knowledge that in a certain desk, perfectly accessible, my employer left three guineas, to be used in case of emergency, but otherwise not to be touched.

It was an unhappy chance, explaining, as well as accounting for, so much of what follows, that were I to enter into long details of the catastrophe, it would be useless; since the judicious reader will have already informed himself of a result that was never in doubt, from the time that my employer's departure at once provided the means of gratification, and by removing the restraints under which we had before laboured, held out the prospect of pleasure. Nor can I plead that I sinned in ignorance; for as I sat among the boys and mechanically heard their tasks, I called myself, "Thief, thief," a hundred times, and a hundred to that; and once even groaned aloud; yet never flinched or doubted that I should take the money. Which I did—to cut a long story short—before Mr. D- had been three hours

out of the house; and that evening humbly presented the whole of it to my mistress, who rewarded my complaisance with present kisses and future pledges, to be redeemed when she should have once more tasted the pleasures of the great world.

To tell the truth, her craving for these, and to be seen again in those haunts where we had reaped nothing but loss and mortification, was a continual puzzle to me, who asked for nothing better than to enjoy her society and kindness, as far as possible from the world. But as she *would* go and *would* play, and made my subservience in this matter the condition of her favour, it was essential she should win; since I could then restore the money I had taken; whereas if she lost, I saw no prospect before me but the hideous one of detection and punishment. Accordingly, when the evening came, and we had effected the same clandestine exodus as before-but this time with less peril, Mrs. Harris being a sleepy, easy-going woman-I could think of nothing but this necessity; and far from experiencing the terrors which had beset me before, when Dorinda would enter the inn, gave no thought to the scene or the crowd through which we pushed, or any other of the preliminaries, but had my soul so set upon the fortune that awaited us, that I was for passing through the door in the hardest fashion, and would scarcely stand even when a hand gripped my shoulder. However, a rough voice exclaiming in my ear, "Softly, youngster! Who are you that poke in so boldly? I don't know you," brought me to my senses.

"I was in last week," I answered, gasping with eagerness.

"Then you were one too many," the doorkeeper retorted, thrusting me back without mercy. "This is not a tradesman's ordinary. It is for your betters."

"But I was in," I cried, desperately. "I was in last week."

"Well, you will not go in again," he answered coolly. "For the lady, it is different. Pass in, mistress," he continued, withdrawing his arm that she might pass, and looking at her with an impudent leer. "I can never refuse a pretty face. And I will bet a guinea that there is one behind that mask."

On which, to my astonishment, and while I stood agape between rage and shame, my mistress, with a hurried word-that might stand for a farewell, or might have been merely a request to me to wait, for I could not catch it-accepted the invitation; and deserting me without the least sign of remorse, passed in and disappeared. For a moment I could scarcely, thus abandoned, believe my senses or that she had left me; then, the iron of her ingratitude entering into my soul, and a gentleman tapping me imperatively on the shoulder and saying that I blocked the way, I was fain to turn aside, and plunge into the darkness, to hide the sobs I could no longer restrain.

For a time, leaning my forehead against a house in a side alley, I called her all the names in the world; reflecting bitterly at whose expense she was here, and at what a price I had bought her pleasure. Nor, it may be thought, was I likely to find excuses for her soon. But a lover, as he can weave his unhappiness out of the airiest trifles, so from very gossamer can he spin comfort; nor was it long before I considered the necessity under which we lay to play and win, and bethought me that, instead of finding fault with her for entering alone, I should applaud the prudence that at a pinch had borne this steadily in mind. After which, believing what I hoped, I soon ceased to reproach her; and jealousy giving way to suspense-since all for me now depended on the issues of gain or loss-I hastened to return to the door, and hung about it in the hope of seeing her appear.

This she did not do for some time, but the interval and my thoughts were diverted by a *rencontre* as disagreeable as it was unexpected. In my solitary condition I had made so few acquaintances in Hertford, that I fancied I stood in no fear of being recognised. I was vastly taken aback therefore, when a gentleman plainly dressed, happening to pause an instant on the threshold as he issued from the inn, let his glance rest on me; and after a second look stepped directly to me, and with a sour aspect, asked me what I did in that place.

Then, when it was too late, I took fright; recognising him for a gentleman of a good estate in the neighbourhood, who had two sons at Mr. D-'s school, and enjoyed great influence with my master, he being by far the most important of his patrons. As he belonged to the fanatical party, and in common with most of that sect had been a violent Exclusionist, I as little expected to see him

in that company, as he to see me. But whereas he was his own master, and besides was there-this I learned afterwards-to rescue a young relative, while I had no such excuse, he had nothing to fear and I all. I found myself, therefore, ready to sink with confusion; and even when he repeated his challenge could find no words in which to answer.

"Very well," he said, nodding grimly at that. "Perhaps Mr. D- may be able to answer me. I shall take care to visit him to-morrow, sir, and learn whether he is aware how his usher employs his nights. Good evening."

So saying, he left me horribly startled, and a prey to apprehensions, which were not lessened by the guilt, that already lay on my conscience in another and more serious matter. For such is the common course of ill-doing; to plunge a man, I mean, deeper and deeper in the mire. I now saw not one ridge of trouble only before me, but a second and a third; and no visible way of escape from the consequences of my imprudence. To add to my fears, the gentleman on leaving me joined the same courtier who had spoken to Dorinda on the occasion of our former visit, and who had just come out; so that to my prepossessed mind nothing seemed more probable than that the latter would tell him in whose company he had seen me and the details of our adventure. As a fact, it was from this person's clutches my master's patron was here to rescue his nephew. But I did not know this; and seeking in my panic to be reassured, I asked a servant beside me who the stranger was.

"He?" he said. "Oh, he is a gentleman from the Temple. Been playing with him?" and he looked at me, askance.

"No," I said.

"Oh," he replied, "the better for you."

"But what is his name?" I urged.

"Who does not know Mat. Smith, Esquire, of the Temple, is a country booby-and that is you!" the man retorted quickly; and went off laughing. Still this, seeing that I did not know the name, relieved me a little; and the next moment I was aware of Dorinda waiting for me at the door. Deducing from the smile that played on her countenance the happiest omens of success, I forgot my other troubles in the relief which this promised; and I sprang to meet her. Guiding her as quickly as I could through the crowd, I asked her the instant I could find voice to speak, what luck she had had.

"What luck?" she cried; and then pettishly, "there, clumsy! you are pulling me into that puddle. Have a care of my new shoes, will you? What luck, did you say? Why, none!"

"What? You have not lost?" I exclaimed, standing still in the road; and it seemed to me that my heart stood still also.

"Yes, but I have!" she answered hardily.

"All?" I groaned.

"Yes, all! If you call two guineas all," she replied carelessly. "Why, you are not going to cry for two guineas, baby, are you?"

CHAPTER VI

But I was going to cry and did, breaking down like a child; and that not so much at the thought of the desperate strait to which she had brought me—though this was no other than the felon's dock, with the prospect of disgrace, and to be whipped or burned in the hand, at the best, and if I had my benefit—but at the sudden conviction, which came upon me, perfect and overwhelming, that my mistress, for whom I had risked so much, did not love me! In no other way, and on no other theory, could I explain callousness so complete, thoughtlessness so cruel! Nor did her next words tend to heal the mischief, or give me comfort.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, flouncing from me with impatient contempt, and walking on the other side of the way, "if you are going to be a cry-baby, thank you for nothing! I thought you were a man!" And she began to hum an air.

"My God! I don't think you care!" I sobbed, aghast at her insensibility.

"Care?" she retorted indifferently, swinging her visor in her hand. "For what?"

"For me! Or for anything!"

With a coolness that appalled me, she finished the verse she was humming; then, "Your finger hurts, therefore you are going to die!" she said, with a sneer. "You see the fire and therefore you must be burned. Why, you have the courage of a hen! A flea! A mouse! You are not worthy the name of a man."

"I am man enough to be hanged," I answered miserably.

"Hanged?" quoth she, quite cheerfully. "Do you think that man was ever hanged for three guineas?"

"Ay, scores," I said, "and for less!"

"Then they must have been cravens like you!" she retorted, perfectly well satisfied with her answer. "And spun their own ropes. Come, silly, cheer up! A great many things may happen in a week! And if that vixen is back under a week, I will eat her!"

"A week won't make three guineas," I said dolefully.

"No, but a good heart will," she rejoined. "And not three but thirty! Only," she continued, looking askance at me, "you have not the spirit of a man. You are just Tumbledown Dick, as they say, and as well named as nine-pence!"

It seemed inconceivable to me that she could jest so merrily and carry herself so gaily, after such a loss; and I stopped short in sudden hope and new-born expectation; and peered at her, striving to read her thoughts. "I don't believe you have lost them!" I exclaimed at last.

"Every groat, Dick!" she answered, curtly—yet still in the best of spirits. "Never doubt that!"

On which it was not wonderful that my disappointment and her cheerfulness agreed so ill, that we came to bitter words, and beginning by calling one another "Thankless," and "Clutch-penny," rose presently to "Fool," and "Jade"; and eventually parted on the latter at the garden fence; where Dorinda, so far from lingering as on the former night, flounced from me in a passion, and left me without a single word of regret. How miserably after that I stole to bed, and how wakefully I tossed in the close garret, I cannot hope to convey to my readers; suffice it that a hundred times I cursed the folly that had led me to ruin, a hundred times went hot and cold at thought of the dock and the gallows; and yet amid all found in Dorinda's heartlessness the sharpest pain. I felt sure now, and told myself continually, that she had never loved me; therefore—at the time it seemed to follow—I deemed my own love at an end and cast her off; and heaping the sharpest reproaches on her head, found my one sweet consolation—whereat I wept miserably—in composing a last dying speech and confession that should soften at length that obdurate bosom, and break that unfeeling heart.

But with the day, and the rising to imminent terrors and hourly fear of detection, came first regret, then self-reproach—lest I too should be somewhat in fault—then a revival of passion; lastly, a

frantic yearning to be reconciled to the only person to whom I could speak freely, or who knew the danger and strait in which I stood. My heart melting like water at the thought, I was ready to do anything or say anything, to abase myself to any depth, in order to regain her favour and have her advice; and the absence of Mr. and Mrs. D-, and Mrs. Harris's easiness rendering it a matter of no difficulty to seek her, in the course of the afternoon I took my courage in my hands and went into the next house. There I found only Mrs. Harris.

"The little slut has stepped out," she said, looking up from the pot over which she was stooping. "She asked leave for half an hour and has been gone an hour. But it is the way of the wenches all the world over. Do you beware of them, Mr. Price," she continued, eyeing me, and laughing jollily.

I made some trifling answer; and returning to my own domain, with all the pangs of loneliness added to those of terror, sat down in the dingy, dreary taskroom and abandoned myself to bitter forebodings. She did not, she never could have loved me! I knew it and felt it now. Yet I must think of her or go mad. I must think of her or of the cart and cord; and so, through the hours that followed, I had only eyes for the next garden, and ears for her voice. The boys and their chattering, and the necessity I was under of playing my part before them, well-nigh mastered me. For, at any hour, on any day, while I sat there among them, Mr. and Mrs. D- might return, and the loss be discovered; and yet, and though time was everything, all the efforts I made to see Jennie or get speech with her failed; and of myself I seemed to be unable to think out any plan or way of escape.

I am sure that the most ascetic, could he have weighed the tortures of those four days during which I sat surrounded by the boys, and now making frantic efforts to appear myself, now sunk in a staring, pale-faced lethargy of despair, would have deemed them a punishment more than commensurate with my guilt. The unusual air of peace and quietness with which Mrs. D-'s absence invested the school had no more power to soothe me than the presence of Mrs. Harris, nodding over her plain-stitch in the next garden, availed to banish the burning gusts of fear that at times parched my skin. At length, on the fifth day, the immediate warning of coming judgment arrived in the shape of a letter announcing that my employer would return (D.V.) by the night waggon, which in the ordinary course was due to reach Ware about six next morning.

At that I could stand the strain no longer, but flinging appearance and deception to the winds, I rose from the class I was pretending to teach, and in a disorder I made no effort to suppress, followed Mrs. Harris; who, having declared the news, was already waddling back to the next house. She started at sight of me in her train-as she well might, for it was the busiest time of the day; then asked if anything ailed me.

"No," I said. "I want a word with Jennie."

"Do you?" quoth she, looking hard at me. "So, it would seem, do a good many young fellows. She is a nice handful if ever there was one."

"Why?" I stammered.

"Why?" she answered in a tone very sharp for her. "Why, because-but what have you to do with Jennie, young man?"

"Nothing," I said.

"Then have nothing," she answered promptly, and shook her sides at her sharpness. "That is no puzzle! And as it is no more than half-past ten, and I hear your boys rampaging like so many wild Irishmen-suppose you go back to them, young man!"

I obeyed; but whatever effect her warning might have had earlier-and I shrewdly suspect that it would have affected me as much as water affects a duck's back-it came too late; my one desire now being to see the girl, even as my one hope lay in her advice. Nine had struck that evening, however, and night had fallen, and I grown fairly sick with fear, before my efforts were rewarded, and stealing into the garden on a last desperate search-I think for the twentieth time-I came on her standing in the dusk, beside the fence where I had so often met her.

I sprang to her side, relief at my heart, reproaches on my lips; but it was only to recoil at sight of her face, grown hard and old and pinched, and for the moment almost ugly. "Why, child!" I cried, forgetting my own trouble. "What is it?"

She laughed without mirth, looking at me strangely. "What do you suppose?" she said huskily, and I could see that fear was on her. "Do you think that you are the only one in danger?"

"How?" I exclaimed.

"How?" she replied in a tone of mockery. "Why, do you suppose that stockings and shoes are the only things that cost money? Or that vizer masks, and gloves and hoods grow on bushes? Briefly, fool, if you can give me four guineas, I am saved. If not-"

"My God!" I cried, horror-stricken.

"If not," she continued hardily, "you have taught me to read, and that may save my neck. I suppose I shall be sent to the plantations, to be beaten weekly, and work in the sun, and-"

"Four guineas!" I groaned.

"Yes, seven in all!" she answered with a sneer. "Have you got them?"

"No, nor a groat!" I answered, overwhelmed by the discovery that instead of giving help she needed it. "Not a penny!"

"Then it must be got!" she answered fiercely. "It must be got!" and as she repeated the words, she dropped her mocking tone, and spoke with feverish energy. "It must be got, Dick!" and she seized my hands and held them. "It must be, and can be, if you have a spark of spirit, if you are not the poor mean thing I sometimes think you. Listen! Listen! In the old man's room upstairs-the door is locked and double-locked, I have tried it-are sixty guineas, in a bag! Sixty guineas, in a drawer of the old bureau by the bed!"

"It is death," I cried feebly, recoiling from her as I spoke. "It is death! I dare not! I dare not do it!"

"Then we hang! We hang, man!" she answered fiercely. "You and I! Will it be better to hang for a lamb than a sheep? For seven guineas than for sixty?"

"But if we take it, what shall we be the better for it?" I said weakly. "He returns in the morning."

"By the morning, given the money, we shall be a score of miles away!" she answered, flinging her arms round my neck, and hanging on my breast, while her hot breath fanned my cheek. No wonder I felt my brain reel, and my will melt. "Away from here, Dick," she repeated softly. "Away-and together!"

Yet I made an effort to withstand her. "You forget the door," I said. "If the door is locked, and Mrs. Harris sleeps in the next room, how can it be done?"

"Not by the door, but by the window," she replied. "There is a ladder in the second garden from this; and the latch of the window is weak. The old fool indoors sleeps like a hog. By eleven she will be sound. And oh, Dick!" my mistress cried, breaking down on a sudden and snatching my hands to her bosom, "will you see me shamed? Play the man for ten minutes only-for ten minutes only, and by morning we shall be safe, and far from here! And-and together, Dick! Together!"

Was it likely, I ask, was it possible that I should long resist pleading such as this? That holding her in my arms, in the warm summer night, with her hair on my breast, while the moon sailed overhead and a cricket chirped in the wall hard by-was it likely or possible, I say, that I should steel my heart against her; that I should turn from the cup of pleasure, who had tasted as yet so few delights, and drudged and been stunted all my life? Whose appetite had known no daintier relish than the dull round of dumpling and bacon, or at the best salt meat and spinach; and who for sole companionship had been shut in, June days and December nights alike, with a band of mischievous boys, whom the ancients justly called *genus improbum*. At any rate I did not; to my shame, great or small, according as I shall be harshly or charitably judged-I did not; but with a beating heart and choked voice, I gave my word and left her; and an hour later I crept down the creaking stairs for the last time, guilty and shivering, a bundle in my hand, and found her waiting for me in the old place.

I confess that the flurry of my spirits in this crisis was such as to disturb my judgment; and my passion for my mistress being no longer of the higher kind, these two things may account for the fact that I felt no wonder or repulsion when she explained to me, coolly and in detail, where the bureau stood, and in what part of it lay the money; even adding that I had better bring away a pair of silver candlesticks which I should find in another place. By the time she had made these things clear to me, the favourable moment was come; the lights of the town had long been extinguished, and the house obscuring the moon cast a black shadow on the garden, that greatly seconded our movements. Yet for myself, and though all went well with us, I trembled at the faintest sound, and started if a leaf stirred; nay, to this day I willingly believe that the smallest trifle, a light at a window or a distant voice, would have deterred me from the adventure. But nothing occurred to hinder or alarm; and the darkness cloaking us only too effectually, and my accomplice directing me where to find the ladder, I fetched it, and with her help thrust it over the fence and climbed over after it.

This was a small thing, the worst being to come. The part of the garden under the wall of the house was paved; it was only with the greatest exertion therefore and the utmost care that we could raise the ladder on it without noise; and but for the surprising strength which Jennie showed, I doubt if we should have succeeded, my hands trembled so violently. In the end we raised it, however; the upper part fell lightly beside the second floor casement, and Jennie whispered to me to ascend.

I had gone too far now to retreat, and I obeyed, and had mounted two steps, when I heard distinctly—the sound coming sharp and clear through the night—the shod hoof of a horse paw the ground, apparently in the road beyond the house. Scared by such a sound at such a time, I slid rapidly down into Jennie's arms. "Hush!" I cried. "Did you hear that? There is someone there!"

But angered by my sudden descent which had come near to knocking her down, she whispered in a rage that I was either the biggest fool or the poorest craven in the world. "Go up! Go up!" she continued fiercely, almost striking me in her excitement. "There are sixty guineas awaiting us up there—sixty guineas, man, and you budge, because a horse stirs."

"But what is it doing there?" I remonstrated. "A horse, Jennie—at this time of night!"

"God knows!" she answered. "What is it to us?"

Still I lingered a moment, unwilling to ascend; but hearing nothing, and thinking I might have been mistaken, I was ashamed to hang back longer, and I went up, though my legs trembled under me, and a bird darting suddenly out of the ivy glued me to the ladder by both hands, with the sweat standing out on my face. Alone, nothing on earth would have persuaded me to it; but with Jennie below I dared not flinch, and the latch of the window proving as weak as she had described it, in a moment the lattice swung open and I climbed over the sill.

Feeling the floor with my feet, I stood an instant in the dark stuffy room, and listened. It smelled strongly of herbs, on which account I hate that smell to this day. I could hear Mrs. Harris snoring next door; and the pendulum of the fine new clock on the stairs, which was Mrs. D-'s latest pride, was swinging to and fro regularly; and I knew that at the slightest alarm the house would be awake. But I had gone too far to recede; and though I feared and sweated, and at the touch of a hand must have screamed aloud, I went forward and groping my way across the floor, found the bureau, and tried the drawer.

It was locked, but crazily; and Jennie foreseeing the obstacle had given me a chisel. Inserting the point, I listened awhile to assure myself that all was quiet, and then with the resolution of despair forced the drawer open with a single wrench. Probably the noise was no great one, but to my ears it rang through the night loud as the crack of laden ice. I heard the sleeper in the next room cease her snoring and turn in the bed; and cowering down on the floor I gave up all for lost. But in a moment she began to breathe again, and encouraged by that and the silence in the house, I drew the drawer open, and feeling for the bag, discovered it, and clutching it firmly, turned to the window.

I found that Jennie had mounted the ladder, and was looking into the room, her hands on the sill, her head dark against the sky. "Have you got it?" she whispered, thrusting in her arm and groping

for me. "Then give it me while you get the candlesticks. They are wrapped in flannel, and are under the bed."

I gave her the bag, which chinked as it passed from hand to hand; then I turned obediently, and groping my way to the bed which stood beside the bureau, I felt under it. I found nothing, but did not at once give up. The candlesticks might lie on the farther side, and accordingly I rose and climbed over the bed and tried again, passing my hands through the flue and dust which had gathered under Mrs. D-'s best feather-bed.

How long I might have searched in the dark, and vainly, I cannot say; for my efforts were brought to a premature end by a dull thud that came to my ears apparently from the next room. Certain that it could be caused by nothing less than Mrs. Harris getting out of bed, I crawled out, and got to my feet in a panic, and stood in the dark quaking and listening; so terrified that I am sure if the good woman had entered at that moment, I should have fallen on my knees before her, and confessed all. Nothing followed, however; the house remained quiet; I heard no second sound. But my nerve was gone. I wanted nothing so much now as to be out of the place; not for a thousand guineas would I have stayed; and without giving another thought to the candlesticks, I groped my way to the window, and passing one leg over the sill, felt hurriedly for the ladder.

I failed to find it, and tried again; then peering down called Jennie by name. She did not answer. A second time I called, and felt about with my foot; still without success. Then as it dawned upon me at last that the ladder was really gone, and I a prisoner, I thought of prudence no longer, but I called frantically, at first in a whisper, and then as loudly as I dared; called and called again, "Jennie! Jennie!" And yet again, "Jennie!"

Still no answer came; but listening intently, in one of the intervals of silence, I caught the even beat of hoofs, receding along the road, and growing each moment less marked. They held me; scarcely breathing, I listened to them, until they died away in the distance of the summer night, and only the sharp insistent chirp of the cricket, singing in the garden below, came to my ears.

CHAPTER VII

How long I hung at the window, at one time stunned and stricken down by the catastrophe that had befallen me, and at another feeling frantically for the ladder which I had over and over again made sure was not there, I know no more than another; but only that after a time, first suspicion and then rage darted lightning-like through the stupor that clouded my mind, and I awoke to all the tortures that love outraged by treachery can feel; with such pangs and terrors added as only a faithful beast, bound and doomed and writhing under the knife of its master, may be supposed to endure.

For a while, it is true, imagining that Jennie, terrified by someone's approach, had lowered the ladder and withdrawn herself, and so would presently return to free me, I hoped against hope. But as minutes passed, and yet more minutes, laden only with the cricket's even chirp, and the creepy rustling of the wind in the poplars, and still failed to bring her, the sound of retreating hoofs which I had heard recurred to my mind, with dreadful significance, and on the top of it a hundred suspicious circumstances; among which, as her sudden passion when I had taken fright at the foot of the ladder, was not the least, so her avoidance of me during the last few days and her frequent absences from the house, spoken to by Mrs. Harris, had their weight. In fine, by the light of her desertion after receiving the plunder, and while I sought the candlesticks-which I had now convinced myself were not there-many things obscure before, or to which I had wilfully shut my eyes-as her callousness, her greed, her recklessness-stood out plainly; while these again, being coolly considered, reflected so seriously on her, as to give her sudden departure the worst possible appearance, even in a lover's eyes. The days had been when I would not have believed such a thing of her at the mouth of an angel from Heaven. But much had happened since, to which my passion had blinded me, temporarily only; so that it needed but a flash of searing light to make all clear, and convince me that she had not only left me, but left me trapped-I who had given up all and risked all for her!

In the first agony of pain and rage wrought by a conviction so horrible, I could think only of her treachery and my loss; and head to knees on the bare floor of the room, I wept as if my heart would break, or choked with the sobs that seemed to rend my breast. And little wonder, seeing that I had given her a boy's first devotion, and that of all sins ingratitude has the sharpest tooth! But to this paroxysm, when I had nearly exhausted myself, came an end and an antidote in the shape of urgent fear; which suddenly flooding my soul, roused me from my apathy of grief, and set me to pacing the room in a dreadful panic, trying now the door and now the window. But on both my attacks were in vain, the former being locked and resisting the chisel, while the latter hung thirty feet above the paved yard.

Thus caught and snared, as neatly as any bird in a springe, I had no resource but in my wits; and for a time, as I had nothing of which I could form a rope, I busied myself with the expedient of throwing out the featherbed and leaping upon it. But when I had dragged it to the window, and came to measure the depth, I recoiled, as the most desperate might, from the leap; and softly returning the bed to its place, I fell to biting my nails, or fitfully roamed from place to place, according as despair or some new hope possessed me.

In one or other of these moods the dawn found me; and then in a surprisingly short time I heard the dreaded sounds of life awaken round me, and creeping to the window I closed it, and crouched down on the floor. Presently Mrs. Harris began to stir, and a boy walked whistling shrilly across the adjacent yard; and then-strangest of all things, and not to be invented-in the crisis of my fate, with the feet of those who must detect me almost on the stairs, I fell asleep; and awoke only when a key grated in the lock of the room, and I started up to find Mr. D- in the doorway staring at me, and behind him a crowd of piled-up faces.

"Why, Price?" he cried, with a look of stupefaction, as he came slowly into the room, "what is the meaning of this?"

Then I suppose my shame and guilty silence told him, for with a sudden scowl and an oath he strode to the bureau and dragged out the drawer. A glance showed him that the money was gone, and shouting frantically to those at the door to keep it-to keep it, though they were half-a-dozen to one! – he clutched me by the breast of my coat, and shook me until my teeth chattered.

"Give it up," he cried, spluttering with rage. "Give it up, you beggar's brat! Or, by heaven, you shall hang for it."

But as I had nothing to give up, and could not speak, I burst into tears; which with the odd part I had played in staying in the room to be taken, and perhaps my youth and innocent air, aroused the neighbours' surprise; who, crowding round, asked him solicitously what was missing. He answered after a moment's hesitation, sixty guineas. One had already clapped his hands over my clothes, and another had forced my mouth open; but on this they desisted, and stood, full of admiration.

"He cannot have swallowed that," said the most active, gaping at me.

"No, that is certain. But what beats me," said another, looking round, "is how he got here."

"To say nothing of why he stayed here!" replied the former.

"I'll tell you what," quoth a third, shaking his head. "There is some hocus-pocus in this. And I should not wonder, neighbours, if the Catholics were at the bottom of it!"

The theory appeared to commend itself to more than one-for they were all of the fanatical party; but it was swept to the winds by the entrance of Mrs. D-, who having heard of robbery, came in like a whirlwind, her face on fire, and made no more ado, but rushed upon me, and tore and slapped my cheeks with all her might, crying with each blow, "You nasty thief, will that teach you better manners? That for your roguery! and that! Oh, you jail bird, I'll teach you!"

How long she would have continued to chastise me I cannot say, but her husband presently stepped in to protect me, and being thoroughly winded, she let me go pretty willingly. But when she learned, having hitherto been under the impression that I had been seized in the act with the money upon me, that the latter could not be found, her face turned yellow and she sat down in a chair.

"Have you searched?" she gasped.

"Everywhere," the neighbours answered her.

"He must have thrown it through the window."

They shook their heads.

On that she jumped up, and looked at me with a cold spite in her face that made me shiver. "Then I will tell you what it is," she said, "he has given it to that hussy, and she has taken it! But I will have it out of him; where the money is, and she is, and how he got in! Mr. D-, when you have done standing there like a gaby, fetch your stoutest cane; and do you, my friends, lay him across that bed! And if we do not cut it out of his skin, his name is not Richard Price. I wish I had the wench here, and I would serve her the same!"

I screamed, and fell on my knees as they laid hands on me; but Mrs. D- was a woman without bowels, and the men were complaisant and not unwilling to see the cruel sport of the usher flogged, and the schoolmaster disciplined; and it would have gone hard with me, in spite of my prayers, if the constable had not arrived at that moment, and requested with dignity to see his prisoner. Introduced to me, he stared; and, moved I believe by an impulse of pity, said I was young to hang.

"Ay, but not too good!" Mrs. D- answered shrilly, her head trembling with passion. "He and the hussy, that is gone, have robbed me of eighty guineas in a green bag, as I am prepared to swear!"

"Sixty, Mrs. D-," said her husband, looking a warning at her and then askance at his neighbours.

"Rot take the man, does it matter to a guinea or two?" she retorted-but her sallow face flushed a little. "At any rate," she continued, pressing her thin lips together, and nodding her head viciously, "sixty or eighty, they have taken them."

It seemed, however, that even to that one of the neighbours had a word to say. "As to the girl, I am not so sure, Mrs. D-," he struck in ponderously. "If she is the wench that has been carrying on

with the gentleman at the 'Rose,' she has had other fish to fry. Though I don't say, mind you, that she has *not* been in this. Only-

But Mrs. D- could restrain herself no longer. "Only! only! Gentlemen at the 'Rose'!" she cried. "Why, man, are you mad? What do you think has my maid-though maid she is not, but a dirty drab, and more is the pity I took her out of charity from the parish-she was Kitty Higgs's base-born brat as you know-what has she to do with gentlemen at the 'Rose'?"

"Well, that is not for me to say," the man answered quietly. "Only I know that for a week or more a wench has been walking with the gentleman in the roads and so forth, by night as well as by day. I came on them twice myself hard by here; and though she was dressed more like a fine madam than a serving girl, I watched her into your house. And for the rest, Mrs. Harris must know more than I do."

But Mrs. Harris, when Mrs. D- turned on her in a white rage, could only cover her head and weep in a corner; as much, I believe, out of sorrow for me as on her own account. However, the fact that the good-natured woman had left Jennie pretty much to her own devices could not be gainsaid; and Mrs. D- had much to say on it. But when she talked of sending after the baggage and jailing her, ay, and the gentleman at the "Rose" too, if he could not pay the money, the constable pursed up his lips.

"It is to be remembered that he came with His Royal Highness, our gracious Prince," he said, swelling out his chest and puffing out his cheeks with importance. "And though it is true he ordered his horses and went for London last evening-as I know myself, having seen him go, and seen him before for the matter of that at Hertford Assizes, for he is a Counsellor-it does not follow that the wench went with him. Or, if she did, Mrs. D-, -"

"That she had anything to do with this money," the neighbour who had spoken before put in.

"Precisely, Mr. Jenkins," the constable answered. "You are a man of sense. For my part," he continued, looking round a little defiantly, "I am no Whig, and I am not for meddling with Court gentlemen, and least of all lawyers. And if you will take my advice, Mr. D-, you will be satisfied to lay this young jail-bird by the heels; and if he does not speak before the rope is round his neck, it is not likely that you will get your money other ways. But, lord," the good man went on, standing back from me, to view me the better, "he is young to be such a villain! It is 'broke and entered,' too, and so he will swing for it." And he took off his hat and wiped his bald head, while he gazed at me between pity and admiration.

Mrs. D-, who was very far from sharing either of these feelings, would have had me taken at once before a Justice and committed. But the constable, partly to prove his importance, and partly, I believe, to give me a chance of disclosing where the money lay, before it was too late, would have the house and garden searched, and all the boys examined; under the impression that I might have had one of these for my accomplice. Naturally, however, nothing came of this, except the discovery that I had been out of nights lately; which had scarcely been made when who should appear on the scene, in an unlucky hour for me, but the gentleman who had identified me outside the gaming room at the "Rose." As he had come for the very purpose of laying a complaint against me, his story destroyed the last scrap of my credit, by exhibiting me as a secret rake; and this removing all doubt of my guilt, if any were still entertained even by Mrs. Harris, it was determined to convey me, dinner over, to Sir Baldwin Winston's, at Abbot's Stanstead, to be committed; the two Justices who resided in Ware being at the moment disabled.

All this time, and while my fate was being decided, I listened to one and another in a dull despair, which deprived me of the power to defend myself; and from which nothing less than Mrs. D-'s atrocious proposal to flog me, until I gave up the money, could draw me, and that only for a moment. Conscious of my guilt, and seized in the act and on the scene of my crime, I beheld only the near and certain prospect of punishment; while I had not the temptation to tell all, and inform against my crafty accomplice, to which a knowledge of her destination must have exposed me. Besides-and I think a great part of my apathy was due to this-I still felt the stunning effects of the blow which her

cruel treachery had dealt me. I saw her in her true light; and as I sat, weeping silently, and seeming to those who watched me, little moved, I was thinking at least as much of the past and my love, and her craft, as of the fate that lay before me.

Though this was presently brought vividly before me, and of all persons by Mrs. Harris. Mrs. D- of herself would have given me neither bit nor sup in the house; but the constable insisting that the King's prisoner must be fed, Mrs. Harris, tearful and shaking, was allowed to bring me some broken victuals. These set before me, the good soul, instead of retiring, potted aimlessly about the room; and by and by got behind me; on which, or rather a moment later, I felt something cold and sharp at the nape of my neck and started up. Bursting into a flood of tears she plumped down on a seat, and I saw that she had a pair of scissors and a scrap of my hair in her hand.

"Good Lord!" I said.

Doubtless the tone in which I spoke betrayed me, for the constable's man who was in charge of me laughed brutally. "Gad, if he does not think she did it out of love!" he cried, speaking to a friend who was sitting with him. "When all the old dame wants is a charm for the rheumatics; and she thinks the chance too good to be lost."

Then I remembered that the hair of a hanged man is in that part held to be sovereign for the rheumatics; and I sat down feeling cold and faint.

CHAPTER VIII

That saying, though a small thing, and a foolish one, brought my state home to me; and, moreover, filled me with so grisly a foreboding of the gibbet, that henceforth I gave my treacherous mistress no more thought than she deserved—which was little; but I became wholly taken up with my own fate, and especially with the recollection of a man, whom I had once seen, pitched and hanging in chains, at Much Hadham Crossroads. The horrible spectacle he had become, ten days dead, grew on my mind, until I grovelled and sweated in a green terror, and that not so much at the prospect of death—though this sent me hot and cold in the same instant—as of the harsh rope about my neck, and the sacking bands, and the dreadful apparatus, and the grinning loathsome thing I must become.

Near swooning at these thoughts, I sank huddled into the chair; and was presently plucked up by the constable's assistant, who, seeing my state, came forward, and though he was naturally a coarse fellow, strove to hearten me, saying that there was always hope until the cart moved, and that many a man cast for death was drinking the King's health in the Plantations. With an oath or two and in a loud voice.

On that a last flicker of pride came to my aid, and trying to meet his eye I muttered that it was not that; that I was not afraid, and that at worst I should be burned in the hand.

"To be sure!" he said nodding, and looking at me curiously. "To be sure. It is well to be a scholar!"

I was athirst, however, to get some further and better assurance from him; and fixing my eyes on his face, I asked hoarsely, "You think that it is certain? You think there is no doubt?"

"Certain sure, my Toby!" he answered. But I saw that, as he moved away, he winked to his comrade, and I heard the latter ask him softly, as he took his seat again, "Is't so? Will the lad cheat the hangman?"

"Not he!" was the reply, uttered in a whisper—but terror sharpened my ears. "There was so long a list at the last Assizes, and half of them *legit*, that it was given out they would override it this time, and make examples. And ten to one he will swing, Ben."

"But is it the law?"

I did not hear the answer for the drumming in my ears and the dreadful confusion in my brain; which were such that I was not aware of the constable's entrance or of anything that happened after that, until I found myself in the road climbing clumsily on the back of a pony, in the middle of a throng of staring curious faces. My feet being secured under the beast's belly—at which some gave a hand, while others stood off, whispering and looking strangely at me—the constable mounted himself, and shouting to his wife that he should take me on to Hertford gaol, and should not be back until late, led me out of the crowd, Mr. D- and Mr. Jenkins bringing up the rear. The last I saw of the school the boys were hanging out of the windows to see me go; and Mrs. D- was standing in the doorway, and unappeased by my misery, was shrilly denouncing me—hands and tongue, all going—to a group of her gossips.

Our road took us past the Rose Inn, and through a great part of the town, but no impression of either remains with me, my only recollection being of the sunshine that lay over the country, and of the happiness that all creation, all living things, save my doomed self, enjoyed. The bitterness of the thought that yesterday I had been as these, free to move and live and breathe, caused great tears to roll down my cheeks; but my companions, whose thoughts had already gone forward to the Steward's Room at Sir Winston's, and the entertainment they expected there, took little notice of me; and less after the porter at the lodge told them that there were grand doings at the house, and a great company, including a lord, come unexpectedly from London.

"I don't think ye'll be welcome," the porter added, looking curiously at me.

"Justice's business," the constable replied sturdily. "The King must be served."

"Ay, that is what you all say when you've something to gain by it," the porter retorted; and went in.

All which I heard idly; not supposing that it meant to me the difference between life and death, fortune and misery; or that in the company come unexpectedly from London lurked my salvation. If I dwelt on the news at all it was only as it might affect me by adding to the shame I felt. But in this I deceived myself; for when the ordeal of waiting in the servants' hall-where the maids pitied me and would have fed me if I could have eaten-was over, and we were ushered into the parlour in which Sir Winston, who had newly risen from dinner, would see us, we found only one gentleman with him.

The two stood at the farther end of a long narrow room, in the bay of a large window, that, open to the ground, permitted a view of cool sward and yew hedges. That they had had companions, lately withdrawn, was clear; and this, not only from the length of the table, which, bestrewn with plates and glasses and half-empty flagons, stretched up the room from us to them, but from two chairs, thrown down in the hurry of rising, and six or seven others thrust back, haphazard, against the panels. In the side of the room were four tall straight windows that allowed the sunshine to fall in regular bars on the table; and these, displaying here a little pool of spilled claret, and there a broken tobacco pipe, the ash still smouldering, gave a touch of grimness to the luxurious disorder.

The same incongruity was to be observed in the appearance of the elder and stouter of the two men; who had hung his periwig on the back of a chair, and showed a bald head and flushed face that agreed very ill with his laced cravat and embroidered coat. Standing with his feet apart and his arm outstretched, he was not immediately aware of our entrance; but continued to address his companion in words that were coherent, yet betrayed how he had been employed.

"Crop-eared knaves, my lord, half of them, and I one!" he cried, as we came to a halt a little within the door, to await his pleasure-I with shaking knees and sinking heart. "And ready to become the same again if the times call for it. For why? Because it was only so we could keep or get, my lord. And martyrs have been few in my time, though fools plenty."

"I should be sorry to deny the last, Sir Winston," his companion answered, smiling; for whom at the moment, blind bat as I was, I had no eyes, seeing in him only a noble youth, handsomely dressed and periwigged, and two, or it might be three years older than myself; whereas I hung on the Justice's nod. "But here is your case," the young man continued, turning to me, and speaking in a pleasant voice.

"And a hard case one of them is," the Justice answered jollily, as he turned to us, and singled out the constable. "That is you, Dyson!" he continued, "one of those of whom I have been telling you, my lord. A psalm-singer in the troubles, sergeant in Lord Grey's regiment, a roundhead, and ran away, with better men than himself, at Cropredy Bridge. To-day he damns a Whig, and goes to bed drunk every twenty-ninth of May."

"Having a good example, your honour!" the constable answered grinning.

"Ay, to be sure. And why don't you follow it also?" Sir Winston continued, turning to the schoolmaster. "But crop-eared you were and crop-eared you are; one of Shaftesbury's brisk boys, my lord! And ought to be fined for a ranter every Monday morning, if all had their deserts!"

"Then I am afraid that your theory does not apply to him, Sir Winston," the young man said with a smile. "Here is one martyr already; and if one martyr, why not many?"

"Martyr?" the Justice answered, with half-a-dozen oaths. "He? No one less! He goes to church as you and I do, and does not smart to the tune of a penny! It is true he pulls a solemn face and abhors mince-pies and plum-porridge. But why? Because he keeps a school, and the righteous, or what are left of them, who are just such hypocrites as himself, resort unto his company with boys and guineas! Resort unto his company, eh, D-?" the Justice repeated gleefully, addressing the schoolmaster. "That is the phrase, isn't it? Oh, I have chopped Scripture with old Noll in my time. And so it pays, do you see, my lord? When it does not, he'll damn the Whigs and turn Tantivy or Abhorrer, or something

that does. And so it is with all; they are loyal. Never were Englishmen more loyal; but to what are they loyal? Themselves, my lord!"

"Yet there are Whigs who do not keep schools," the young lord said, after a hearty laugh.

"Ay, my lord, and why?" Sir Winston answered, in high good humour, "because we are all trimmers to the wind, but some trim too late, and some too soon. And those are your Whigs. Never you turn Whig, my lord, whatever you do, or you will die in a Dutch garret like Tony Shiftsbury! And if anyone could have made Whiggery pay nowadays, clever Anthony would have. Here's his health, but I doubt he is in hell, these eight months."

And Sir Winston, going to the table, filled and drank off a bumper of claret. Then he filled again. "The King-God bless him-is not very well, I hear," said he, winking at the young lord. "So I will give you another toast. His Highness's health, and confusion to all who would exclude him! And now what is this business, Dyson? Who is the lad? What has he been doing?"

The constable began to explain; but before he had uttered many words, the baronet, whose last draught had more than a little fuddled him, cut him short. "Oh, come to me to-morrow!" he said. "Or stay! You are in the Commission for the county, my lord?"

"I am, but I have not acted," the young man answered.

"Rot it, man, but you shall act now! Burglary, is it? Broke and entered, eh? Then that is a hanging matter, and a young hound should be blooded. I am off! My lord will do it, Dyson. My lord will do it."

With which the Justice lurched out of the window so quickly, not to say unsteadily, that he was gone before his companion could remonstrate. The young lord, thus abandoned, looked at first at a nonplus, and seemed for a while more than half-inclined to follow. But changing his mind, and curious, I am willing to believe, to hear the case of a prisoner so much out of the common as I must have appeared to him, he turned to us, and adopting a certain stateliness, which came easily to him, young as he was, he told the constable he would hear him.

Then it was that, hanging for my life on the nods and words of intelligence that from time to time fell from him, and whereby he lifted the constable out of the slough of verbiage in which he floundered, I dared again to hope; and noting with eyes sharpened by terror the cast of his serious handsome features, and the curves of his mouth, sensitive as a woman's yet wondrously under control, saw a prospect of life. For a time indeed I had nothing more substantial on which to build than such signs, so damning seemed the tale that branded me as taken in the act and on the scene of my crimes. But when the young peer, after eyeing me gravely and pitifully, asked if they had found the money on me, and the constable answered, "No," and my lord retorted, "Then where was it?" and got no answer; and again when he enquired as to the lock on the door and the height of the window, and who had aided me to enter, and learned that a girl was suspected and no one else-then I felt the blood beat hotly in my head, and a mist come before my eyes.

"Who is his accomplice? Pooh; there must be one!" he said.

"The girl, may it please your lordship," the constable answered.

"The girl? Then why should she leave him to be taken? How did he enter?"

"By a ladder, it is supposed, my lord."

"It is supposed?"

"Yes, my lord."

"But ladder or no ladder, why did she leave him?"

The constable scratched his head.

"Perhaps they were surprised, please your lordship," he ventured at last.

"But the boy was found in the room at seven, dolt. And the sun is up before four. What was he doing all those hours? Surprised, pooh!"

"Well, I don't know as to that, your worship," the man answered sturdily; "but only that the prisoner was found in the room, in which he had not ought to be, and the money was gone from the room where it had ought to be!"

"And the bureau was broken open," Mr. D- cried eagerly. "And what is more, he has never denied it, my lord! Never."

At that and at sight of the change that came over my judge's face the hope that had risen in me died suddenly; and I saw again the grim prospect of the prison and the gibbet; and to be led from one to the other, dumb, one of a drove, unregarded. And, it coming upon me strongly that in a moment it would be too late, I found my voice and cried to him, "Oh, my lord, save me!" I cried. "Help me! For the sake of God, help me!"

Whether my words moved him or he had not yet given up my case, he looked at me attentively, and with a shade as of recollection on his face. Then he asked quietly what I was.

"Usher in a school, my lord," someone answered.

"Poor devil!" he exclaimed. And then, to the others, "Here, you! Withdraw a little to the passage, if you please. I would speak with him alone."

The constable opened his mouth to demur; but the young gentleman would not suffer it; saying with a fine air that there was no resisting, "Pooh, man, I am Lord Shrewsbury. I will be responsible for him." And with that he got them out of the room.

CHAPTER IX

I know now that there never was a man in whom the natural propensity to side with the weaker party was by custom and exercise more highly developed than in my late lord, in whose presence I then stood; who, indeed, carried that virtue to such an extent that if any fault could be found with his public carriage-which I am very far from admitting, but only that such a colour might be given to some parts of it by his enemies-the flaw was attributable to this excess of generosity. Yet he has since told me that on this occasion of our first meeting, it was neither my youth nor my misery-in the main at any rate-that induced him to take so extraordinary a step as that of seeing me alone; but a strange and puzzling reminiscence, which my features aroused in him, and whereto his first words, when we were left together, bore witness. "Where, my lad," said he, staring at me, "have I seen you before?"

As well as I could, for the dread of him in which I stood, I essayed to clear my brain and think; and in me also, as I looked at him, the attempt awoke a recollection, as if I had somewhere met him. But I could conceive one place only where it was possible I might have seen a man of his rank; and so stammered that perhaps at the Rose Inn, at Ware, in the gaming-room I might have met him.

His lip curled, "No," he said coldly, "I have honoured the Groom-Porter at Whitehall once and again by leaving my guineas with him. But at the Rose Inn, at Ware-never! And heavens, man," he continued in a tone of contemptuous wonder, "what brought such as you in that place?"

In shame, and aware, now that it was too late, that I had said the worst thing in the world to commend myself to him, I stammered that I had gone thither-that I had gone thither with a friend.

"A woman?" he said quickly.

I allowed that it was so.

"The same that led you into this?" he continued sharply.

But to that I made no answer: whereon, with kindly sternness he bade me remember where I stood, and that in a few minutes it would be too late to speak.

"You can trust me, I suppose?" he continued with a fine scorn, "that I shall not give evidence against you. By being candid, therefore, you may make things better, but can hardly make them worse."

Whereon I have every reason to be thankful, nay, it has been matter for a life's rejoicing that I was not proof against his kindness; but without more ado, sobbing over some parts of my tale, and whispering others, I told him my whole story from the first meeting with my temptress-so I may truly call her-to the final moment when, the money gone, and the ladder removed, I was rudely awakened, to find myself a prisoner. I told it, I have reason to believe, with feeling, and in words that carried conviction; the more as, though skilled in literary composition, and in writing *secundum artem*, I have little imagination. At any rate, when I had done, and quavered off reluctantly into a half coherent and wholly piteous appeal for mercy, I found my young judge gazing at me with a heat of indignation in cheek and eye, that strangely altered him.

"Good G-!" he cried, "what a Jezebel!" And in words which I will not here repeat, he said what he thought of her.

True as the words were (and I knew that, after what I had told him, nothing else was true of her), they forced a groan from me.

"Poor devil," he said at that. And then again, "Poor devil, it is a shame! It is a black shame, my lad," he continued warmly, "and I would like to see Madam at the cart-tail; and that is where I shall see her before all is done! I never heard of such a vixen! But for you," and on the word he paused and looked at me, "you did it, my friend, and I do not see your way out of it."

"Then must I hang?" I cried desperately.

He did not answer.

"My lord! My lord!" I urged, for I began to see whither he was tending, and I could have shrieked in terror, "you can do anything."

"I?" he said.

"You! If you would speak to the judge, my lord."

He laughed, without mirth. "He would whip you instead of hanging you," he said contemptuously.

"To the King, then."

"You would thank me for nothing," he answered; and then with a kind of contemptuous suavity, "My friend, in your Ware Academy-where nevertheless you seem to have had your diversions-you do not know these things. But you may take it from me, that I am more than suspected of belonging to the party whose existence Sir Baldwin denies-I mean to the Whigs; and the suspicion alone is enough to damn any request of mine."

On that, after staring at him a moment, I did a thing that surprised him; and had he known me better a thing that would have surprised him more. For the courage to do it, and to show myself in colours unlike my own, I had to thank neither despair nor fear, though both were present; but a kind of rage that seized me, on hearing him speak in a tone above me, and as if, having heard my story, he was satisfied with the curiosity of it, and would dismiss the subject, and I might go to the gallows. I know now that in so speaking he had not that intent, but that brought up short by the certainty of my guilt, and the impasse as to helping me, in which he stood, he chose that mode of repressing the emotion he felt. I did not understand this however: and with a bitterness born of the misconception, and in a voice that sounded harsh, and anyone's rather than mine, I burst into a furious torrent of reproaches, asking him if it was only for this he had seen me alone, and to make a tale. "To make a tale," I cried, "and a jest? One that with the same face with which you send me out to be strangled and to rot, and with the same smile, you'll tell, my lord, after supper to Sir Baldwin and your like. Oh, for shame, my lord, for shame!" I cried, passionately, and losing all fear of him in my indignation. "As you may some day be in trouble yourself-for great heads fall as well as low ones in these days, and as little pitied-if you have bowels of compassion, my lord, and a mother to love you-

He turned on me so swiftly at that word, that my anger quailed before his. "Silence!" he cried, fiercely. "How dare you, such as you, mention-. But there, fellow-be silent!"

I caught the ring of pain as well as anger in his tone, and obeyed him; though I could not discern what I had said to touch him so sorely. He on his side glowered at me a moment; and so we stood, while hope died within me, and I grew afraid of him again, and a shadow fell on the room as it had already fallen on his face. I waited for nothing now but the word that should send me from his presence, and thought nothing so certain as that I had flung away what slender chance remained to me. It was with a start that when he broke the silence I was aware of a new sound in his voice.

"Listen, my lad," he said in a constrained tone-and he did not look at me. "You are right in one thing. If I meant to do nothing for you, I had no right to your confidence. I do not know what it was in your face induced me to see you. I wish I had not. But since I have I must do what I can to save you: and there is only one way. Mind you," he continued in a sudden burst of anger, "I do not like it! And I do it out of regard for myself, not for you, my lad! Mind you that!"

"Oh, my lord!" I cried, ready to fall down and worship him.

"Be silent," he answered, coldly, "and when my back is turned go through that window. Do you understand? It is all I can do for you. The alley on the left leads to the stables. Pass through them boldly; if you are not stopped you will in a minute be on the high road. The turn, to the left at the cross-roads, leads to Tottenham and London. That on the right will take you to Little Parndon and Epping. That is all I have to say; while I look for a piece of paper to sign your commitment, you would do well to go. Only remember, my man, if you are retaken-do not look to me."

He suited the action to the words by turning his back on me, and beginning to search in a bureau that stood beside him. But so sudden and so unexpected was the proposal he had made, that though

he had said distinctly "Go!" I doubt if, apart from the open window, I should have understood his purpose. As it was I came to it slowly-so slowly that he lost patience, and with his head still buried among the pigeon-holes, swore at me.

"Are you going?" he said. "Or do you think that it is nothing I am doing for you? Do you think it is nothing that I am going to tell a lie for such as you? Either go or hang, my lad!"

I heard no more. A moment earlier nothing had been farther from my thoughts than to attempt an escape, but the impulse of his will steadied my wavering resolution, and with set teeth and a beating heart, I stepped through the window. Outside I turned to the left along a shady green alley fenced by hedges of yew, and espying the stable-yard before me, walked boldly across it. By good luck the grooms and helpers were at supper and I saw only one man standing at a door. He stared at me, mouthing a straw, but said nothing, and in a twinkling I had passed him, left the curtilage behind me, and had the park fence and gate in sight.

Until I reached this, not knowing whose eyes were on me, I had the presence of mind to walk; though cold shivers ran down my back, and my hair crept, and every second I fancied-for I was too nervous to look back-that I felt Dyson's hand on my collar. Arriving safely at the gate, however, and the road stretching before me with no one in sight, I took to my heels, and ran a quarter of a mile along it; then leaping the fence that bounded it on the right, I started recklessly across country, my aim being to strike the Little Parndon highway, to which my lord had referred, at a point beyond the cross-roads, and so to avoid passing the latter.

I am aware that this mode of escape, this walking through a window and running off unmolested, sounds bald and commonplace; and that if I could import into my story some touch of romance or womanish disguise, such as-to compare great things with small-marked my Lord Nithsdale's escape from the Tower three years ago, I should cut a better figure. Whereas in the flight across the fields on a quiet afternoon, with the sun casting long shadows on the meadows, and for my most instant alarms, the sudden whirring up before me of partridge or plover, few will find anything heroic. But let them place themselves for a moment in my skin, and remember that as I sweated and panted and stumbled and rose again, as I splashed in reckless haste through sloughs and ditches, and tore my way through great blackthorns, I had death always at my heels! Let them remember that in the long shadows that crossed my path I saw the gallows, and again the gallows, and once more the gallows; and fled more quickly; and that it needed but the distant bark of a dog, or the shout of a boy scaring birds, to persuade me that the hue and cry was coming, and to fill me with the last extremity of fear.

I believe that the adventurer, and the knight of the road, when it falls to their lot to be so hunted-as must often happen, though more commonly such an one is taken *securus et ebrius* in the arms of his mistress-find some mitigation of their pains in the anticipation of conflict, and in the stern joy which the resolve to sell life dearly imparts to the man of action. But I was unarmed, and worn out with my exertions; no soldier, and with no heart to fight. My flight therefore across the quiet fields was pure terror, the torture of unmitigated fear. Fear spurred me and whipped me; and yet, had I known it, I might have spared my terror. For darkness found me, weak and exhausted, but still free, in the neighbourhood of Epping in Essex, where I passed the night in the Forest; and before noon next day, believing that they would watch for me on the Tottenham Road, I had found courage to slink in to London by way of Chingford, and in the heart of that great city, whose magnitude exceeded all my expectations, had safely and effectually lost myself.

CHAPTER X

At this point, it becomes me to pause. I set out, the reader will remember, to furnish such a narrative of the events attending my first meeting with my honoured patron, as taken with a brief account of myself might enable all to pursue with insight as well as advantage the details of my later connection with him. And this being done, and bearing in mind that Sir John Fenwick did not suffer for his conspiracy until 1696, and that consequently a period of thirteen years divided the former events, which I have related, from those which follow-and which have to do, as I intimated at the outset, with my lord's alleged cognisance of that conspiracy-some may, and with impatience, look to me to proceed at once to the gist of the matter. Which I propose to do; but first to crave the reader's indulgence, while in a very hasty and perfunctory manner I trace my humble fortunes in the interval; whereby time will in the end be saved.

That arriving in London, as I have related, a fugitive, penniless and homeless, in fear of the law, I contrived to keep out of the beadle's hands, and was neither whipped for a vagrant at Bridewell, nor starved outright in the streets, I attribute to most singular good fortune; which not only rescued me (*statim*) from a great and instant danger that all but engulfed me, but within a few hours found for me honest and constant employment, and that of an uncommon kind.

It so happened that, perplexed by the clamour of the great city, wherein all faces were new to me and ways alike, I came to a stand about noon in the neighbourhood of Newgate Market; where, confident that in the immense and never-ceasing tide of life that ebbs and flows in that quarter, I was safe from recognition, I ventured to sell an undergarment in a small shop in an alley, and buying a loaf with the price, satisfied my hunger. But the return of strength was accompanied by no return of hope; rather, my prime necessity supplied, I felt the forlornness of my position more acutely. In which condition, having no resource but to wander aimlessly from one street to another while the daylight lasted-and after that no prospect at all except to pass the night in the same manner-I came presently into Little Britain, and stopped, as luck would have it, before one of the bookshops that crowd that part. A number of persons were poring over the books, and I joined them; but I had not stood a moment, idly scanning the backs of the volumes, before one of my neighbours touched my elbow, and when I turned and met his eyes, nodded to me. "A scholar?" he said, smiling pleasantly through a pair of glasses. "Ah, how ill does the muse requite her worshippers. From the country, my friend?"

I answered that I was; and seeing him to be a man well on in years, clad in good broadcloth, and of a sober, substantial aspect, I saluted him abjectly.

"To be sure," he said, again nodding cheerfully. "And a stranger to the town I expect?"

"Yes," I said.

"And a reader? A reader? Ah, how ill does the muse- But you *can* read?" he ejaculated, breaking off somewhat suddenly.

I said I could, and to convince him read off the names of several of the volumes before me. I remembered afterwards that instead of looking at them to see if I read aright, he kept his eyes on my face.

"Good!" he said, stopping me when I had deciphered half-a-dozen. "You do your schoolmaster credit, my lad. Such a man should not want, and yet you look-frankly, my friend, are you in need of employment?"

He asked the question with so much benevolence, and looked at me with so good-natured a twinkle in his eyes, that my tears nearly overflowed, and I had much ado to answer him. "Yes," I said. "And without friends, sir."

"Indeed, indeed," quoth he. "Well, I must do what I can. And first, you may do me a service, which in any case shall not go unrequited. Come this way."

Without waiting for an answer he led me into the mouth of a court hard by, where we were less open to observation; there, pointing to a shop at a little distance from that at which he had found me, he explained that he wished to purchase a copy of *Selden's Baronage* that stood at the front of the stall, but that the tradesman knew him and would overcharge him. "So do you go and buy it for me, my friend," he continued, chuckling over his innocent subterfuge, with a simplicity that took with me immensely. "It should be half-a-guinea. There is a guinea" – and he lugged one out. "Buy the book and bring the change to me, and it shall be something in your pocket. Alas, that the muse should so ill- But there, go, go, my lad," he continued, "and remember *Selden's Baronage*, half-a-guinea. And not a penny more!"

Delighted with the luck which had found me such a patron, and anxious to acquit myself to the best advantage I hurried to do his bidding; first making sure that I knew where to find him. The shop he had pointed out, which was surmounted by the sign of a gun, and appeared to enjoy no small share of public favour, was full of persons reading and talking; but almost the first book on which my eyes alighted was *Selden's Baronage*, and the tradesman when I applied to him made no difficulty about the price, saying at once that it was half-a-guinea. I handed him my money, and without breaking off his talk with a customer, he was counting the change, when something in my aspect struck him, and he looked at the guinea. On which he muttered an oath and thrust it back into my hand.

"It will not do," he said angrily. "Begone!"

I was quite taken aback: the more as several persons looked up from their books, and his immediate companion, a meagre dry-looking man in a snuff-coloured suit, fell to staring at me. "What do you mean?" I stammered.

"You know very well," the tradesman answered me roughly. "And had better be gone! And more, I tell you, if you want a hemp collar, my man, you are in the way to get one!"

"Clipped?" quoth the dry-looking man.

"New clipped and bright at the edges!" the bookseller answered. "Now go, my man, and be thankful I don't send for a constable."

At that I shrank away, two or three of the customers coming to the door to see me out, and watching which way I turned. This, I suppose-though I was then, and for a little time longer in doubt about him-was the reason why I could see nothing of my charitable friend, when I returned to the place where I had left him. I looked this way and that, but he was gone; and though, not knowing what else to do, and having still the guinea in my possession, I lingered about the mouth of the court for an hour or more, looking for him, he did not return.

At the end of that time the meagre dry man whom I had seen in the shop passed with a book under his arm; and seeing me, after a moment's hesitation stood and spoke to me. "Well, my friend?" said he, looking hard at me. "Are you waiting for the halter?"

I told him civilly, no; but that the gentleman who had given me the guinea to change had bidden me return to him there.

"And he is not here?" he said with a sneer.

"No," I said.

He stared at me, wondering at the simplicity of my answer; and then, "Well, you are either the biggest fool or the biggest knave within the bills!" he exclaimed. "Are you straight from Gotham?"

"No," I told him. "From the north." And that I wanted employment.

"You are like to get it-at the Plantations!" he answered savagely, taking snuff. I remarked that neither his hands nor his linen were of the cleanest, and that the former were stained with ink. "What are you?" he continued, presently, in the same snappish, churlish tone.

I told him a schoolmaster.

"*Exempli gratiâ*," he answered quickly, and turning to the nearest stall, he indicated the title-page of a book. "Read me that, Master Schoolmaster."

I did so. He grunted; and then, "You write? Show me your hand."

I said I had no paper or ink there, but that if he would take me-

"Pooh, man, are you a fool?" he cried, impatiently. "Show me your right hand, middle finger, and I will find you *scribit* or *non scribit*. So! And you want work?"

"Yes," I said.

"Hard work and little pay?"

I said I wanted to make my living.

"Ay, and maybe the first time you come to me, you will cut my throat, and rob my desk," he answered gruffly. "Hm! That touches you home, does it? However, ask for me to-morrow, at seven in the forenoon-Mr. Timothy Brome, at the sign of the Black Boy in Fleet Street."

Now I was overjoyed, indeed. With such a prospect of employment, it seemed to me a small thing that I must pass the night in the streets; but even that I escaped. For when he was about to part from me, he asked me what money I had. None, I told him, "except the clipped guinea."

"And I suppose you expect me to give you a shilling earnest?" he answered, irascibly. "But no, no, Timothy Brome is no fool. See here," he continued, slapping his pocket and looking shrewdly at me, "that guinea is not worth a groat to you; except to hang you."

"No," I said, ruefully.

"Well, I will give you five shillings for it, as gold, mind you; as gold, and not to pass. Are you content?"

"It is not mine," I said doubtfully.

"Take it or leave it!" he said, screwing up his eyes, and so plainly pleased with the bargain he was driving that I had no inkling of the kind heart that underlay that crabbed manner. "Take it or leave it, my man."

Thus pressed, and my mind retaining no real doubt of the knavery of the man who had entrusted the guinea to me, I handed it to my new friend, and received in return a crown. And this being my last disposition of money not my own, I think it a fit season to record that from that day to this I have been enabled by God's help and man's kindness to keep the eighth commandment; and earning honestly what I have spent have been poor, but never a beggar.

In gratitude for which, and both those good men being now dead, I here conjoin the names of Mr. Timothy Brome, of Fleet Street, newsmonger and author, whose sharp tongue and morose manners cloaked a hundred benefactions; and of Charles, Duke of Shrewsbury, my honoured patron, who never gave but his smile doubled the gift which his humanity dictated.

The reader will believe that punctually on the morrow I went with joy and thankfulness to my new master, whom I found up three pairs of stairs in a room barely furnished, but heaped in every part with piles of manuscripts and dogs-eared books, and all so covered with dust that type and script were alike illegible. He wore a dingy morning-gown and had laid aside his wig; but the air of importance with which he nodded to me and a sort of dignity that clothed him as he walked to and fro on the ink-stained floor mightily impressed me, and drove me to wonder what sort of trade was carried on here. He continued, for some minutes after I entered, to declaim one fine sentence after another, rolling the long words over his tongue with a great appearance of enjoyment: a process which he only interrupted to point me to a stool and desk, and cry with averted eyes-lest he should cut the thread of his thoughts-"Write!"

On my hesitating, "Write!" he repeated, in the tone of one commanding a thousand troopers. And then he spoke thus-and as he spoke I wrote: -

"This day His Gracious Majesty, whose health appears to be completely restored, went, accompanied by the French Ambassador and a brilliant company, to take the air in the Mall. Despatches from Holland say that the Duke of Monmouth has arrived at the Hague and has been well received. Letters from the West say that the city of Bristol having a well-founded confidence in the Royal Clemency has hastened to lay its Charter at His Majesty's feet. The 30th of the month began the Sessions at the Old Bailey, and held the first and second of this; where seventeen persons

received sentence of death, nine to be burned in the hand, seven to be transported, and eleven ordered to be whipped. Yesterday, or this day, a commission was sealed appointing the Lord Chief Justice Jeffreys-

CHAPTER XI

In a word, my master was a writer of Newsletters, and in that capacity possessed of so excellent a style and so great a connection in the Western Counties that, as he was wont to boast, there was hardly a squire or rector from Bristol to Dawlish that did not owe what he knew of His Majesty's gout, or Mr. Dryden's last play, to his weekly epistles. The Popish Plot which had cost the lives of Lord Stafford and so many of his persuasion, no less than the Rye House Plot, which by placing the Whigs at the mercy of the Government had at once afforded those their revenge, and illustrated the ups and downs of court life, had given so sharp a stimulus to the appetite for news, that of late he had found himself unable to cope with it. In this unsettled condition, and meditating changes which should belittle Sir Roger and *The London Mercury*, and oust print from the field, he fell in with me; and where another man would have selected a bachelor whose cassock and scarf might commend him at Wills' or Childs', his eccentric kindness snatched me from the gutter, and set me on a tall stool, there to write all day for the delectation of country houses and mayors' parlours.

I remember that at first it seemed to me so easy a trick (this noting the news of the day in plain round hand) that I wondered they paid him to do it, more than another. But besides that I then had knowledge of one side of the business only, I mean the framing the news, but none of the manner in which it was collected at Garraway's and the Cockpit, the Sessions House, the Mall, and the Gallery at Whitehall. I presently learned that even of the share that fell to my lot I knew only as much as a dog that turns the spit knows of the roasting of meat. For when my employer, finding me docile and industrious-as I know I was, being thankful for such a haven, and crushed in spirit not only by the dangers through which I had passed, but also by my mistress's treachery-when I say, he left me one day to my devices, merely skimming through a copy and leaving me to multiply it, with, for sole guide, the list of places to which the letters were to go, as Bridgewater, Whig; Bath, Tory; Bridport, Tory; Taunton, Whig; Frome, Whig; Lyme, Whig, and so on, I came very far short of success. True, when he returned in the evening I had my packets ready and neatly prepared for the mail, which then ran to the West thrice a week and left next morning; and I had good hopes that he would send them untouched. But great was my dismay when he fell into a rage over the first he picked up, and asked me bluntly if I was quite a fool.

I stammered some answer, and asked in confusion what was the matter.

"Everything," he said. "Here, let me see! Why, you dolt and dunderhead, you have sent letters in identical terms to Frome and Bridport."

"Yes," I said faintly.

"But the one is Whig and the other is Tory!" he cried.

"But the news, sir," I made bold to answer, "is the same."

"Is it?" he cried in fine contempt. "Why you are a natural! I thought you had learned something by this time. Here, where is the Frome letter? "*The London Gazette*" announces that His Majesty has been graciously pleased to reward my Lord Rochester's services at the Treasury Board by raising him to the dignity of Lord President of the Council, an elevation which renders necessary his resignation of his seat at the Board.' Tut-tut! That is the Court tone. Here, out with it, and write: -

"*The Earl of Rochester's removal from the Treasury Board to the Presidency of the Council, which is announced in "The Gazette," is very well understood. His lordship made what resistance he could, but the facts were plain, and the King could do no otherwise. Rumour has it that the sum lost to the country in the manner already hinted exceeds fifty thousand guineas.*'

"There, what comes next? '*Letters from the Continent have it that strong recommendations have been made to the Court at the Hague to dismiss the D- of M-, and it is confidently expected that the next packet will bring the news of his departure.*' Pooh, out with it. Write this: -

"*The D- of M- is still at the Hague, where he is being sumptuously entertained. Much is made of His Majesty's anger, but the D- is well supplied with money from an unknown source, which some take to be significant. At a ball given by their Highnesses on the eleventh, he danced an English country dance with the Lady Mary, wherein his grace and skill won all hearts.*'

"That is better. And now what next? '*This day an Ambassador from the King of Siam in the East Indies waited on His Majesty with great marks of respect.*' Umph! Well leave it, but add, '*Ah, si sic propius.*'

"And then, '*There are rumours that His Majesty intends to call a parliament shortly, in which plan he is hindered only by the state of his gout.*'

"Out with that and write this: – '*In the city is much murmuring that a parliament is not called. Though His Majesty has not played lately at tennis, he showed himself yesterday in Hyde Park, so that some who maintain his health to be the cause deserve no weight. In his company were His Highness the Duke of York and the French Ambassador.*'

"There, you fool," my master continued, flinging two-thirds of the packets back to me. "You will have to amend these, and another time you will know better."

Which showed me that I had still something to learn; and that as there are tricks in all trades, so Mr. Timothy Brome, the writer, did not enjoy without reason the reputation of the most popular news vendor in London. But as I addressed myself to the business with zeal, I presently began to acquire a mastery over his methods; and my knowledge of public affairs growing with each day's work, as in such an employment it could not fail to grow, I was able before very long to take the composition of the letters in a great measure off his hands; leaving him free to walk Change Alley and the coffee-houses, where his snuff-coloured suit and snappish wit were as well known as his secret charity was little suspected.

In private, indeed, he was of so honest a disposition, his faults of temper notwithstanding, as to cause me at first some surprise; since I fancied an incompatibility between this and the laxity of his public views; which he carried so far that he was not only a political skeptic himself, but held all others to be the same; maintaining that the best public men were only of this or that colour because it suited their pockets or ambitions, and that, of all, he respected most Lord Halifax and his party, who at least trimmed openly, and never cried loudly for either extreme.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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