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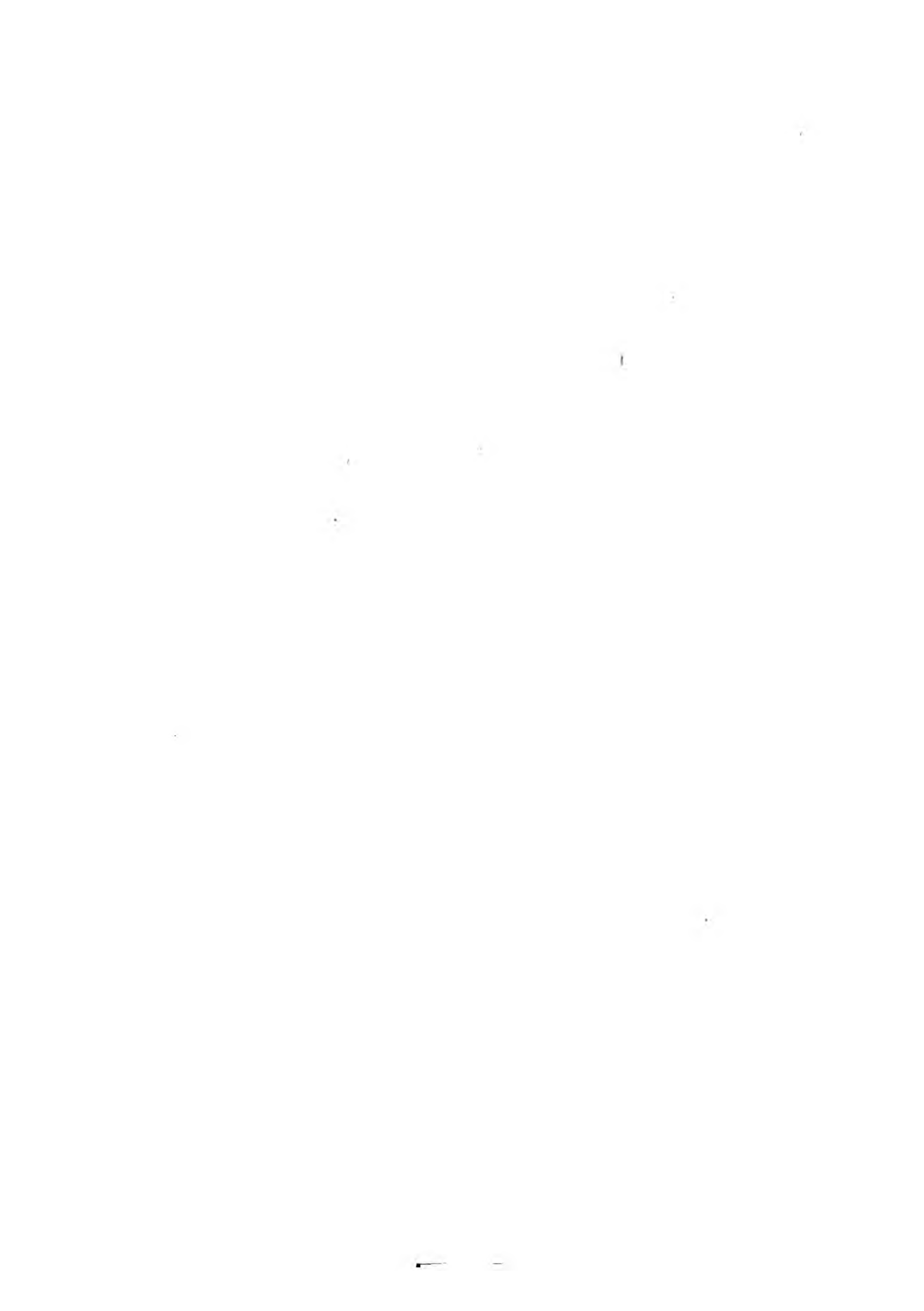
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THE MAID OF "THE MAYFLOWER"

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE CALL OF THE NIGHT-
RIDER

A STORY OF THE DAYS OF WILLIAM
TYNDALE

UNDER COLIGNY'S BANNER

A STORY OF THE HUGUENOTS

AT HIS COUNTRY'S CALL

A STORY OF THE GREAT WAR

FOR ENGLAND'S HONOUR

MORGAN & SCOTT LTD.

THE MAID OF "THE MAYFLOWER"

A STORY OF THE DAYS OF THE
PILGRIM FATHERS

BY

ALBERT LEE

AUTHOR OF

"THE EARL'S SIGNATURE" "AT HIS COUNTRY'S CALL",
"UNDER COLIGNY'S BANNER" "FOR ENGLAND'S MONOUR"
ETC. ETC.

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BOOK I
THE OUTCAST

CHAPTER I

AN ANGRY QUEEN



WHEN Bernard Vincent left the palace he was in disgrace with Her Majesty. Queen Elizabeth was a good mistress, but imperious, unreasonable, and uncertain. Sometimes, when Vincent went on for morning duty, he would find her all pleasantness, ready for argument or for recreation, amiable with her Ministers and her menials, willing to take advice from the former, or condone the faults of the latter. Before evening, too often, her sunny face was clouded over, her answers and orders given with a snappiness which was disconcerting, and even an attempt at conciliation was construed into a wish to be disobliging.

Why there should be such a change, so absolute a revulsion from the gay to the sombre, from the suave to the offensive, no one in the palace could conceive. Her Majesty was a woman of moods, and, taking into consideration her passionate nature, not an altogether safe mistress to serve.

Those about the great Castle at Windsor felt that it was not a pleasant thing to live in such an atmosphere of uncertainty. It has been said that we can confront Death when we know that we stand face to face with him; but to have his sword dangling over our heads by a thread of gossamer, and not to know at what moment it may fall, is

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to be in a position of nameless dread. Lords-in-Waiting, and Maids of Honour, pages, Ministers, and others, often had that feeling when it was their turn to enter the Presence.

Vincent was at Windsor Castle when his disgrace came, and, since it was autumn, the forest and the great park, which he saw from one of the windows, were radiant in brown and amber beauty. Summer was gone, but the sun still induced a rich verdure from the greensward which covered the undulating country, and the vast woodland expanses displayed exquisite harmonies of colour.

"In such an environment no day could be accounted dull here."

Bernard swung round when he heard the words, and found himself face to face with Clare Cortelyon, one of the Queen's Maids of Honour.

His heart beat more quickly, for he loved her. She was in his thoughts night and day. She was his perpetual companion in spirit; and as for beauty—there was no lady in the Court who could vie with her. Her dark eyes could languish or flash fire, and in either mood she had her charm. Her lips were made to smile, but they could display her scorn. Her nature could be sunshine, although her dark skin could suggest cloud; yet she was none the less beautiful. She had fine intelligence, quick and ready wit—in no way was Clare Cortelyon an ordinary woman.

Of course, it was a lover's idea of the woman on whom Bernard Vincent set his heart; but none the less was he ready to hold her in his mind as peerless. Once Master William Shakespeare came to the palace at the Queen's command, to read one of his plays to Her Majesty before it was put upon the stage; and there was one passage which fixed itself in Vincent's memory. He applied it to Clare Cortelyon, so admirably did it suit his sentiment.

An Angry Queen

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“What you do
Still betters what is done. When you speak sweet,
I'd have you do it ever; when you sing,
I'd have you buy and sell so, so give alms,
Pray so; and for the ordering your affairs,
To sing them too. When you do dance, I wish you
A wave o' the sea, that you might ever do
Nothing but that.”

Bernard was in love—“stupidly so,” one of his friends said; “head over heels in love.” But Clare Cortelyon was worth it all. It was delightful to find her standing at his side. Yet it was painful; for, so far as he knew, she did not return his love. She never appeared to soften when he told her that to him she was the only woman at Court, or in all the world, worth the winning. She would be graciousness itself, but when he wanted to be a lover, she held him off at arm's length, and said candidly:

“Bernard Vincent, there must be no more of this if we are to continue friends.”

There was more of it—a great deal more—for Vincent's love would not allow him to be silent, and once or twice she turned on her heel, and left him in the middle of his protestations.

That morning, while they stood side by side at the Castle window, Clare was in a friendly vein, and if the Queen had not come in, Vincent would have put the old question to her. On the instant they were at the service of Her Majesty, and they saw at a glance that she was in her worst mood.

She brought some papers with her and tossed them on the table petulantly. Half of them slid across the polished surface, and fell on the floor. Bernard went forward to pick them up, but she stopped him, speaking her sharpest.

“Let them lie there!”

He waited to know what the Queen's pleasure might

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be. It proved to be abusive, not to Clare, nor to him, Her Majesty's Secretary. She was angry concerning some of her subjects, who were counted among the Puritans, or, as many termed them, Precisians.

"Have they been especially unreasonable, Madame?" he ventured. He went so far because the Queen permitted him ordinarily to speak freely.

She stared at him, and did not answer the question. She went on to speak slightly of some whom Bernard knew to be godly men and women, and he thought it grossly unfair that they should be so maligned, and classed among Papists and criminals. He ventured to say so, and the Queen, who was moving up and down the room in the worst of tempers, halted, and swung round to face him.

"What was that you said?" she asked sharply; and there was a flash in her eyes not pleasant to witness.

"I was saying, Madame, that they are blamed for much when their faults are so few."

He stopped abruptly, but she insisted that he should say what was in his mind, and he obeyed unwillingly, knowing that he had ventured too far.

"It has always seemed to me, Madame, that the Puritans are troubled on trifling points, and I have heard it said that many of them complain that the faithful ministers of the Word are marshalled with the worst malefactors, arraigned and condemned for what some count matters of slender moment."

The Queen interrupted him.

"What things do some count matters of slender moment?" she asked scornfully.

"Some, Your Majesty, are punished for leaving the Holy Days unobserved; some for singing the *Nunc Dimittis* in the morning; some for turning the questions in baptism concerning faith from the infants to the god-

fathers; some for leaving out the cross in baptism; some for omitting the ring in marriage."

He paused.

"Bernard Vincent, go on!" cried the Queen sharply, and her eyes flashed like steel.

"I would rather say no more, Madame."

"I should think not, indeed," came the angry retort. "It is my pleasure that these creatures be treated as rogues, and felons, and Papists, or anything else that is bad within my realm! They shall think as I think, or I will make the land too hot to hold them!"

Bernard had ventured to differ from his royal mistress at other times on some points, and had been forgiven, and he presumed on past indulgences now. In his blindness he went on to what might well be his destruction.

"But, Madame, may not these godly men and women have consciences of their own?"

"Certainly not, while I am Queen!"

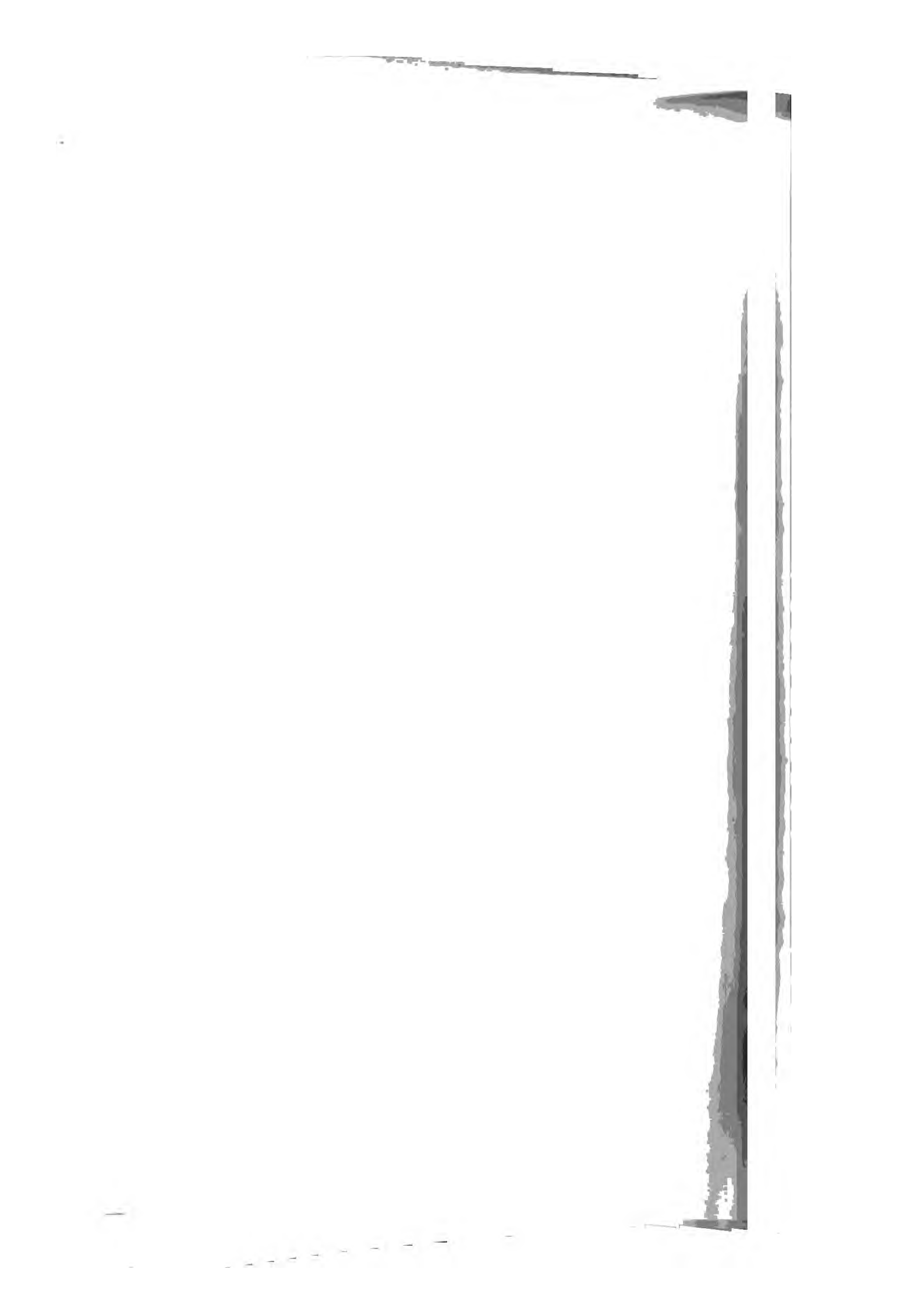
He ought to have taken warning from her tone.

"Surely, Madame, you would not expect them to give up everything to the Crown, and yield to it the absolute direction of their consciences?" he exclaimed incredulously.

"Why not? I will permit no latitude in these matters," the Queen retorted. "There shall be an exact uniformity in doctrine and ceremonies within my realm!"

He marked the flash in her proud eyes, and the almost breathless energy with which she asserted her claim to dominate her subjects, body and soul. But, having begun, and blind to consequences, since he was hot in his argument, he went on. Then he halted abruptly, and wished that he had been dumb. The Queen came forward a step or two, and before he knew what she intended to do, she boxed his ears, and his face tingled with the blow.

"Do you suppose, Bernard Vincent, that I am going to



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allow you to tell me what I ought or what I ought not to do? You must be a Puritan yourself, or you would not say what you dared to say here, in my presence!"

She turned her back on him, and, beckoning to Clare to accompany her, left him standing in the room alone.

He knew not what to do. Even Clare's furtive look of sympathy did not suffice to lessen his consternation. He turned to the window to gaze on the scene without, but neither park, nor forest, nor shining river attracted his attention. At other times Her Majesty had been displeased, but she had quickly found some excuse to bring back her favourite to favour. Not so now. Her face was his assurance that he had sinned beyond forgiveness. What was more, he had the uncomfortable memory of what had chanced when in her anger she had struck the handsome Earl of Essex, for later he passed to the scaffold.

It was ominous.

An hour passed; then he heard the steady tramp of men in the corridor outside. A halt was called. There was the stamp of the end of halberdiers on the polished floor, and stillness followed. That was disconcerting. Still more so when the door opened without ceremony, and the Constable of the Castle entered.

"What mad thing have you been doing, Vincent?" he asked when he had closed the door behind him, and came forward. When Bernard told him, his comment was terse enough.

"You must have been mad!"

There was something Sir Stephen Danforth had to say, but hesitated in doing so; but he spoke after an uncomfortable silence.

"I have to take you to the Curfew Tower, and keep you there during Her Majesty's pleasure. We had better go at

once, since delay will make matters none the more pleasant."

Sir Stephen said it regretfully, and it was something to know that he was not the hard man Bernard had always considered him to be. He had led others to the Curfew Tower, and apparently without compunction. The clang of the iron dungeon door had not disturbed him—had apparently brought him no regret—but this particular commission seemed to be distasteful.

That in no sense lessened Bernard's consternation. The dungeon was a horrible place in spite of the praise which had been lavished on the groined ceiling. It was one thing to be an enthusiast in matters that were antiquarian; it was another to be a prisoner there. It was a place of darkness from whence none could escape without the aid of the grim turnkey, whose heart was too hard to be impressed by any sort of trouble.

Nothing was to be gained by protest or delay. It was useless to ask to see the Queen, and crave her mercy, for she invariably hardened her heart against such appeals.

Bernard followed Sir Stephen, and with the Guard in close attendance, passed into the corridor which led to the Quadrangle. The way after that was through the Norman Gate, and along the road which skirted the moat, encircling the Round Tower. Thence he and his Guard went, in the glorious light of the rich, autumnal morning, down the slope to the Lower Ward, through the archway to the Horseshoe Cloisters, and thence to the stone steps at the base of the Curfew Tower.

He shuddered. On so glowing a day to step into dungeon darkness, and for so trivial a crime! Because he had spoken of human rights, to lose one's liberty—it was a merciless penalty, he thought. Yet it had to be. The

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imperious Queen has said so much, and it was impossible to act contrary to her command.

The turnkey stared at Bernard grimly.

"What has this gentleman been doing?" he asked; but Sir Stephen bade him curtly to mind his own business, and look to the prisoner's comfort while he had him in charge.

"Her Majesty will want to know how he fared, Withers, when she sends for Master Vincent. Therefore be gentle with him, so that he may give a good report—something that may bring promotion."

"Ha! Does it lie that way? Is it a bit of salutary discipline? Will questions be asked when he comes out again?" exclaimed the turnkey, with a grin on his face.

"You may confidently count on that," was the Constable's stern response. "And you may count on this as well, that Master Vincent is not to be treated to bread and water diet, but to good and substantial fare, unless I tell you otherwise."

He turned and gripped the hand of the prisoner before he followed Withers to a cell. The keys rattled in the jailer's hand; the metal screamed in the lock; the door moved on its rusty hinges. Bernard entered, and a moment or two later there was a clang, and he was in total darkness.

CHAPTER II

IN THE CURFEW DUNGEON

BERNARD stood motionless, not knowing where to turn; for he had no idea as to the shape of the cell, whether it was large or small, high-roofed, empty, or furnished. All thinking power had apparently deserted him, for the sudden change in his fortunes had numbed him mentally.

It was some time before he roused from his stupor, and began to acquaint himself with his surroundings. In such darkness he had to use his hands, for seeing was out of the question. Moving cautiously, he reached the wall, and, groping slowly from that point, came to a stool which tumbled over with a clatter when his knee struck against it. A heavy wooden table was near by, and a little farther he touched a bedstead.

There was nothing more. He felt round the walls for a window; they were blank all round, and light had never come into the cell, save when the jailer brought in his lantern.

Seating himself on the stool, and burying his face in his hands, he began to think. He cursed his folly, for he knew the strange temper of the Queen, and from experience he ought to have known that he was likely to fall into disfavour for his mad presumption. But cursing his folly did not better his condition. To travel the fault-

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strewn road of the past only serves to fill one's soul with useless misery and dangerous despair. He knew that; yet he abused himself freely, and was none the happier for doing so.

After a while he considered what he had lost. There was his reputation : that was gone, and he knew that a lost good name is rarely retrieved. He could now be counted among the jail-birds, standing more advantageously, perhaps, because he was not a malefactor, but in a sense a State-prisoner. For was he not paid the doubtful compliment of being thrust into the prison where Queen Anne Boleyn had languished, and which had held many an ill-fated but greater man than himself? But what if, after a few days, he should be set free? Would it not be true that his good name, his honour, his credit, once lost, would probably never return?

He had not long been in the darkness, the haunt of vermin, he knew not what horror, before he felt that it is never good for one to realise the sense of absolute loneliness. The solitary one grows morbid, distorts realities, becomes bitter, fearful, misanthropic, and begins to degenerate. To the lonely one, robbed of the blessings of intercourse with his fellows, the choicest and most entrancing spot on earth—the valley of flowers, the hills of glory, the forest glade—is but a desert.

What, then, of the loneliness of the cell in the Curfew Tower?

Withers did not come near, and the hours went by until hunger formed some sort of distraction. He wished the man would come with something, for the coarsest food would be better than the gnawing discomfort. A drink of water would have been refreshing.

The jailer came at last, opening the door noisily. Bernard saw the streak of light below the door, and was

glad; still more so when he heard the rattle of the keys. When Withers stood in the open doorway, a smoke-begrimed lantern in one hand, a loaf under his arm, and a jug of water in the other hand, Bernard had never before been so pleased to see one of his own kind. Even this ill-conditioned fellow was better than no one.

When Bernard spoke the jailer answered curtly. When he asked whether Withers could not leave him the lantern, the man carried it out of the cell without a word, so that the prisoner had nothing but what one might call a borrowed light.

The jailer lingered, watching Bernard eat as though the coarse loaf was an appetising morsel. Bernard wondered why he blocked up the doorway, and did not go away, until it occurred to him that the fellow was willing to grant some sort of favour if the prisoner chose to pay for it.

The light was desirable, and Bernard asked if he might not have it.

"For a price," came the gruff response.

"What price?"

"Well, for a supply of candles a crown per day."

"'Tis an exorbitant charge," Bernard protested.

"'Tis that, or darkness."

Bernard had been so long in loneliness, and the horror of darkness, that he began to think that anything which bettered his condition was worth paying for, even at prison rates. He drew out a crown from his pouch, and laid it on the table, holding the point of his forefinger on the coin.

"That is yours when I see the supply of candles here," he said quietly, but decisively.

"And not before?" asked Withers sulkily, resenting the implied distrust.

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"Does a man pay before receiving?"

"Prisoners do."

"Then I elect to take the darkness," said Bernard, putting back the coin into the pouch.

That did not suit the warden. He went out, and left the prisoner alone; but the cell door was wide open.

When he heard the outer door clang, Bernard rose to his feet and, passing out by the cell, picked up the lantern. He explored the prison thoroughly. He went to one of the cells and found that it was broad daylight, for the sun came through a long and narrow slit in the stonework. Looking out, although the opening was not more than broad enough for him to put his clenched fist through, he saw the country, bathed in sunshine, the river shimmering in silver as it wound its way amid the meadows. On the greensward across the river, where Eton lay, was a company of riders, following the Queen, who was surrounded by her Ladies-in-Waiting.

One of them, he was confident, was Clare Cortelyon.

It was like looking into Paradise after having been shut in with his desperation and misery; and to see that dear one there, was a sight more beautiful than he had thought possible on earth. If she would only look his way, to give him the hope that she had some thought for the sighing of the prisoner!

She looked. She was too far off for Bernard to see her face, but he saw her gaze in his direction, as if she remembered that one who loved her was shut away from the joys and freedom of that autumn day.

His thoughts were roughly broken in upon.

"What are you doing there?" came the gruff inquiry, and, turning quickly, Bernard saw the jailer.

Without beating about the bush, he put the question to the man:

“What is there to hinder my stay here, rather than in that dark place?”

“Lack of money.”

Bernard's heart beat quickly.

“How much?” he asked, with that nonchalance he could command.

“Well,” came the deliberate answer, “if you were a loyal subject of Her Majesty, I would say five crowns a day; but since you are not only a rich man, but, as I have just now heard, one of those accursed, whining Puritans, the price will be ten.”

Bernard protested, but Withers stood by his terms.

“’Tis ten crowns, or the dark cell.”

Thinking that the Queen might soon relent, Bernard agreed, and returned no more to the rat-infested hole.

Days went by, and he had no other occupation than to watch the country from the narrow, wind-swept window, or sit and indulge in bitter thought. He marked the hours by the chiming of the great clock overhead, when it was night, and he was wakeful; but through the day, when he could look out, and see men and women going up or down the hill which led to the river, or saw the gentles and their ladies pass, the hours were not so dreary. He always had a hope—to see Clare go by.

He saw her twice, and both times she rode with the Queen down the Thames Hill. On each occasion she turned her face towards his prison, first making sure that Her Majesty could not see; and each time Bernard saw that the face had lost its brightness, and was pale. She was certainly sad at heart. Was it because he was locked up within the Curfew Tower walls?

A week had gone, and the Queen had apparently not relented, for no message came. He asked Withers if he could tell him anything, and the man was communicative

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in proportion to Bernard's spending. Then he learned that the Queen had spoken angrily about him more than once; that she had said that Bernard Vincent should pay dearly for daring to espouse the cause of those straight-laced Precisians, who flouted her authority in matters religious, and if he ventured to become one of them he should hang, as so many others had already done.

The seventh day of the prison experience was a glorious autumn day, and Bernard spent many hours of it at the narrow slit in the wall. As on other days he saw the Queen ride by, and as she passed she looked up at the Curfew Tower. Her face was dark with anger. The hand which was free was ungloved, and at her impatient gesture the jewels in her rings flashed in the sunlight. Then she was gone, and there was nothing but the clatter of the hoofs of the horses in the royal cavalcade.

An hour later Bernard saw half a score of horsemen ride by—men of the Guard—and Sir Stephen Danforth leading. The Constable looked up at the Curfew Tower, but his face was full of deep concern. It seemed to Bernard that it must be concern for his own fate. Then did it mean the worst? Was he really to hang, as Withers had reported?

The hours which passed were more full of mental distress than any that had gone before. Something compelled him to the thought that the worst was approaching. He was no coward, for none about Her Majesty had a braver, nobler heart than his; but the thought of his ruined future, and the impossibility of ever wedding Clare—it was that which broke him down, and made him creep away from the window and go upon his knees, where he buried his face in his hands.

"If it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" he exclaimed.

He knew nothing of the opening of the door of his cell, and that the space was filled by the Constable of the Castle. But he heard the sound of Sir Stephen's spurred boots on the floor. He turned, and his heart leapt with fear when he saw the gravity of the Constable's face.

Bernard sprang to his feet, and then the amazing thing happened, for Danforth spoke while his hand lay on the younger man's shoulder.

"God has heard that prayer of yours, Vincent," the soldier said, his voice tremulous.

"My prayer?" cried Bernard.

"I heard you say, 'If it be possible let this cup pass from me!' Was not that a prayer? Well, 'tis answered."

"What!" cried Bernard, but Sir Stephen did not give him time to say more.

"You are dismissed from the Queen's service because you dared to avow yourself a sympathiser with the Puritans."

Bernard wondered where there was an answer to his prayer, in face of this dismissal. So many had gone to the gallows for such trifling faults that he expected the Constable to go on to tell him that dismissal was one step—death the next. Instead, when next Sir Stephen spoke, Bernard's heart bounded with relief.

"I am to set you free at once, and you are to quit the Castle without delay—so little delay, indeed, that I have your horse and your serving-man outside."

Dismissal was better than death, but the recoil came. Bernard had been shamed by his imprisonment, without trial, without an opportunity for explanation, or apology. He turned on his heel to hide his feeling, to regain his mental balance, and consider what he should say. But what was there to say that would alter that decision of the Queen?

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Without a word he stepped towards the door. Withers was there and, halting to draw three or four pieces of gold from his pouch, he put them into the man's open hand. Going to the outer door, he mounted the steps, and, walking round the cloisters to the open space where his horse was standing, he sprang into the saddle. He was angry, filled with resentment because of the harsh treatment, and was about to ride forth with nothing by way of greeting to his man, Pory, or of farewell to the Constable.

But Sir Stephen had followed at his heels, and while Bernard was gathering up his reins he laid a hand on the bridle.

"Do you go without a word of farewell?" he asked.

"Why should I say as much to you, or to anyone here? Who has cared sufficiently for me that I should expend my words on you, or any other?"

He spoke sharply, and bitterly.

"Many care for your welfare, Vincent."

"You among their number, Sir Stephen?"

"Yes."

"But you never came near to ask me how I fared. You never troubled to inquire as to whether I was being treated well, or even fairly in the dungeon. Had I been poor I should have lingered on for all these days—one long horror-filled week—in the windowless cell, with a common prisoner's fare, and with all those noisome pests which make prison life a torment."

The Constable's face filled with surprise.

"You amaze me, Vincent. I was not allowed to come, and thus you have, not my excuse, but my explanation. But the Queen expressly ordered that you should be taken out of the dark cell, and placed in one of the windowed chambers, and you were to be fed well, and comforts served to you!"

“What ‘comforts’ I have had I have paid for, and dearly,” Bernard cried, almost savagely. “That jailer charged me heavily for everything I had, and when I did not buy better, fed me on the coarsest fare. I had to pay him in crowns and nobles when he would have been overpaid in groats!”

Sir Stephen stamped his foot on the gravel in anger, and, bidding Bernard wait, strode across the lawn to the dungeon entrance. He returned before long, bringing the reluctant jailer with him. When the two men halted at the horse’s head, Sir Stephen charged the man with extorting money.

Withers was speechless and sulky.

“Have you the money about you?” cried Danforth.

“No.”

“Fetch it.”

For a moment the jailer halted stubbornly. It seemed as though he would refuse; but he walked away, and when he came again he carried a small bag.

“’Tis here.”

“Give it to Master Vincent. I will consider whether or not to tell the Queen how her jailer dealt with his prisoner.”

The words were so sternly spoken that Withers’ face turned pale. He handed the bag to Bernard, and, turning on his heel, walked back to his quarters. Both men who watched him knew by the savage steps upon the stones, and the man’s clenched fists, that he was cursing them both for having deprived him of his gains.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEMPT OF COURTIERS

BERNARD gave no further thought to Withers, but went on his way. While the horse's hoofs clattered on the stones in the archway of the cloisters, he looked ahead, and his face grew hot with confusion and shame. For by Henry the Eighth's Gateway stood a group of ladies and gentlemen of the Court, as if they waited for someone's coming. He thought it might be the Queen, for she often rode in about that hour; but before his horse had gone many paces across the Lower Ward he realised that they were waiting for him.

But not to give him a kindly greeting, and send him forth to his exile with a friendly word and a token of sympathy because of an undeservedly severe punishment. The company divided in the archway long before he came so far, to form a lane down which he might ride, as they did whenever Her Majesty or any lords or ladies of high rank passed in or out.

The shame of it!—the brutal unkindness of it! for, when they had so divided, several turned their backs on him deliberately. Some of the men faced him, took off their hats, and made a low and mocking bow, the plumes sweeping the stones, as if to make the sham homage more shameful. A few stood stock-still, and scowled, neither

moving nor recognising him. Nearly all the ladies seemed bent on showing Bernard how a lady of the Court could most display her scorn.

“Dear Puritan!” said one, and laughed. Others joined her, and said the same.

There were one or two on whose friendship Bernard thought he might have relied, whatever his condition, but they neither smiled nor scowled, but kept their faces averted, as if it were a matter of indifference who passed down that human lane. He was running the gauntlet of humiliation, and it was added torture when a sweet-voiced, pretty-faced Maid of Honour said—and more offensively because she said it in such dulcet tones :

“Master Bernard Vincent, the Castle will smell more wholesome when it has one Puritan the less in it !”

Laughter rippled down the line, and never till then did the man who was riding to exile know how cruel laughter could be, or how merciless such models of demureness and courtesy could be. Bernard would have been more content if someone had struck him in the face.

He had nearly come to the end of the lane of courtiers, and the hoofs of his horse were clattering less loudly because he was just emerging from the archway when something stung him more than all. The last man in the line was one who was always expressing his discontent at the laxity of royal favour shown to him. Yet Bernard had been kinder to him than to others. He had lent him money to pay his debts; he had relieved him when it was his turn for duty that he might be free for some pleasure-going. Only the day before he had fallen into disfavour, Bernard had asked the Master of the Household to overlook such a breach of duty as might well have led to instant dismissal from the Court. Now Rupert Bernis repaid him for a score of kindnesses which

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had cost the exile much, not one of them having been rendered cheaply.

"The Castle will be well rid of a jail-bird!" he cried, and did so in such coarse tones that some who would have laughed at any other jibe protested.

It was this unkindest cut of all to one who had fallen into disgrace—this desertion when he might have spoken a parting word of friendship, which hurt the most. Even had he not spoken, but had stepped forward for a grip of the hand—the dumbness alone would have counted. It would have been like balm in the hour of torment.

Bernard understood it all now. Those dainty damsels had no need to explain why they tossed their heads, and curled their lips, and looked contemptuous. His quondam companions were telling him by their conduct how they counted him deserving of their contempt for so demeaning himself as to associate with the Puritans—the men and women who were so hateful in the estimation of the Church Party.

It bore that explanation; yet Bernard's fingers itched to use his whip about Bernis, and he would have done so had not his attention been attracted by the sound of an approaching cavalcade. He looked, as did the others, and coming round the corner was a company of ladies and gentlemen, and chief among them Her Majesty.

She had in no sense forgiven him. As she drew level she threw at him a contemptuous glance; then, with averted face, spoke to Clare Cortelyon, who was riding at her side.

Each one in the company followed suit. Not one of them saw Bernard—none save Clare. And she, in spite of the fact that the Queen must needs know what she did, looked at him with kindly eyes, and waved her gloved hand. She was the only friend among them.

When Bernard and Pory had crossed the river, and rode through Eton, making for the Northern Road, the thought of banishment from the Court became more insistent. He had time to think while travelling the country road. The kind and sympathetic look from Clare, and that friendly gesture which all could see—even Her Majesty!—made large amends for the estrangement of the others; and for many a mile he was building up his hope on that simple expression of tenderness.

Or was it pity? The tenderness would serve, but the pity would shame him. If it were pity, it might prove a long, long road to travel before love would be found. If it were tenderness—ah! there would be every possibility for hope.

CHAPTER IV

THE ARREST OF MASTER ROBINSON

BERNARD and his man did not travel far, and because the night came on with unusual blackness, they halted at an inn where they had often stayed.

Much to the landlord's regret Bernard had to sit in the public room, for the house was fuller than usual; but a table was cleared in a cosy corner, whence he could see and hear all that was going on without being put to inconvenience.

"How are things going on at the Castle, Master Vincent?" asked Josselyn, while the supper was preparing.

"Much as usual."

"And Her Majesty?"

"Never better, in spite of her age. She was riding through Henry the Eighth's Gateway when I came away, and looked remarkably well after her ride."

Bernard answered nonchalantly, not intending to advertise his own disgrace.

More would have been said, for the landlord was a rare gossip, but there was an interruption because of the noisy entrance of a stout and rubicund-faced yeoman, not over-gifted with intelligence, and possibly at his best when drinking Josselyn's muscadine, or tasting the quality of the things that came from the larder of the Hen and

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Badger. Yet he considered himself competent to pass judgment on the controversy which was keenly carried on within the Queen's realm.

"I've seen a sight that gladdens one's eyes!" he exclaimed, as he bustled in.

"What sight?" cried one who had just put down his wine-pot, and was wiping his lips with his sleeve.

"One of your Gospellers, or whatever you choose to call 'em, dangling by the neck at the end of a rope. 'Twas worth seeing, for it means one less of the miserable, whining, psalm-singing beasts in the world. Josselyn, get me something to drink!"

While the wine was being brought the talk began to be general. There was one sitting in the far corner whom Bernard had not noticed. He stood for a moment to adjust his dress, and the movement attracted Bernard's attention. He was tall and spare in figure, and his garb was that of one of the clergy, but affording no indication as to whether he was among those who were opposed to the Romish practices in the Church.

Bernard gazed at his intellectual face—that of a scholar who had life before him so far as age went, for he might be anything from thirty to thirty-five years old. His nose was long and somewhat aquiline, and his lips were thin. Beneath his broad, high forehead and brown hair were deep-set blue eyes, which were piercing and restless, and seemed more so when he glanced from beneath his strong eyebrows.

His attention was chiefly taken by the yeoman who had most to say, and said it blatantly. To hear the countryman talk, the Precisians, as he called them, were worse than Turks, and Papists, and heathens, and considering the general estimate of these, they were absolutely bad. "Unspeakable" was the word he used more than once, while he raved mischievously.

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"Come, Adams, that's rather too strong," cried one by way of protest. "I yield to no one in the matter of these Puritans, but one cannot blink the fact that they are clean livers, and professing to be godly men and women, live as such. They are not the foul beasts you call them!"

Adams swung round, his face redder than before, and his voice had more emphasis than when he blustered into the Hen and Badger.

"So, Tom York, it lies that way with you, does it?"

"No, it doesn't. But I'll add my protest when I hear one speaking so foully of clean-living men and women, as you are doing."

"Add your protest!" cried Adams almost savagely. "They are hogs, and dogs, the whole lot of them, and I pray it may be my pleasure to see many a score dangling at the gallows when they have first had their noses slit at the pillory!"

There was an uproar. The majority in the public room were dead against the Puritans, but they disapproved of the unqualified condemnation of the yeoman.

Bernard watched the man in the corner from time to time, and saw that he kept silent only by placing great constraint upon himself. His pale face went paler yet, and the fiercer Adams' invectives were, the more distressed he appeared to be.

The moment came when he could no more be silent. Adams said some scandalous thing, and, rising from his seat, the stranger spoke in clear and measured tones:

"Master Adams—for so I judge your name to be—have you no sense of justice?"

"I?" exclaimed the yeoman. "Why?"

"You speak of men of whom you disapprove as though they were black-hearted rogues, standing shoulder to

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shoulder with murderers, and all that disgraceful company against whom God has fulminated such bitter curses, and so many."

"What if I do? They are all that, and more," came the dogged retort. "Hanging is too good for them! I'd hang, draw, and quarter them, if I could wear the Queen's crown for a week, and have the ordering of the realm's affairs for so long!"

"Their doctrines are the same as yours," said the stranger calmly.

"Oh, are they?" asked Adams, disconcerted for the moment; but he recovered himself, and repeated much of what he had already said.

Before the stranger could respond the door opened, and four men entered. One was the Hundredman of the district, and he carried in his hand the small brass-crowned baton which was the token of his authority.

"Is the Reverend John Robinson in this company?" he asked, looking round the room.

The stranger's face grew paler when he turned to the Hundredman, and spoke amid such silence that the soft shifting of the logs on the hearth could be heard.

"I am he."

"Then I am here to arrest you, in the Queen's name."

Adams rose from the chair in which he had been sprawling.

"So this is the Rev. John Robinson? Well, I thought, when he began to speak, that he was somewhat of a jail-bird."

"Sam Adams," cried the landlord, "if you talk like that in my place, I'll kick you out into the road."

"Do it, Dick Josselyn! Call in your varlets, and let them toss me into the horse-trough; but see what the Hundredman will say. He'd say what he said to that

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mad parson, yonder, 'Master Dick Josselyn, I am here to arrest you in the Queen's name!' Out, I say, on such scum! such riff-raff! If the Hundredman will but give me leave, I'll put the Reverend John Robinson into the horse-trough, and count myself happy in having done Her Majesty some service."

Not content with saying so much, Adams placed his hand on the officer's arm.

"Will your worship permit me to do what I will with yonder fellow for five minutes?"

The Hundredman drew his hand away.

"Mind your own business," he exclaimed sternly. "My men and I are capable of doing ours."

There was a laugh throughout the room, for the blatant yeoman was one of whom the company were often weary, and it was a satisfaction to see him snubbed.

"Is there any need that we stay here, Master Hundredman?" asked Robinson. He turned and took down his hat from a peg on the wall, grasped his walking staff, and stood in readiness. "If it be God's will that I should go to prison, much as I regret the necessity, I must go; but I pray you let us not linger."

Without a word the officer turned and left the room, followed by the prisoner.

"Hadst better follow him, Sam Adams?" said one mischievously, when the tramp of feet outside had died away. "Thou mightst have been of use in case the prisoner had proved one too many for the Hundredman."

There was a burst of laughter, followed by much talk backwards and forwards, some criticism of the Queen's attitude, and no small discussion as to Her Majesty's right to hinder freedom of speech or thought. There was bitterness in plenty against the Puritans, yet there was no stint in the expression of resentment that

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the woman on the throne should dictate what a man should or should not say, and that she should claim the right to judge between what was orthodox and otherwise.

Bernard took no part in the discussion, and when it seemed very much like controversy that would end in blows, he slipped out of the room, and asked the landlord to take him to his sleeping-chamber.

“’Tis a dangerous topic, Master Vincent, and I’ll go downstairs and put an end to it, or there’ll be broken heads,” said Josselyn, wishing his guest a hasty “Good-night.”

CHAPTER V

THE COMING OF A FUGITIVE

THERE was so much to think of that Bernard could only lie awake, and suffer his thoughts to have their way. He tried to imagine what would come to John Robinson, now that he was in the clutches of the law. Would that thoughtful and refined man ever come from the prison? Or would he hang, and remain rotting in chains somewhere, a warning as to the penalties awaiting those who chose to follow their consciences?

It was a question from which he could not get away. That, and the Queen's treatment of him, and Clare's attitude, were matters which drove sleep so far away that Bernard arose, and dressing, sat down to think this thing out to the bitter end.

He started homewards at daybreak, and Pory, when they were on the road, had much to tell of the discussion that ensued after Bernard had gone to bed. But the man's young master's attention wandered, for he was thinking of his probable reception at home. His father had great ambitions as to his son's career in the Queen's service. What would he say when he heard all?

Bernard was in no hurry to get home. He loitered so much on the way, and took so roundabout a road, that it was late in the afternoon of the following day before

he came in sight of his father's mansion. It lay among the meadows, and the westering sun sent a red glow on the windows, so that they gleamed like fire. The fine old house, with its terrace and beautiful pergolas laden with foliage now coloured with autumn glory, had sent a thrill of pleasure through him at other times. But now a chill settled at his heart. A premonition of misfortune came—the idea, if not the certainty, that days were approaching when sorrow would enter the house to which he was riding.

When the iron gateway was in sight Bernard saw a horseman riding through, and to his amazement it was Rupert Bernis. When he rode by, he cried mockingly, "I have taken your father a letter from Her Majesty!"

Bernard's impulse was to turn his horse and follow Bernis, to have the quarrel out with him, once and for all, but Pory laid his hand on his master's bridle, and suggested that he should allow the matter to stand over.

Presently the horse's feet clattered in the courtyard, and when he dismounted, Bernard saw his father standing at one of the mullioned windows, looking stern and troubled, and holding in his hand an open letter. The sight added to Bernard's anxiety, and, leaving his horse with Pory, he went into the house with trepidation. He feared that, because Bernis had forestalled him, his father would misunderstand; and he knew but few men who could say so much that was withering in so few words as he. What would the comments on that letter be?

When he entered the room, halting near the door in uncertainty as to his reception, his father swung round on his heel and faced him. The usual word of affectionate greeting was now unspoken; nor was there the warm handclasp after a prolonged absence.

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"Father," said Bernard falteringly, taken aback by the silence, "have you no word of greeting for me?"

"None, until you can throw some light on such a letter as this which has come from the Queen."

There was smothered anger in the tone, and a sternness which surpassed all that Bernard had before experienced. He went forward and took the letter from his father's outstretched hand, and while he read he turned hot, then cold. The letter was full of contumely. It implied sins of which Bernard was not guilty, and Her Majesty expressed her grief that Sir Percival Vincent should have such reason to be ashamed of his son.

Bernard dropped the letter on the table, and, sitting on a chair close by, buried his face in his hands. It was the thought of being degraded in the eyes of his father, who had been proud of his son, and to come home thus, dismissed and disgraced—it was more than he could endure.

His father stood and waited in silence.

"Father, shall I explain?"

"I am waiting for you to do so. I want you to throw light on what is incomprehensible to me."

There was no token of relenting. The sight of his son's confusion had not softened him, and when Bernard looked up his father's face was set, and there was much in it that rendered explanation difficult; but he took his courage in his hands, and, standing, told his story, adding nothing and keeping nothing back.

When it ended, Sir Percival made no comment and gave no sign. Whether he was stunned with the thought of his son's disgrace, or indignant at the imprisonment on such an impulse, it was impossible for Bernard to discover. The thought that he was standing thus, distressed him and he turned away to the window. He gazed into the

garden, but he saw none of the beauties that were there. The green walk, the pergola in autumn splendour, the pond garden in the distance, with its ornamented terraces—Bernard saw none of it.

But the unexpected happened. An arm came about his shoulder, and the hand that touched his face drew him nearer to his father's side—drew him so closely that Sir Percival's lips came on his cheek. It was years since his father had kissed him; not since his boy days.

"My boy, I would have done the same had I been as you were. Forgive me for judging before I heard what my son had to say. I might have known that he would have done nothing that was not honourable."

Bernard was taken by surprise, and still more when his father led the way into the garden, and, linking his arm in his son's, not only began to talk, but unreservedly declared himself a Puritan.

When Bernard went to his room that night, much exercised in his mind, he sat down to think of this. He did not notice how the hours passed, but at last a sound broke in upon his thoughts. It was at the window which opened on the terrace. He was alarmed, and his hand went to his sword lying on a chair close by, when a man came through the glass doorway. As he entered, the stranger turned, and drew the heavy curtains across the window so that none who might be outside could watch his movements. He was the man who had been arrested at the Hen and Badger; but when he saw Bernard he exclaimed in a mingled tone of mortification and fear.

"Why are you here, Master Robinson?" Bernard cried.

"Pardon me," Robinson panted, for he was breathless and heated. "I sought the room of Sir Percival. Will you take me to him?"

Bernard did not answer, but crossed to the window,

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fastened it, and drew the heavy curtains together, so that through no opening, however little, should any light show, to lead men to suppose that the fugitive had entered there; for Robinson had told in a few brief words how he had broken from his prison.

"Go to the fire, Master Robinson, and warm yourself, for the night is cold," said Bernard; yet hard-pressed though the man was, and in danger, he could not repress a smile.

"I am warm enough, for I have been dashing through the countryside for hours, and I am in a great heat."

Bernard saw that Robinson was bespattered with mud. He had lost his cap; his doublet was awry and torn, as though he had gone through thorny bushes in his race for life; his knees showed how he had crawled into places out of sight, and his hands were streaked with red scratches, even his face was splashed with mud, and his roughened hair was not free of it. It had been a desperate chase, a bold, hard bid for liberty, and now he was exhausted. Utterly worn out, he sank into the chair which Bernard placed for him.

Bernard went to his father's room. In the dim light, thrown on the bed by the smouldering embers in the grate, he saw Sir Percival sit up hastily, and heard the scrape of steel as if he had caught at his sword, and was drawing it from its scabbard.

"Who goes?" he cried loudly, slipping out of bed, and standing ready for resistance.

"It is I, father!" Bernard exclaimed quickly, and the sword was dropped on the bed.

"I thought it might be someone less welcome," were Sir Percival's words. "Why have you come? And why are you not undressed? Why up at this unearthly hour?"

"Never mind that, sir. I have come to tell you that

Master John Robinson, whom I saw arrested at the Hen and Badger, has escaped from jail, that he has kept up throughout a wild chase, and is in my room, exhausted, and hoping for your protection."

Bernard wondered what Sir Percival would say, but he spoke heartily.

"He shall have it. Go and tell him I will be with him in a short space."

Leaving his father to dress, Bernard hastened to his room to set Robinson's mind at ease. He found him alert, as if the footsteps he heard in the corridor might be those of one of the men who had been keeping up the pursuit for so many hours.

"My father will see you as soon as he can dress," said Bernard quickly, to allay the other's anxiety. By the time Sir Percival entered the room, Master Robinson had regained some of that quiet dignity which had won Bernard's admiration when he saw him at the inn, the butt of the shallow-minded Adams. He rose on the instant, and the two men approached each other with outstretched hands.

"You are in trouble, Master Robinson," Sir Percival exclaimed, taking the other's hand. "You are welcome."

"My distress may bring you harm," said Robinson doubtfully.

"Out on the idea!" The response was so honestly spoken that the fugitive was overwhelmed with the kindness.

"They may come here," he ventured.

"Let them come! There is surely some corner in my house where I may hide a man of God! We will waste no time in words, but find a hiding-place without delay; then we can talk as much as you please."

Sir Percival took up a silver candlestick, and, beckoning

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to Master Robinson, he led the way. But in the corridor he halted.

"Bernard, 'twere well to get Master Robinson on the road to a safer place. Go and tell Noyes to have three horses ready—the best he has in the stables—the fleetest; then if any should come hither, we will find a way to frustrate them, and they will discover that my house has no escaped prisoner in it. I can keep the pursuers of Master Robinson a long time at their search, and you and Pory can have him many a mile on the road. Meanwhile he shall have something to eat. After that, he shall rest until the summons comes from any who may be in pursuit; yet that may be a long time," Sir Percival added, drawing aside the curtain and looking out of the window.

"The country is buried in fog," he exclaimed. "And I wot that no riders will care to cross the country now. Still, have the horses ready."

It was morning when Noyes came to Sir Percival's sleeping-chamber, where Master Robinson was sleeping, while his host was resting on the rug upon the hearth.

"There is a summons at the gate, and some riders are there."

"Let them ring again if they list; for why should people be disturbed at this early hour? A man is not obliged to answer every chance caller, especially when it may be a ruse for a bundle of rascals to get into my house, and loot the place, and murder us all."

Noyes turned to go away, but Sir Percival spoke again.

"What about the horses, Noyes?"

"They are ready, Sir, and could go out at the postern-gate where none could see them."

"Then turn a deaf ear to those fellows at the gate, until I come; then I can parley with them, but it shall

not be until Master Robinson and my son are gone. Have nothing to say to them. Leave it all to me."

Master Robinson was already dressed, and Bernard and Pory before long were in the stable looking to the horses, and bringing them out softly. Before many minutes had gone Master Robinson and his companions rode out at the postern-gate, while Sir Percival went to the gateway where the riders were, and began to parley with them. They went carefully, for the fog was dense. It was not dark, yet they were in as much obscurity as though it had been night. There were no sounds anywhere. The birds were silent, save for an occasional complaint at being thus cooped up while it was early day, and unable to go on the search for food. It seemed as though nothing human was abroad, but these three and those who were at the gate of Bernard's home.

Unexpectedly, when they had been some little while on their way, a voice came.

"Who goes there? Halt in the Queen's name!"

Bernard's heart leapt, for it was surely one of those troopers who were scouring the country for Master Robinson.

"On!" exclaimed Bernard, in little more than a whisper, and when each rider drove in the spurs, the startled horses plunged into the mist, where none could see them. Going at this breakneck speed, with nothing to rely on but their knowledge of the road, which they knew would be fairly straight for the next quarter of a mile or more, they took infinite risks. There was a possible plunge into the river at the bend, or a broken body if the horses took the ditch instead of keeping on the Queen's highway.

As by common consent, they pulled up and listened. There was no sound; no sign of anyone following.

"The lych-gate of the church should be here," said

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Pory. "If we took the path through the graveyard and got out on the other side, we could go with ease. The troopers cannot know the country as I do, and 'twill give us time to grope, and the others to lose themselves."

Riding on slowly for a few yards they saw the gate, a dark blotch in the whiteness; but it served their purpose. It was on the latch, and when Pory had opened it the others rode through, and to the gate on the other side of the churchyard. Passing out, they paused. Some sounds convinced them that horsemen were on the road, coming on at a speed which was madness to those who did not know the countryside intimately. There came the sound of a stumbling horse, and a cry. The horses that had been in full career came to a halt; the sound of a man in pain was heard, and after that there was a momentary silence.

Neither Bernard nor his companions dared to move lest they should betray themselves, for sounds in the mist travelled with extraordinary distinctness. Every movement was magnified in the stillness; even the tramping of heavy riding-boots on the gravelled soil. Voices, too, reached their ears—the groaning of an injured man, and the directions given in quick, sharp tones by someone.

They heard, in consequence, all that was arranged. The trooper was to be carried back to the inn while the others were to keep the road in the hope of overtaking those whom they were seeking.

CHAPTER VI

BERNARD'S PERIL

BERNARD did not leave Master Robinson until he had lodged him in a place so safe and in such care that none of the troopers could ever find him. Then Pory and his master debated the question as to their next course.

"If you go back to your father's house just yet, the troopers may be there, suspecting that it was you who were evading them, and aiding in Master Robinson's escape. I can only think of the worst that will befall you in such a case," said Pory seriously, looking at his young master.

"I have been thinking the same, Pory."

"Then what shall you do?"

"Ride to London, and hide there awhile until we discover which way the wind blows," said Bernard. "'Tis safer there than in the country, where you cannot move without attracting attention; but in London you can easily be lost, and none will ask your name and business."

"Let it be London, Master Bernard. But have you money enough?"

"Plenty. My father did not forget it when we came away."

They turned down a narrow lane, and after traversing a labyrinthine path, came out on the Queen's highway to London. When they rode into the great city, horses and

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men alike worn out with the journey, and timing their arrival after darkness had set in, they put up at an inn where they were not known. When Pory had gone to bed for the night, Bernard sat before the fire, thinking of his own concerns.

His mind wandered to Clare Cortelyon, whom he had not seen for many days. He recalled her perversity, her readiness to hold him as a friend, but her persistent refusal to regard him as her lover. She would listen to anything he said, save when he wished to talk of love, and that she put aside.

"As much pleasantry as you please, Bernard; as much serious talk as you may desire. We will ride together, if you will; or I will sing, and you shall play. You shall tell me of your pleasures, or, although I pray you may not have any to speak of, your sorrows. You shall tell me of your ambitions, and if I can further them, since I am much with Her Majesty, and she is fond of me, I will do so as freely as I would for my brother. But I will not have any lover's talk. I want no lover. I never mean to have one. I intend to be what the Queen is. She is the Virgin-Queen, and I am going to be a Virgin Maid-of-Honour, and maintain my liberty."

He did a bold thing after he had sat a long time thinking of Clare. He wrote to Lord Burleigh, asking him for an interview. It was one of those daring ventures which might end in weal or woe—to see the statesman who had more influence over Her Majesty than any man in the realm. He had always been friendly to Bernard, and would perhaps advise him as to the course he should take now that he was in such difficulty. The landlord found a trusty man to carry the letter, and Bernard sat down again to await the messenger's return.

"Is the Queen in London, or at Windsor?" he asked,

when the landlord returned to say that the man was gone.

"In London, sir."

"And all her Court?"

"She came in yesterday."

Seeing that Bernard had no more to say, the landlord left him. He heard the man's heavy feet tramping down the stairs, and then he turned to the old theme—to Clare Cortelyon.

A long time passed, when the latch lifted, and the door opened. It was the landlord, who thought to see Bernard in bed, and was surprised to find him where he had left him.

"Watt brought this from Lord Burleigh."

The man dropped the letter on the table at Bernard's elbow, and with a "Good-night," went away. What Bernard read, when he broke the seal, filled him with a sense of dread:

"Stay where you are, and keep well in hiding. I will send to you later.
BURLEIGH."

He was in danger, surely; greater, perhaps, than he knew.

The night that followed was a sleepless one. The hours dragged slowly when the day came, and he was compelled to remain at the inn, with nothing in the way of activity to while away the time. Most of it was spent at the window, where he watched the passers-by. Some went carelessly, as if they had no cares. Others moved as if the burden and demands of life were heavy.

Pory stole into the room on some excuse, and when he saw his master gazing gloomily at what was going on below, he went to his side to speak; but he became alert, like Bernard, for there were sounds he knew so well—the clatter of the hoofs of a score of horses.

"It must be the Queen," exclaimed Bernard eagerly,

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and at once his thoughts ran to the possibilities. Clare might be with her!

The Queen rode by, and with her a gallant company; but none save one looked up to the window. There was no reason why they should, for none would suppose that Bernard Vincent had the boldness to be in London. That one was Clare, and it was done without a purpose. But their eyes met! It was the same look of grave concern, and Bernard knew that it meant sympathy, to say the least. But when the riders had gone, and the sound of clattering hoofs and jingling harness had died away, his gloom returned. If every man or woman banished from the Court felt as he did, when thinking of the gay cavalcade in the winter sunshine, there was much bitterness that day, and unavailing regrets. Bernard was distressed at his own peril, but more yet at the thought of the days of lost delight, the lost hours in which he might have been so happy, and when, too, he might have made some better headway in the matter of winning Clare's love.

He stood at the window, forgetful of Pory's presence—forgetful, too, of the need for caution. He was in greater danger than he knew; for unknown to him a man was in a room on the other side of the street, hiding behind the curtains, and gazing at Bernard with malicious-looking eyes. A look of exultation swept across his face, and he drew still farther from the window, lest he should be seen.

Neither Pory nor Bernard saw him, and neither knew that their hiding-place was known to Rupert Bernis.

CHAPTER VII

CLARE'S COMING

IT being winter-time, the evening came on early. Pory had gone to the stable to look to the horses ; for in the dreary hours Bernard had grown so restless that he felt it would be intolerable to stay in London. Better a score of times over to be in the country, to range at will, but alert to evade the men who were doubtless searching for him. His idea was, that when night came he would ride away with Pory, and take his chance, trying to keep himself from despair by the thought of that beautiful face which betrayed such sympathetic solicitude.

Under any ordinary conditions the cosy room, with its roaring fire and curtained window, would have ensured comfort ; but cosiness could not affect him now. Why should he consider himself in danger ? Why should Lord Burleigh tell him to keep in hiding ? Had it leaked out in any way that he had aided the escape of Master Robinson ? He went hot at the thought, for in the Queen's present mood that was a sin beyond forgiveness.

A soft tap came on the door, and before he could speak, the latch lifted. He thought it was Pory, and did not turn ; but a few moments later a hand was laid on his shoulder, and he felt some warm breath on his face. He looked round quickly, and exclaimed in wonder, for bend-

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ing to him was Clare, dressed as if for a journey. The fire-flash showed that her face was full of concern.

"Clare!" he cried, springing to his feet, and, bending, he took her hands in his, and kissed them. "Why have you come here?" he asked, still holding her hands, for she did not draw them away.

"Bernard, I have come to tell you of your danger," she said, her voice tremulous; and he saw by the firelight how pale she was; how full of distress.

"I know I am in danger, my darling!" he exclaimed, not thinking how greatly daring he was in saying so much.

"You do not know the full extent of it," said Clare, and she gazed at him in a way that filled him with fear. "Listen, for the moments are precious," she went on, her hands still in his. "You were to be arrested by Sir Conrad Lyall, the Hundredman in your county."

"I am not surprised. I suppose it was because I aided Master Robinson to escape?"

"Yes," came the answer. "But now your hiding-place is known. I saw you at the window when I rode by with the Queen, and Rupert Bernis saw you! And therein lies your immediate peril, my dear."

Bernard's heart leapt at those last words, even while he felt the thrill of dread at the thought that his hiding-place was known. Clare did not give him time to speak.

"Bernard, he stood at a window opposite to yours, and saw you. When the Queen returned from seeing Lord Burleigh, who is ill, Bernis was waiting, and in my presence he told Her Majesty that you were in London."

"And then?" asked Bernard, with bated breath.

"Ah, then! 'Twas that which brought me here, my love—for that you are, in very deed, Bernard! I have come to save you, for, were you to die, the light of my life would be blotted out."

Her face was tear-wet now, and Bernard, dropping her hands, threw his arms around her. She nestled against him as if it did her good to be so near.

"Bernard, my love!" she cried, lifting her lips. "Kiss me, for now you are all in all to me. We must go through life together. If it be weal for you, 'tis weal for me. If woe, then it is mine to share it with you. One kiss more, and then we must be gone, for in two hours from now it is arranged that you must be taken to the Tower."

"Where can I go?" asked Bernard.

"Where I shall take you, for I know a place where they will never dream of seeking you."

"They will miss you."

"Nay, for my time of Waiting expired an hour ago, and I am free for several days, so that my movements do not concern the Queen. How long before you can be ready?"

Some heavy footsteps were on the stairs, and Clare, disengaging herself from Bernard's arms, turned to the closed door, her face displaying her fear; but a moment later Pory entered. He halted in the doorway, in confusion, when he saw who was with his master.

"Pory, come in, and shut the door," said Bernard. "This lady—you know her?"

Pory nodded.

"She brings me bad news. I am to be arrested two hours hence, and taken to the Tower; but Mistress Cortelyon says she can find me safe hiding if we can set out speedily. When can the horses be ready?"

"In a few minutes," said Pory, betraying his alarm. "We'll ride out at the back gate, and avoid the street."

He went away, and in the brief space that followed, Clare watched while Bernard gathered his belongings together.

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Within a quarter of an hour they rode through the gateway at the back of the inn, and before long the city lay behind them. The road was more than ordinarily lonely, for those who dwelt in the country had kept within doors rather than be in the stinging cold, where they could do nothing profitable, and where no pleasure was procurable.

"Clare!" said Bernard, only dimly seeing the girl who rode at his side.

"Yes," was the quiet response.

"Give me your hand."

It came to his without a moment's hesitation.

"'Tis mine, my darling?"

"For ever," was the soft answer, and her small hand, drawn away for a moment, came back to him ungloved, and he covered it with kisses.

"To think that I held you off so long, my dear, and yet in my heart of hearts I loved you so!" she said, drawing her horse nearer to him. "Bend over and kiss me. Tell me again how much you love me. Let me hear what I have always loved to hear. And forgive my perversity!"

Their horses were pulled up, and the lips of the lovers met in the darkness.

"When shall we marry?" Bernard asked. "When this danger is overpast?"

"Not so far away as that," was the answer.

Pory was riding in front. He noticed the cessation of the sound of hoofs behind him, and smiled; but it was a smile which told of his gladness that these two were happy, even in the extremity of their danger.

"They'll wed ere long, please God," he muttered to himself.

An hour later he heard Bernard's call, and, turning in

his saddle, saw in the light of the newly risen moon that Clare and his master had halted at some iron gates. They were at the entrance to a drive which ended at a house he had known in other days, which had an evil reputation, as being haunted and avoided.

"Come back," cried Bernard, and, swinging his horse round, Pory returned and followed them through the gateway.

They pulled up presently at a house which, as the moonlight played upon it, was the picture of ruin. It was covered with ivy, which crawled over the roof, or hung in heavy masses.

"There is a bell there," said Clare, when Bernard had lifted her out of her saddle.

"What!" exclaimed Bernard, "is there anyone living in such a place?"

"Pull the bell, and see," said Clare quietly. The moon was shining full on her face, and he saw that she was smiling at his bewilderment.

The iron handle creaked when he forced it to move, but a loud peal rang through the house, followed by the sound of footsteps within. A bolt was drawn, the door swung open, and a woman stood in the full moonlight.

"Ha! 'tis my sweet young mistress," she exclaimed, drawing back for Clare to enter.

"Mary, go round with this good man to the stable, and, when he has seen to the comfort of the horses, give him food, and plenty of it. Is Master Redfern in his room?"

"Yes, mistress," the buxom little woman answered briskly, and, tripping down the steps, she led the way for Pory and the horses. Clare closed the door, and she and Bernard stood side by side in the great hall, lit only by the candle on the table.

Bernard gazed around curiously, and everywhere there

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was dilapidation. The tapestries on the walls, depicting historic scenes, were moth-eaten; the rugs on the floor were rat-eaten, and dust-laden. There had been some attempt at restoring order, but with poor success. The furniture was not dusty, but the seats of the chairs were worn and time-eaten, while other things spelt out the one ominous word, "ruin." A long table, inlaid with ivory, stood in the centre of the hall, and by the walls were rusty suits of armour, and ragged banners which had done service on old-time battlefields.

"What does it mean?" asked Bernard, in bewilderment.

"Don't you know that once upon a time my family left their home because of some great trouble?"

"I remember now," said Bernard.

"This is it. 'Tis mine, since I am the last of my family," Clare explained. "My other home you know, but that does not concern us just now." She drew Bernard down so that she might whisper to him. "Some day that other home may see you master in it, my love." She said it shyly. "But come. 'Tis in the room yonder we shall find the Reverend John Redfern, hiding, as you are, from Sir Conrad Lyall. None would think to find him here—an abhorred spot to which none will come unless compelled."

Bernard bent, and whispered, and her face flushed; but she recovered quickly.

"Yes, my beloved, he shall make us man and wife when you will," she answered. "I shall be as content as though His Grace, the Archbishop, married us."

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONSPIRACY

FOR many days of their early married life Bernard and Clare remained in the seclusion of the dilapidated mansion. Word came through that when the Queen heard that Clare had married the man whom Her Majesty had disgraced, and was somewhere in hiding with him, she stamped her foot in anger.

“The wilful baggage!” she cried. “If she comes into my presence she shall be lodged in the Curfew Tower as Bernard Vincent was! And as for him!” She paused as if for words. “The moment I know where to lay hands on him he shall hang! You are there, Rupert Bernis?”

“I am here, Your Majesty,” said Bernis, stepping forward from his place at the curtained door.

“Here is a commission, and see that you ride hard to fulfil it. Find Clare Cortelyon and Bernard Vincent, and bring them here. Lodge them in the Curfew Tower, but in separate cells. As for that husband of hers, he shall hang within the hour I know him to be there.”

That news came through, and it thrilled them with dread. Clare’s fear was not for herself, but for her husband. Would Bernis find them? The question haunted her night and day, and for many a week they remained in seclusion, never venturing, except by night, into the entangled garden, lest their hiding-place should be discovered.

News came at intervals of gay doings at Court. There were stories of festivities and royal progresses, when it pleased the Queen to pocket her frowns and display her smiles; and these two were out of it all. Sometimes Bernard surprised his young wife in her boudoir, looking sad, and more than once in tears. One day he saw her on her knees, her hands clasped on the table, and her head bent down. She was praying, and he heard the words, the pleading that the search for her husband should be frustrated.

Feeling that it was not good for Clare to be shut up in the ruinous old house, far from any human kind except her husband and Pory, and one or two others who were old and trusted servants, he determined one day to ride by night to his father, and talk over the possibilities of staying there. He started at dusk, but finding that the countryside was beset with wandering bands of branded vagabonds, he talked the matter over with Pory, and decided to stay at an inn for the night, and make their following plans according to circumstances. Yet it was taking infinite risks.

The inn was full but for one room, and Bernard resolved to share it with Pory.

"Is this our room?" asked Bernard, halting at an open door.

"Nay, master, 'tis engaged. Someone came this afternoon, and said that two gentlemen would arrive late tonight; as they were on the Queen's business, he bespoke accommodation for them. They may arrive now at any moment."

The landlord threw open the door of the room Bernard was to occupy, but left him at once when he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs on the road. Bernard was standing at the door of his room, which was in darkness, and was

startled with what he saw. Two men ascended the staircase, following the landlord, the light of whose candle fell on their faces. The first of them proved to be Rupert Bernis; the other he did not know, but he wore the garb of a Gentleman Pensioner.

"This is the room, gentlemen," the landlord said obsequiously.

Bernis and his companion entered the room, and closed the door, and for a time Bernard heard no more of them. To rest with danger so near was impossible. While he stood at the open window, wondering what he should do, three gentlemen rode up to the inn, and, calling to a stableman, asked whether Rupert Bernis had arrived. Hearing the answer, and dismounting, they asked to be shown to Bernis' room.

When the passage was empty, and the door was closed, Bernard slipped past and, descending the stairs, went out to the road, where he walked to and fro, trying to decide his course. Here was danger. Was it possible that Bernis had discovered that Clare and he were hiding in the haunted mansion, trusting to its ill name for safety? Should he ride there with Pory at once and get Clare away, taking the risk of going to his father's house unexpectedly? He determined that he would, and with this intention returned to the inn, thinking to tell his man to get the horses ready, that they might ride home again.

Mounting the stairs in the darkness, he saw a line of light beneath the door of Bernis' room, and heard the low murmur of voices as he passed. When he came to his own door and flung it open he was surprised to find the room in darkness, and, entering, he bundled against someone.

"Softly," came a whisper. It was Pory, and he was almost blocking up the doorway.

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"What is it?" Bernard asked, in a low tone.

"Do you see that slit of light in the partition?"

"What of it?"

"Go to it, and see what you will see, and find out for yourself what mischief is brewing."

"Mischief?" Bernard ejaculated.

Without putting any further question he went on tip-toe to the line of light, and looked into the room where Bernis was lodged. He and four other men were seated at a table, conferring eagerly in low tones, but suspecting nothing in the way of being overheard or under observation; they spoke with such freedom that he heard every word. It was odious to him—a man with so high a sense of honour—to play the part of eavesdropper, but Pory's seriousness compelled him to set aside his scruples.

He grew hot with indignation. The Gentlemen Pensioner had thrown aside his gorgeous coat, and Bernard knew him to be not what he seemed, but a priest named John Ballard, while the other three were men whom he had often seen at Court. One was Morgan. The other two were Gifford and Greatley. They were deliberating in the most cold-blooded manner how they could perfect a plot for the Queen's assassination.

While Pory and Bernard listened, with their ears close up against the long slit in the partition which divided the rooms, a letter was written by Ballard, and, as he wrote, he said the words aloud for the others to hear, they interpolating suggestions from time to time. The letter was being written to a man named Anthony Babington. When it was completed and sealed, lots were drawn as to the bearer of it.

"I dare not draw the lot," exclaimed Bernis. "I am on the quest for Bernard Vincent and his wife, who was Clare

Cortelyon. I have to find them and take them to Windsor. Vincent is to hang soon after we get there."

"That's nothing to us," exclaimed Ballard sharply. "You will take the risk like the rest of us. Bernard Vincent can wait, for a day or two either way will not matter."

"Very well," responded Bernis reluctantly; and two minutes later the lot fell to him.

Bernis took the letter, and for safety's sake slit open the leather of his heavy riding-boot, and thrust the missive between the open folds. Ballard, who suggested this expedient, produced some waxed thread and a needle, and fastened the slit securely; then tossed the needle and what remained of the thread on the table, where it lay unobserved. Bernis did not draw on his boot again, and it lay on the floor where Ballard had tossed it.

The men rose to their feet to separate.

"We will meet at Lawrence House, in Chelsea, on Friday night, at ten," said Morgan. "Tell Babington to be with us, Bernis," he added; and, turning on his heel, he left the room, followed by the others, save Bernis, who remained behind.

Keeping near the slit, Bernard whispered to Pory to follow the men downstairs, and mark what happened. The man returned in a quarter of an hour with the report that the four had ridden northwards.

"That leaves the London road clear," Bernard whispered.

"What of that?" Pory said; but a moment later the full meaning of the words came to him, and he followed up his conception of it with a question.

"You do not propose to ride to London, Master Vincent?"

"I do."

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"'Tis madness! 'Tis riding to death."

"'Tis death for the Queen if we do not go," came the answer. "Pory," Bernard said, still in a whisper, "I'll take the chance. I'll go, whatever the consequences; for this thing shall not be!" "It shall not be!" Bernard repeated in a tone which convinced Pory that no argument would change his master's purpose.

There was a silence which Bernard broke.

"If possible I mean to carry the letter."

"How so?" came the other's question in a puzzled tone.

"I'll wait till Bernis sleeps."

They waited, long and patiently. Bernis sat and drank, steadily and persistently. The light of the candle lit up his face, which began to display anxiety and concern, as if, now that he was alone, he realised the gravity and danger of the contemplated crime. He apparently drank to forget, and after a while he laid his head on the table, and fell into a drunken sleep.

"Now is the opportunity," said Bernard, when he was assured that the sleeper would not awake; but no reply came from Pory. A few moments later, while he still peered through the slit, wondering where his companion was, he saw the door of Bernis' room open slowly. Then Pory's head appeared. After that came his whole body, and with two or three swift but noiseless strides, he bent down for the riding-boot. At the door he halted, as if he had forgotten something. He returned to the table, and, bending over the sleeper's shoulder, picked up the needle and thread, drew it cautiously from beneath Bernis' arm, and went away.

It was not a long task to cut the thread and extract the letter, which Bernard thrust into his doublet. To avoid suspicion, and smiling while he did so, Pory thrust three or four pieces of blank paper into the empty space

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before he sewed the leather folds together, careful to put the needle into the same holes.

“I’ll carry the boot back,” said Pory, and Bernard, at the slit again, saw him steal into the sleeping man’s room, and lay it down on the hearth.

CHAPTER IX

“TO SEE THE QUEEN”

IN half an hour they were on the way. Bernard made some explanation to the landlord, and since he was paid for the full night's accommodation, and received as well a handsome gratuity, the man did not care whether his guests slept in their beds, or chose the road and risked its dangers.

It was the hardest ride Bernard had ever had. The horses almost broke down under the pressure put on them, and when they began to flag, he took post-horses boldly in the Queen's name, changing for fresh ones at every stage.

On reaching London, disappointment was in store for Bernard, for Her Majesty had gone to Windsor the day before. Hearing that Lord Burleigh was in town, he called on him, and, sending in word that he came on a matter of life and death, he was admitted to his lordship's room without delay.

Lord Burleigh's greeting was disconcerting.

“Have you no care for your neck, Vincent? No fear of the gallows that are waiting for you when Bernis finds you?” his lordship asked grimly.

Bernard's face blanched at the words, but he had counted the cost, and expected the worst while he was on the road.

“I am aware, my lord; but I want you to hear my story.”

Burleigh listened in surprise, and his anger increased as the tale proceeded. When Bernard ended he toyed with the sealed letter which had been handed to him, as though he would open it.

“She shall open it herself, and you shall tell the Queen your story, just as you have told it to me,” said Burleigh, returning the letter to Bernard.

“I am in disgrace, my lord, and, as you said, death awaits me,” Bernard objected, his courage failing him now that he was faced with the prospect of meeting Her Majesty.

“If she be a true woman, Vincent—and who would doubt it who knows her?—the Queen will forego everything in consideration of such a service. Go down to Windsor, and don't be put aside by any jacks-in-office. If needs be, ruffle their gold-laced dignity by blows, if you will. Do anything, so that you see the Queen. I will give you that which any man in Windsor will hesitate to disregard.”

Burleigh turned to the table and wrote on his coroneted paper :

“Admit Master Bernard Vincent to Her Majesty's presence without delay. His is State business of the first importance, and any who hinder him on his errand will do so at their peril. BURLEIGH.”

His lordship went with Bernard to one of the rooms where food was on the board. Sending for Pory, he bade the honest fellow set aside ceremony, and sit and eat, and, meanwhile, bidding someone order fresh and fleet horses, and an escort of four well-armed men, he sat and waited until the hunger of his visitors was appeased.

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"Friday is perilously near, and I would like to know what Her Majesty's will is concerning those scoundrels who intend to be at Lawrence House that night," said Lord Burleigh, when Bernard rose to start on his journey.

He shrugged his shoulders when the horsemen had gone out of sight.

"Surely she will not allow malice to override such service as Vincent's," he said to himself, when he turned away. "But there's never any telling what her temper may make her do," he added gravely.

It was sunset when Bernard arrived at Windsor. The men on duty stared when the riders clattered through the gateway, and rode up the Lower Ward towards the Norman Gate. One or two whom Bernard had known, who had been among those who insulted him by their mock civility and their added insolence in that line of courtiers at the gate, rubbed their eyes when they saw him going up the hill at a quick trot, with Pory and four of Lord Burleigh's men at his back.

"Has he returned to have another spell in the Curfew Tower, and then hang?" asked one, loudly enough for Bernard to hear.

When he pulled up at the entrance, Bernard dismounted, and asked for Her Majesty. One of the young gallants on duty stared him up and down, saw how dusty and travel-stained he was, and laughed in his face. Bernard found it difficult to restrain himself; otherwise he would have struck a blow which both might regret. He had to see the Queen. That was the dominating idea with him; to see her, forgetful of insolence, in face of all refusal, whether or not he had afterwards to go to his death.

Strangely enough he had forgotten Burleigh's letter,

which would be the “Open Sesame”; but he remembered it when Lord Aytoun saw him ascending the Grand Staircase, and sought to bar the way.

“What is your business, Master Vincent?” he asked sourly.

“To see Her Majesty.”

“You are forbidden the Palace. Surely you are aware of that? And already an order is out for your arrest.”

“Notwithstanding all that, my lord, I must see Her Majesty,” Bernard exclaimed sharply, resenting his lordship’s tone.

“It becomes my duty to stand in your way,” Aytoun answered, and he did so literally.

It was then that Bernard remembered.

“In face of this, my lord, you will stand aside, and allow me to pass,” he said, unfolding Burleigh’s letter, and showing it to Lord Aytoun, who read it. His lordship’s pale face flushed.

“I ask your pardon, Master Vincent. Ignorant of this, I did no more than my duty.”

He stood and considered, and meanwhile some of the men and women of the Court drew near. They had watched the controversy with some amusement, but none ventured to intrude, either with advice or question.

“Time presses, my lord. ’Tis a matter of life and death—and not my own, or I should not be here,” said Bernard, after waiting some minutes. “It says, ‘Without delay.’”

“Yes; I forgot that. Follow me.”

Lord Aytoun turned on his heel, and led the way. Here and there they passed little groups of richly dressed men and women, who stared at Vincent in amazement. They had supposed that his feet would never again tread the stately corridors, and certainly he would never again

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have audience with the Queen. Had Bernard gone alone they would have tittered, to say the least. They might have shown him mock courtesy, as they had done at the Gateway so long ago. But Lord Aytoun's grave face, and Bernard's own determined carriage when he walked past the groups and couples as though they were nowhere near, amazed them so much that they knew not what to think.

"Is Her Majesty within?" Bernard asked, when his lordship halted outside the Queen's writing-room, where at that time of day she was generally to be found.

"She is, Master Vincent. Shall I announce you?"

"Please, but do not name me. Ask Her Majesty to receive a gentleman with urgent news from Lord Burleigh—very urgent, my lord."

"As you will."

Bernard stood without, and a moment or two later he was ushered into the Presence.

"You bring me news from Lord Burleigh," said the Queen, not looking up while she spoke, being engaged with papers on the table at which she was seated. But then she glanced in Bernard's direction.

"You!" she cried, in anger. "You! How dare you come hither, Sir? Would my lord insult me by sending such as you into my presence? Better send his meanest lackey as his messenger than one who dared to flout me as you did, and whom I have ordered to be hung!"

The Queen was pale with anger, and stamped her foot. Before Bernard could speak she bade him begone. He stood, and did not move, and his silence, his slackness of obedience, his audacity, rendered her speechless.

"I dare not obey Your Majesty until I have told my business," he said.

Still she was silent. Words failed her when she saw

one before her who did not heed her imperative command. It was something absolutely new in her experience.

“’Tis a matter of life and death, Your Majesty!” Bernard cried, beginning now to speak rapidly, lest she should have time to speak, and refuse to listen. He drew the fateful letter from his bosom.

“Madame, it is *your* life or death. Hear what I have to say, and after that, since, as you say, you have condemned me, I must needs die. But I shall have saved the Queen.”

He had disarmed Elizabeth by his eagerness, and by the words which sounded so much like threatening peril. She sat down, and did not speak, and Bernard, not waiting to be told to proceed, began his story from the moment when he saw Bernis enter the inn.

“Give me the letter,” cried the Queen, holding out her hand.

Bernard had never seen her hand tremble save when in passion; but now she shivered, as if with ague. She examined the seal; then she tore the letter open, and read it. She re-read, and read again, and, crumpling the paper in her hand, walked to and fro, agitated almost to tears.

“Leave me, but stay within call,” she said presently; and she spoke as she was wont to do when Bernard was in favour. “Send Lord Aytoun to me without delay.”

He left the chamber, and sought his lordship. Those whom he asked answered him almost automatically. They did not understand why he should be there to tell one or another to do this or that, as in the old times; but no one disobeyed; not even the page who had made a grimace when he saw Bernard Vincent pass along the corridor in Lord Aytoun’s company.

His lordship was closeted with Her Majesty for several minutes, and, coming out again, he asked Bernard, with a

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consideration and courtesy which surprised him, to bid the page find the Master of the Household, and one of the Lords-in-Waiting.

"Remain within call yourself," Lord Aytoun added. In the brief moments which sufficed for his request, he laid his hand on Bernard's shoulder, and said yet more in a low voice, "Forgive me, Master Vincent. I have been unjust to you."

An hour barely sufficed for the conference between the Queen and her Great Lords, for one and another was sent for from time to time. Each, as he entered, looked at Bernard askance; but when they came from the interview they smiled on him. None had anything to ask his pardon for, for none had ever been other than kind. Each took his hand, but Bernard could not remember whether one of them said a word. They had that to do which might well take up their thoughts. But the perplexity of the onlookers who were loitering about increased when they saw how Bernard was being treated. Was he to hang?

The last to leave the Queen was Lord Aytoun, and, seeing Bernard standing at one of the windows of the corridor, looking out on the enchanting scene beyond the river, where the College Chapel at Eton nestled among the elms down by the waterside, he called to him.

"Her Majesty wishes to see you," he said, and led the way into the Presence.

"Bernard Vincent," the Queen began, as gracious now, and as smiling, as she had been fierce and cruel an hour before, "I have done you a grievous wrong, and I am sorry. Come here."

Bernard advanced, and she held her hand for him to kiss. Never had he gone on his knee to her with so glad a heart.

“Yet, you know, I had out a warrant for your death, and I cannot understand your courage in coming here, knowing it to be so.”

“It was my duty to take the risks,” said Bernard quietly. “The Queen was in danger.”

She smiled.

“Well, that ends it; and for all the past I am unfeignedly sorry. As for the present, you have placed me under a debt of lasting gratitude which I shall find it hard to repay.”

Bernard took his courage in his hand.

“Do but reinstate me, Madame, and my wife, and you cannot think how happy we shall be.”

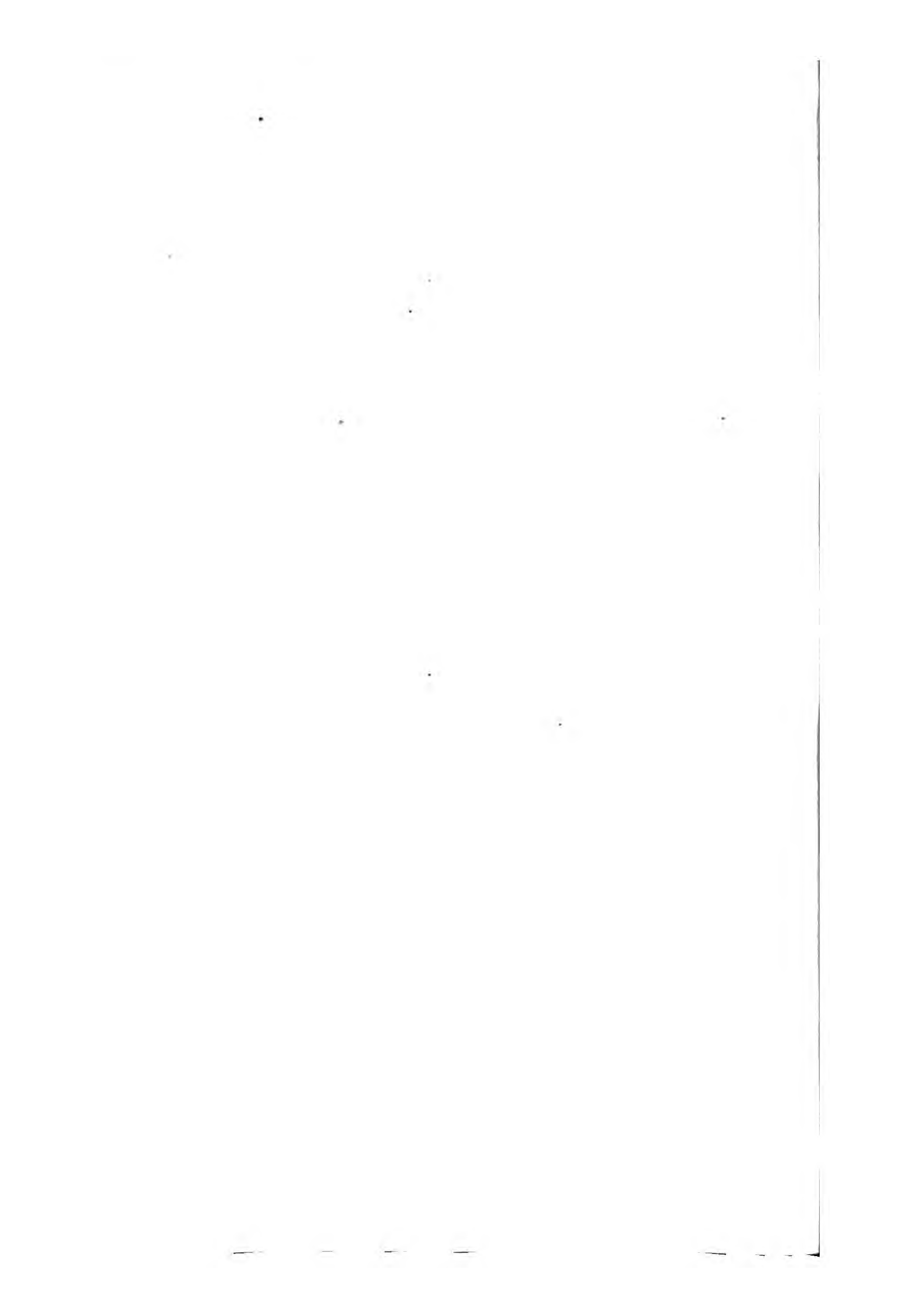
“Your wife?” The Queen’s face brightened. “Stand up, Vincent, and tell me all about her. God bless the child! I have felt lost without her.”

“She has been unhappy not to be with Your Majesty,” said Bernard, now face to face with his royal mistress.

There was a softness in the Queen’s voice when she answered him.

“Go for her. Bring her here to me. Tell her to come quickly. I would fain tell her with my own lips how I appreciate this splendid service her husband has rendered to his Queen.”

A week later, Clare was in Windsor Castle again. Bernard watched with dim eyes when the Queen took his darling in her arms, and kissed her, and when she held her at arm’s length to see whether she had added to or had lost any of her beauty since she had gone away. What she thought she did not say, but she folded her in her arms again. For the time being she was not the Queen, but the gentle woman who found it gladness to have those whom she loved with her again.



BOOK II
THE VIRGINIANS



CHAPTER X

THE WARNING

BERNARD stood in the same mullioned bay-window as that in which he found his father standing when he returned home in disgrace from Windsor Castle. And here, as then, he was gazing into the garden, and, as then, with unseeing eyes. He was scarcely aware of the beauties that were there: the green walk, the pergola covered with late summer splendour, the pond-garden with its ornamented terraces, and far beyond it the dark green ridge of forest.

His thoughts were on the things which had happened since his father's death, making him the Master of the Manor. The Queen had died, kind to the last to him and Clare, in spite of what Her Majesty termed their lamentable lapse into Puritanism, "which thing I hate," she always said with an emphasis which left no doubt as to whether it was really so.

Then King James sat on her throne, and neither the palace in London nor Windsor Castle had any place or duty either for Bernard or his wife. His Majesty made it known that he "would have no canting Puritans" about his Court; and hence Sir Bernard and Clare came to the Manor and settled down to country life, infinitely more happy than before, and having the crowning joy of a little daughter's presence in their home.

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The window was open, and through it came the sound of a child's laughter. It was Flora, and with her was a great mastiff, standing in good-tempered meekness while she garlanded him with flowers, prattling to him the while, and laughing when she sought to keep his waving tail still, to decorate it. Her mother sat on the carved marble seat at the fountain, watching.

Bernard saw none of it, for his thoughts went to the King, who was making unhappiness throughout the kingdom by his resolution to assert his kingly right to interfere in men's religious opinions and sacrifices. It was not alone the King's intrusion on religious matters. Men were talking everywhere of the Sovereign's outrage on the civil rights of men who thought as His Majesty did not think, especially when he set forth the maxim concerning the dignity and power of such a Prince as himself, and that if he chose, it was within his right to mitigate or suspend any laws which did not meet with his own approval.

"The men of England will not brook that," said Bernard. His mind reverted to what had happened the day before, when he sat in the House of Commons, of which he was a member. The question of privilege had come up for discussion. The King had insisted that the judgment of the House should not be permitted on a point at issue, and had declared to the Speaker that the House should hold a conference with the Judges of the Realm.

Like other members, Bernard wondered at the look upon the Speaker's face when he rose to deliver a Message from the King.

"Gentlemen," the Speaker said, in his quiet, but incisive voice, "His Majesty sent for me concerning the election of a member to this House. He declared that

he was distracted in judgment as to the merits of the case, and for his further satisfaction he commanded, as an absolute King, that there shall be a conference between his Commons and the Judges. That, gentlemen, is the Message."

The Speaker sat in his Chair, and dead silence followed. Members looked at each other. Here was an assumption of control intolerable to men who had fought so seriously for their privileges; but would anyone dare to say "Nay" to the King?

There was a movement, and every eye turned in the direction of the sound. Bernard Vincent was on his feet, and his eyes were fixed on the Speaker. His face was pale, and his hand, which held a paper in it, trembled slightly. Did he really mean to speak concerning the Message while older members lacked the courage? Yet, as all knew, he had never spoken in the House before.

"Mr. Speaker," he began, in a quiet tone, and yet so firmly that there was no tremor in his voice. Men leant forward to hear, and were amazed at his words. "The Prince's command is like a thunderbolt. His command upon our allegiance is like the roaring of a lion. To his command there is no contradiction; but how, or in what manner, we should now proceed to perform obedience, that will be the question. Here is the greatest matter of them all which come up here for discussion. Are we the voice of the people? Shall we simply legislate as we are told, or as our judgment and our privileges prompt?"

He said much more, and the members gazed at him, aghast. More than one had a vision of a prisoner escorted to the Tower, and passing through the Traitors' Gate. The vision went farther than the cell; it led to a court-

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yard where was a block where many had knelt, and lost their heads.

"Vincent, you are doomed," said one who sat near him.

"Probably. But there is one word to be spoken here, and that is 'Privilege'; I have spoken it."

Bernard had come home for the week-end, but he had not shaken away the uncomfortable feeling as to consequences.

He turned, for he heard the sounds of a horse's hoofs, and, wondering who came in such haste, he moved to another window.

"'Tis Wilson!" he exclaimed, when he saw the member who had told him he was doomed. "What can he want here?"

He went at once to the hall, and met the rider as he was stepping in at the doorway.

"More than welcome, Sir James!" cried Bernard.

"I wonder whether I am?" said Wilson gravely. He looked about him, then turned towards the library, and Bernard, following, closed the door behind him, convinced that he wanted to see him privately.

"You remember your speech in the Commons?"

"Am I likely to forget it? Was it likely that I should sit silent when such a message came from the King?"

Yet a sense of dread came, especially when the sound of Flora's laughter came through the open window. Had he said too much? Was punishment coming in some shape? Was it something which would savour of visiting his wife and child as well as himself, with heavy penalty?

Sir James stood facing him. He had come in hot haste, as Bernard knew, for the horse he rode was covered with foam. But he was slow to speak.

"You have something to tell me. What is it?" Bernard said, after a long pause.

“Yes. Someone told the King of your words, and he declared that ere long you should hang or lose your head, for daring to speak against the Lord’s Anointed. Someone about the King’s person told me to come to you, and bid you get out of the country. ‘Tell him not to waste an hour, but begone! Tell him that the process is in train to put him into the power of Star Chamber.’ And I came at once. Vincent, fetch your wife and little one, and get together what money and valuables you can lay hands on, and begone!”

Bernard watched Sir James, and knew that he must not remain in his home. The mere mention of the Star Chamber brought its terrors with it, for it was relentless, bringing ruin to its victim.

“You say I must be gone, Wilson. But where? I can lay my hand on money, and I have horses, but what then?”

“I expected that question,” cried Sir James; “but I have an answer ready. There is Virginia.”

“Virginia? ’Tis banishment.”

“To stay here is to court death. It will mean ruin to those who are in the garden—the little one, and your incomparable wife. Better get away to that magnificent land which will hold so many possibilities than stay here!”

“I know!” exclaimed Bernard, wiping his damp face. “But how am I to get there?”

“Listen, Vincent,” was the quiet response. “God’s hand is in this, and is clearing the way. There were men in the House who thought you mad for speaking as you did, and said that the King’s realm would become too hot for you. But one of them is engaged in making arrangements for the voyage. At this moment a fleet of nine vessels is nearly ready to sail, and places are being secretly reserved for you by him who bade me come and warn you.”

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For a few moments Bernard remained silent. There was a task before him from which he shrank—to tell Clare of this trouble which was come like a bolt from the blue; but it had to be done. Without a word he threw the window wide open and called to her. As she crossed the soft carpet of grass she saw that her husband was in trouble.

"What is wrong, my beloved?" she asked, not seeing Sir James; but when the story came, she stood as one who was stunned, but only for a few moments. Her womanly insight told her what was best, and her loyalty to her husband was uppermost.

"Bernard, it is the will of God. Let us go, as Sir James has said." She turned to Wilson. "When ought we to go?" she asked.

"Within the hour," was the grave response.

The next night the *Kingly Crown* set sail. Bernard and those who were so dear to him were in her cabin, with the ocean and the world before them.

CHAPTER XI

THE MENACE

THE *KINGLY CROWN* ran up the river, first of the little squadron which was bringing such a motley company to the land where safety was promised. When she dropped anchor the boats came from the shore to take away those who were on board. There was no ceremony, for it was a wild scramble to get away from the swill and swish of the evil-smelling bilgewater, and the rat-infested hold, not only because they were keen to breathe the fresh, pure air of the new land, but the voyagers wished to be first in the search for work.

Clare and Bernard drew away from the crush, and Pory kept the roughest at arm's length. They waited till an empty boat was at their disposal. None were on board but themselves and the crew, and with a pleasant farewell to them all, and a generous gift for distribution, they were pulled ashore.

"Where can we find lodging for the night?" Bernard asked a sailor who was watching the little company of four, and wondering at the contrast between them and those who had gone past him before—the majority of them the sweepings of the jails.

"There's an inn yonder; as comfortable a place as ever a man lay in who has just come from a voyage."

The man pointed to the place, but was doubtful when

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he looked more closely at Clare and Flora. He stood up and saluted them.

"I have my doubts, my lady, as to whether 'tis good enough for such as you. But 'tis clean. Mistress Warren is a homely little body, who knows how to treat people—except such quality as you," he added, with increasing doubt. "Perhaps you ought to go to the Governor's house, and make inquiries there. I could show you the way."

Bernard looked at the inn, then glanced at Clare.

"It will do very well, Bernard," she said quietly, anticipating what his question would be. She turned and smiled amiably at the sailor, who thought he had never seen a woman so beautiful, nor a child so sweet and tender as little Flora, who was gazing at him with widely opened eyes.

After winding in and out among the merchandise, they halted at the doorway of the inn, where the sailor bawled loudly for the hostess. She was at their service almost before the man's call had ended—a buxom little woman, pretty because of her pleasant looks rather than from her features, and with eyes which sparkled with good humour.

"What may I do for you?" she asked, making a low curtsy.

"This good fellow here recommended you," said Bernard, pointing to the sailor, whose face was broad with grins. "And we are hungry, to begin with."

"Then you want a good meal, you, and your lady, and that pretty darling—and you shall have it. Is the next thing a good bed?" asked Mistress Warren.

"The very thing, mistress, if you have a room to spare."

"If you don't mind one that overlooks the stable yard," the woman answered, curtsying again.

“What matters it what we overlook if we sleep well,” said Clare, who had hitherto been silent, but liked the comely woman’s looks.

It was growing dusk when, after the meal, Clare and Bernard sat at the window, and Flora, who was sleepy, was in the little bed which Mistress Warren made ready for her in her own room. The stars came one by one into the darkening sky, and, since there was no moon, the men who had been working on the quay gave up their tasks, and left the place deserted and silent.

The matter they had to consider was one of real moment. They had money, or money’s worth in the shape of jewels, which they had hurriedly gathered in the hour before they left their home. There was enough, when turned into golden crowns, to enable them to live, not in affluence but in comfort. Yet the idea of an idle life was distasteful to Bernard, who had always been active although his means had been so ample.

“If I stay here, Clare,” he exclaimed, “living the so-called life of a gentleman, I shall begin to think of what we have lost, and of what has driven us here. Then I shall grow morbid. I shall count my vexations, and forget my blessings. I shall have visions of calamities. Perhaps I shall slide into evil ways—into indulgences, wasting my talents.”

He stood and leaned his elbows on the window-sill, while he gazed gravely at the darkening scene outside, where he barely saw the masts of the ships, and their dark hulks, and the heaped-up goods that were to be distributed through the colony.

“What do you think, Clare?” he asked, turning to his wife, whose face was barely visible.

“I think with you. You must work, and so must I. We must get a home, and that will absorb my energies.

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When there is no loitering there will be no scope for sin behind the idleness."

"Wise little woman!" said Bernard tenderly, smoothing the soft hair of the woman who had drawn her chair more closely to the window, to see her husband's face in the gathering darkness. "I will do as you say. I will leave you and Flora to-morrow, in Pory's care, while I ride on to Jamestown, the capital, and see what possibilities there are of work of some sort."

Bernard remained at the window, and his hand dropped to his side. Clare took it in her own, and thus they stayed, talking in the darkness.

"Bernard, I have been thinking of the incongruity of our style and our work. Suppose you seek for employment, who will give you any if you say that you are Sir Bernard Vincent? What will people say if our house should be a log-hut outside the town, for I cannot think of breathing in a house in a stifling street, scorched by the summer sun?"

"What do you mean, little woman?" Bernard asked, when she paused.

"I want to suggest that we drop our titles. You must be Master, and I must be Mistress Vincent."

Bernard laughed, and a man who was passing by, coming out of the darkness of the quay, looked up, when he heard the full ring of amusement.

"So let it be, Mistress Vincent!" he exclaimed, bending to kiss her.

A few days later he came to Jamestown, fifty miles up the river, but in the heart of a swamp where fever and ague lurked, and spread death among the population, and sometimes decimated it. He had gone on a hired horse, and when he rode into the town he pulled up to watch the Colonists working like men who were toiling against time.

“What does it mean?” he asked of a careworn woman who was passing.

“News has come that the Indians are preparing for a raid, and at last, in spite of warnings, and because it will mean death if we be taken unawares, they have decided to erect a palisade to keep the red men out.”

“Is it so serious?” Bernard asked anxiously.

“Serious?” the woman exclaimed, gazing at him half reproachfully. “How could it be other than serious when we number but scores, while the tribes of the Monicans, Powhatons, and Marmahoacs are known to be more than twenty thousand?”

“’Tis serious indeed,” said Bernard, shifting in his saddle, to gaze around. “I have but just arrived from England, and had no thought to find things in so dire a state.”

“Naturally,” the woman cried bitterly. “I, too, came here, and see how wan and thin I am! I once was plump and beautiful, so they told me, but there have been times when food was scarcely to be had for money.”

A small company of horsemen appeared while they were speaking, and presently a single rider came in the opposite direction, but he pulled up and waited for the others, who passed by without noticing Bernard.

“What luck, Sir Eustace?” came the question, in a tone which gave token of his great anxiety.

“I have succeeded.”

“Thank God!” the other cried. “And Jamestown is safe?”

“Yes. The Powhatons, who were coming on in hundreds, stopped, and we had a palaver, and we have made a treaty which they and we will keep, so that our people may return to their homesteads, and the town is safe.”

“Then I say, ‘Thank God!’ again,” the rider from the

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town exclaimed, and, swinging his horse about, he rode back to the town with Sir Eustace.

Bernard had listened eagerly to what was said, and in his anxiety not to miss a word, had paid no attention to the others in the Governor's train. As they moved away his lips parted in amazement, for on the Governor's other side rode one whom he knew—Rupert Bernis!

Here was something likely to make life in Jamestown impossible. If he would live in Virginia, Bernis must not know of his presence; otherwise the man who had done him such hurt in England might seek his ruin. Bidding the woman adieu, he swung his horse round, and rode back to the inn where Clare and Flora were awaiting his coming, and before many days had gone they had made fresh plans.

The decision meant a journey far away to the West; and every time the sun went down Bernard and Clare breathed more easily, for they were leaving Rupert Bernis and possible danger so much farther behind them.

They came one day to a place of which they had heard before they began their journey. The place was beautiful, more for Nature's intrusions than for what man's hands had done. Honeysuckle hung over the long, low-built house which was on the edge of a mighty forest. At the front was a garden, once full of flowers, but now choked with weeds. A small orchard, subsiding into equal ruin, was at the back of the dwelling-house: but behind again, where the marshes shot out a watery arm, as if to shut the forest away from the homestead, lay some rough cabins where those who worked in the fields, as pioneers, had slept until they deserted the place because of rumours that the Indians were coming.

"There will be some hard work here, Clare," said Bernard, halting with those who came with him, to gaze

at the scene. "But as they say at home, 'It's dogged that does it,'" he added, as he dropped out of the saddle. Standing at his tired horse's head, he looked around again. "We'll make a change here. These men we have brought with us are made of the right sort of stuff, and we'll soon show what willing hands will do."

He lifted Clare out of her saddle, and Hester, the woman whom they had hired at the instance of Mistress Warren; while Pory, who was going to act as overseer, took charge of the horses, and with a wonderful subtlety got the men to help him put the stables straight. He blessed the far-sightedness of his mistress, for there were things among their goods which only a woman would have thought of.

Like Bernard, when evening came, and things were as tidy as women's hands could make them, he gazed around.

"What are you dreaming about?" asked Bernard, seeing Pory standing in apparent idleness.

"About the possibilities," was the brief reply.

"What are they?"

"We must turn that space yonder into a flourishing orchard, Sir Bernard. It will take years, but time is before us. The trees shall be laden almost to the breaking of the branches with their burden of fruit. I can foresee rice swamps, and tobacco-fields; and much besides," he added, for here his imagination failed him. "Anyhow, this wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose," he suddenly exclaimed, in exultation.

Years passed, and Pory's vision crystallised into fine reality. The outlying station, in the depths of the West Virginian forest, unmolested by the Indians, and ignored by those who were in authority in the Colony, made those who dwelt there independent of the outside world. A sense

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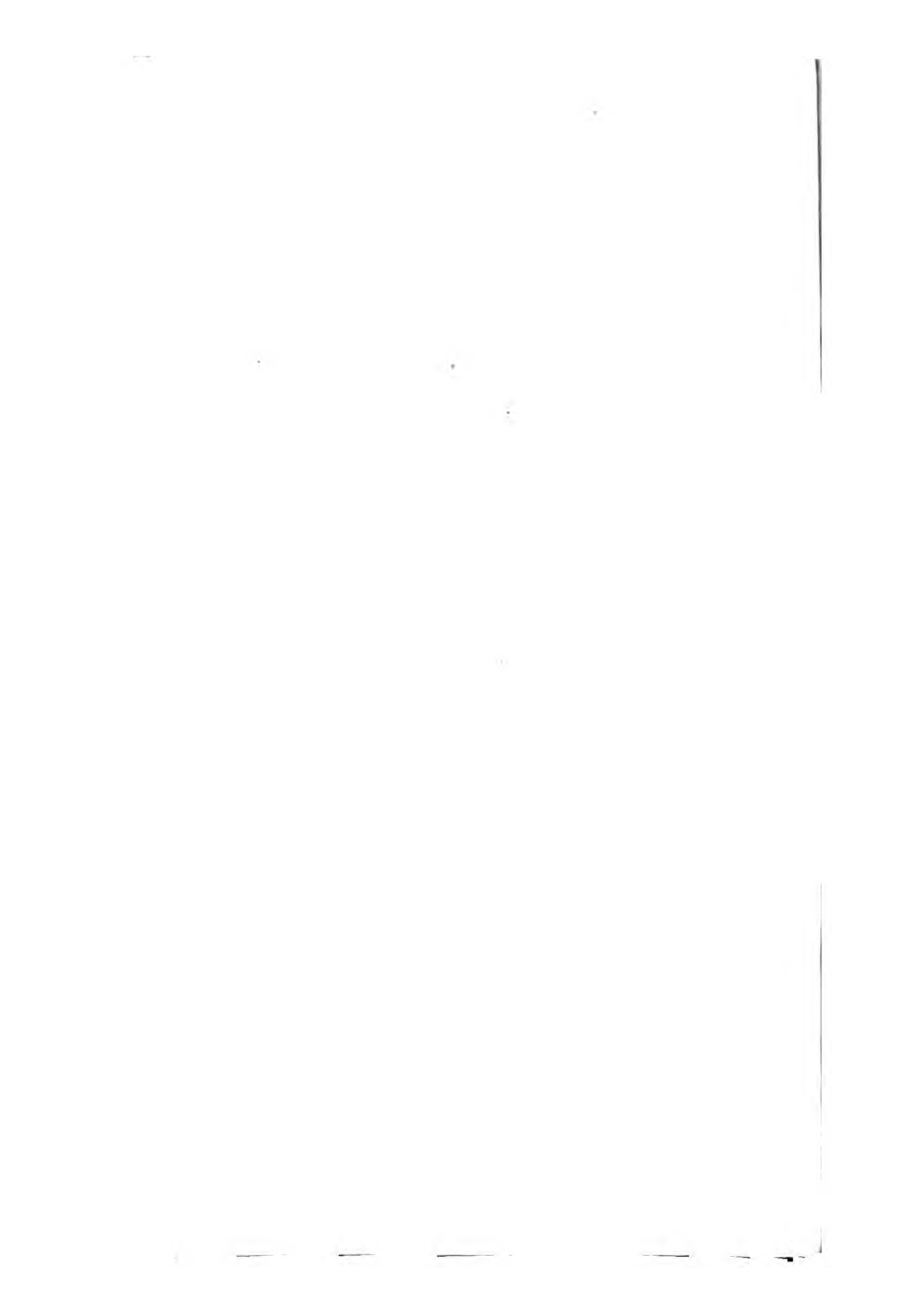
of peacefulness fell on those who had come out with Bernard—men and women who had left England for the same reasons as those which made Vincent and Clare and Flora exiles.

They were a quiet, godly little community. With no one to interfere, and ignorant of any restrictions in the matter of religious worship, such as were exercised within the Governor's jurisdiction, they were free to do as they listed. Yet there was an uncertainty as to whether they were all of one mind; for this matter of religion was kept very much in reserve. It remained so until one of the little community determined to put the matter to the test. He suggested that those who cared to do so should meet Sunday by Sunday, and worship God, not to run to seed for want of religious intercourse. That was the beginning of it within a week of their arrival, and everyone responded.

The meetings by the riverside served to lessen the smart of their exile. Bernard and Clare were as regular as any in those little forest assemblies. To Bernard, especially, they were balm to his wounded soul, for there was one among their number who had been a Puritan preacher in England. Wilson often spoke of the comforting God, Who was there in the solemn forest depths to meet His people. Many a time the thought of exile became more than irksome—a pain that became intolerable. It was not his absence from the home which was so splendid, nor the fact that his wealth was left behind, and he must needs toil for his daily bread like others. It was the fact of compulsory absence—the inability to be at home to do something towards lessening abuses, and securing civil and religious freedom for his countrymen. Many a time that comfort came to Bernard in the forest meeting, and he looked forward to the hours of worship as times for soul-uplifting.



“HE STOOD AWHILE AND WATCHED THE LITTLE COMPANY OF MEN AND WOMEN, ASSEMBLED FOR WORSHIP” (p. 81).



Flora, in the passing years, grew into beautiful girlhood ; so beautiful that her parents wondered what would have been her lot had they never left England. The others in the little settlement thought the same when they saw her developing into such lovely womanhood. Not one among them all who was not her devoted slave ; and as for her, since her beauty never seemed to dawn on her, she wondered why everyone was so kind, so ready for service, so careful of her comfort and her safety. They loved her first for her pretty prattle and loving ways. They loved her later, not so much for her opening beauty as for the tender spirit which displayed itself—the readiness to be of service. They loved her later yet when she became a woman, in her soft, round beauty and grace, and her helpfulness.

Bernard never ventured so far as the towns, for he had the lasting dread lest Bernis should see him, and trouble would follow. Not that he cared for himself ; but there were Clare and Flora to think about.

There was consternation one day when Pory returned from a business journey to Jamestown. When he rode into the palisaded courtyard it was empty. There was no response to his call, but, remembering the time of day, he took the horse to the stable, and having given him food, wended his way to the riverside. He went gravely, and his face betrayed his concern. Once he paused, drew a paper from his bosom, and read it, as he had done many a time while on his journey ; but he found no hope nor comfort in it. Putting it back again, he went forward in swift, long strides, traversing the path which wound in and out among the bushes until he came to a small open space. All around it rose the trees like the great pillars of a cathedral. He stood awhile and watched the little company of men and women who, after their day of toil,

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were assembled for worship. The sun rays slanting through the trees and across the grass added to the impressiveness of the scene.

"Will this have to stop?" Pory asked himself, and his hand went to his bosom to finger the paper that was there. "Ought it to discontinue? Shall we think of man before we think of God? Who must come first in this matter?"

Someone was praying when he had come to a halt amid the trees, but the prayer ended, and the worshippers rose from their knees. The meeting was over, and they were about to disperse.

"I have something to say," Pory exclaimed, stepping forward. "Listen, before any of you go away."

They wondered at the serious look upon his face, for Pory was usually serene, and often jovial.

"When I was at Jamestown I found that the King, under representations made by Sir Rupert Bernis——"

Bernard started at the mention of the name, and Clare's face paled, for she associated him with what was likely to mean trouble to someone—probably to her husband and her daughter. But Pory did not notice this alarm.

"He has been to England to tell the King that some of the Colonists are practising the old Puritan irregularities, and now he has returned, and this is the outcome."

Pory drew out the paper, and held it forth for the others to see.

"What is it?" asked Bernard anxiously.

"I'll read the body of it, Sir Bernard," said Pory. "I can skip the long rigmarole which goes by way of introduction; but this is what matters. King James has revised the Virginia Charter, and it comes as a disagreeable blow even to good Churchmen; for it is required

that on working days, throughout the Colony, every man and woman shall, twice a day, upon the first tolling of the bell, repair to the church to hear divine service. If this is not done the punishment for the first omission shall be the loss of the man's or woman's allowance. If that does not bring obedience, the offenders shall be stripped to the waist, and whipped. As for the third offence, the penalty shall be six months at the galleys."

The women hid their faces in their hands, and the men's fists clenched tightly, and their lips were set.

But Pory had not finished.

"There is more to come," he added. "What I have read concerns the weekday; but hear what is said about the Sabbath. 'Every man or woman shall repair in the morning to divine service and sermons, and in the afternoon to divine service and catechisms, upon pain for the first fault to lose their provision and allowance for the first whole week following; for the second to lose the said allowance, and also to be whipped; *and for the third to suffer death.*'"

Pory read the last words slowly, and with bated breath. His face had burned with anger and shame at this tyranny when he first heard of it; but here, in the depths of the forest, the threat appeared to him more terrible, and he had the vision of a little settlement wiped out, since he knew that none who were there would yield on this point, even with the galleys threatening, and the gibbet.

He handed the paper to Bernard, who took it and looked at it, but unseeingly. He was not thinking of himself. His thoughts were for the others—for Clare, for Hester, for the men who were toiling with him on the outskirts of the colony; and for Flora, who was at his side, and rested her hand on his arm, knowing what this meant for all.

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"What will you do, father?" she asked softly, but in the hush, among those bewildered ones, her voice reached everyone. Every face was lifted, and the eyes of all rested on the girl—so richly beautiful in the first flush of her womanhood.

"Were it not for you, my child, and for your mother—and these, my brethren"—his hand's gesture took in the little company. He paused, and there was a momentary silence.

"No need to think of me, Sir Bernard," said one, who stood farthest away, and whose eyes wandered to the depths of the forest. "Come what will, I shall worship God according to my conscience. I left the old country to find liberty. I will not yield now that we are breathing an ampler, clearer air, and find God so near."

The others, watching Grayburn, felt that his words rang true.

"Nor will I," cried Pory.

"Nor I," sprang from the lips of every man. But the women were not dumb.

"Bernard, I shall take my own course. That paper shall not deter me!" said Clare, looking at her husband.

"And I, Sir Bernard," came from Hester; while the other women, joining in, went each to her husband or her father, or her brother, and linked hands with theirs.

"Father, I say the same," said Flora, and those who gazed at her saw in her a womanhood that transformed her.

Bernard had not yet spoken.

"I have said nothing, but you must know my mind in this matter," he said, folding the fatal paper slowly, his hand as steady as though it were a document of no particular moment. "Can you imagine that I should yield?"

“’Twere impossible to think of it,” cried one of the men.

“Then we shall proceed as before, and place ourselves in God’s keeping,” came the quiet response.

The little company dispersed, and ere long the settlement was hushed in the silence of the night.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEPARTURE OF JULES ROLLIN

AMONG the occasional visitors to the settlement was one who, by dress and bearing, was of some distinction, of breeding and of rank; finely built, athletic, a man capable of holding his own in rough-and-ready times, carrying his sword at his side with an ease which bespoke his usage to it. There was a kindly glance in his blue eyes, and although his chin was firm, and his lips gave one the impression of decision in his purposes, a child would have responded to his smile.

He came on business from the Governor, who was sending out in all directions to know how the settlers were faring, and what the produce of their farms was likely to be; but when his business was ended, and because time was not pressing, he accepted Bernard's invitation to remain a few days longer as his guest.

Edward Fuller was attracted by Flora, as much for her gentleness and unobtrusive service for those who belonged to the settlement as for her beauty. He came again and again, and Bernard smiled, for his errand was often trifling. Both he and Clare knew that he came for Flora's sake, counting the danger and the distance as nothing, that he might see her. He came and went, and while Flora hid her feelings, she confessed in the solitude

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of the riverside that he was much to her. She loved him, but he had not spoken, and she was left to wonder whether her womanly instinct read his feeling truly.

She stood one afternoon at the head of a grove of forest trees, and saw two horsemen approaching. One was a cavalier, the other his body servant.

"Who can this be?" she exclaimed.

"Does Master Vincent dwell here?" the rider asked, doffing his cap with the grace of a courtier.

"Yes," Flora answered, flushing at the look which swept across the horseman's face. She counted it an insolence on the part of a stranger.

"I must see him, Mademoiselle," the man said, dropping out of his saddle and giving the horse's rein to his servant.

"I will take you to him," said Flora, in quiet dignity; and, leading the stranger to the house, she left him in her father's room.

He proved to be a messenger from the Governor.

"Sir Eustace might have sent an English gentleman," said Bernard to Clare later, and in a tone of real annoyance. "Why should a Frenchman, whom I do not know, be sent on this errand?"

"What is the errand?" Clare asked.

"To make inquiries as to the movements of the Indians, and whether the report be true that the warriors are assembling to go on the war-path."

"Have you no answer that will send him away tomorrow?"

Bernard shrugged his shoulders.

"If I could I would; but Jules Rollin, as he calls himself, is commissioned to see the red men personally, and, if possible, make a compact with them."

"A strange errand for a Frenchman," said Clare, who betrayed her discomfort.

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"You don't like him?" Bernard exclaimed.

"I very much distrust him from the little I have seen of him. Suppose he finds an excuse for staying on? My dear," she broke off abruptly, "there's Flora."

"What of her?"

"I don't like the way in which he looked at her when we were at our evening meal. He is one of the graceless gallants such as we met at Court when we were at home; men who had no conception of what true womanhood is."

"I understand, my dear," was Bernard's quiet answer. "I'll rid the place of him as speedily as I can; but what can we say? The Governor sent him here, and we have no choice but to endure him till his business is done."

Bernard wondered whether Clare was thinking as he did; for he had the fear that the man was less concerned with the doings of the red men than of what was going on in the distant homestead. The conviction came that Rollin had come to spy out what was going on. Was he here to discover whether any meetings for worship were held contrary to the Proclamation Pory had brought from Jamestown? What if he discovered the meetings in the forest which had never been other than open, and with no attempt at secrecy?

Rollin rode in one evening after having visited one of the Indian villages. The house was empty, and with a sinister look on his face, and a shrug of his shoulders, he left his horse to his man, and went into the forest with an air which attracted the attention of his manservant. When he returned his face wore an ugly smile, and he was rubbing his hands with satisfaction. The others returned to the house before long, and found him sitting at the window in an attitude of utter weariness.

The evening meal was over, and Flora went out to enjoy the night hour before she went to her room.

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About her were the sounds of the forest, the trill of a night-bird, the ripple of a streamlet, the swaying of branches in the gentle breeze, the call of a prairie dog somewhere, and the hum of men's voices.

A sound caused her to turn quickly, and she recoiled a step or two when she saw a man at her side.

"I startled you, mistress?" asked Rollin, halting.

"Yes, Monsieur," was her cold answer.

"I saw you," he said, drawing nearer, so that they stood side by side, gazing on the moonlit land and into the forest depths, where shafts of silver light revealed the brushwood and the slowly swaying branches.

"Mademoiselle," said the Frenchman softly, "I have been here several days, and to-morrow I go. I do not know how I shall tear myself away, and leave you so far behind me."

She drew back, and by the moonlight on her face he saw that she was annoyed.

"I displease you, mademoiselle, but I must say what is in my heart. I followed you to tell you that I love you."

He drew nearer, but she fell away from his outstretched hands.

"You intrude upon me, Monsieur," cried Flora. "You shall not speak so to me."

She turned and walked towards the house swiftly, but the man was not to be balked in his purpose, and, coming to her side, he put an arm around her. She struggled to get away, but he held her firmly.

"Let me go!" she exclaimed, striving to loosen his hand, but he laughed aloud.

"I do not let one so beautiful go when I have her thus," said Rollin, drawing her round so that they faced each other.

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"Let me go," she cried, now with both hands thrusting at his face to hold him back. She saw someone coming towards her—a man who ran, and needed no call; yet the cry came:

"Pory!"

An arm went round Rollin's neck from behind, and he was flung heavily to the ground. Pory looked at him, and, unable to resist the impulse, kicked him.

"You hound!" he cried, his great fists clenched tightly; "to dare—to dare to touch my mistress!" His voice shook with passion, and, bending, he caught at Rollin's collar and, lifting him, shook him until his teeth chattered.

"The river is the place for such as you!" roared Pory, and, dragging Rollin swiftly to the bank, he lifted him bodily in spite of his struggles and hurled him into the stream.

"I'll take you to the house, Mistress," he said, when he came to Flora, who stood trembling. "Did he hurt you?" he asked, his anger subsiding.

"No, Pory," she answered faintly. "But he will drown."

"Not he," came the answer. "He can swim, for he has bathed in the river every morning since he came to the homestead. He won't want another bath at daydawn," Pory added, with a chuckle, and shrugging his shoulders. "Now, Mistress, I'll see you safely to the house."

He turned, and saw an Indian, stolid and imperturbable, standing just away from the shadows. It was Deer Foot, who often came to the homestead. The red man grunted when he glanced towards the river, and strode swiftly to the bank. Rollin was crawling out, dripping and bedraggled, his costly dress ruined; but Deer Foot had no thought for that. The Indian took him in his strong hands, but what he said neither Pory nor Flora could

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hear. They only knew that his exclamation was one of profound disgust. A moment or two later, Rollin was once more thrown into the stream into its deepest, while the Indian moved away, leaving the other to his fate.

When morning came, Rollin was gone. He had left no message with the man who brought out the horses for himself and his servant, but, climbing into the saddle, took the forest path to Jamestown. Before he completely passed out of sight he brought his horse to a standstill, drew his dagger from his belt, and it flashed in the morning sunlight.

"It means mischief," Carmichael muttered, when the riders disappeared. "Ought I to tell Sir Bernard? 'Twill make him uncomfortable. But that is a menace I do not like, and if I do not tell about it, the master may be taken unawares."

Carmichael went about his morning task, disturbed and undecided. Meanwhile, Bernard was anxious, for Flora had told him of the previous night's adventure. What might not be the outcome? Certainly not good, and probably much harm; but of what nature? He halted to think the matter out, gazing at the forest through which Rollin had ridden. His face coloured crimson, and strong man though he was, he trembled. He was thinking of the possibilities—things which stalked through his mind, full of menace to himself, but that was not the thing that troubled him most. He thought of what might come to Clare, to Flora, to Hester, to the other women, to those fine-spirited men who had thrown in their lot with him, all of the same faith, all with the same set determination, that whatever might proclaim against their worship, here, in these solitary backlands, they would follow the dictates of their conscience, and not the commands of an intolerant King.

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Bernard had had his doubts of Rollin from the first. A man like Edward Fuller won his confidence; he could find nothing but transparent honesty of purpose in him; but Rollin was not to be trusted. He might gloss over much of his inner nature, and mislead by his subtle demeanour, but there was an inevitable doubt as to how far words and character tallied.

He started, for someone spoke, and, turning, he saw Carmichael.

"Sir Bernard, I saw the Frenchman ride away at day-dawn," said the man. "He mounted his horse in silence, and rode away without a word. When he came to the end of the avenue yonder, he pulled up his horse and drew his dagger in a way which looked like a threat."

"Was that all?" Bernard asked, feeling sick at heart, but striving to hide his feelings.

"That was all, but it was more than I like to think about."

When the man had gone, the future came to Bernard like a hideous picture. It was a changing scene. Now he saw Jules Rollin approaching with a band of Indians, coming in stealth, red men in war-paint, eager for ruthless murder, or torture.

He wiped his face when he thought of what that might mean to those he loved, if the vision crystallised into reality.

Another picture was no less terrible. The drawn dagger might stand for so much. Rollin could tell Rupert Bernis of what he knew, and set him loose; then would come the galleys—for one like Clare! or Flora!—or worse—death! The thought brought a sense of faintness, and, leaning his arms against a tree trunk, he laid his damp face on them, and almost sobbed at the possibility. He pulled himself together, feeling that he must

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play the man, and he moved away, resolute not to betray his fears in any way.

One evening, when the sun was setting, and all was silent, but for the late birds that had not yet ended their last day songs, Bernard sat on the river-bank, and near by were moored three or four canoes.

“If only we were going in them down the river to the sea, and then on board a ship for England!” he said, when he saw them.

He turned apprehensively, and his hand went to the pistol at his belt; for he heard the sound of breaking branches, and of footsteps. An Indian was coming out of the forest, moving swiftly, and as the last glow of evening fell on the red man’s face, Bernard saw that it was Deer Foot. Behind him came Edward Fuller. They were moving swiftly, the Indian forgetful of his usual forest wariness, as though his business was urgent and carefulness would be misplaced. Bernard sprang to his feet, and Fuller spoke, even while he was hurrying towards him.

“Vincent, we have come to bid you begone—you and yours!” he exclaimed.

“What mean you?” cried Bernard; yet in that moment his mind turned to Rollin and Rupert Bernis.

Fuller’s answer came breathlessly :

“Rupert Bernis knows now that you are here. Jules Rollin told him that you and those who are with you worship here in the forest, regardless of the Proclamation. I heard him say that it should not be a question of fine, or flogging, or the galleys, but death for you, and Lady Vincent, and Flora—for all!”

As the words poured forth Bernard felt himself reel, and he had to lay his hand on a tree-trunk to prevent his falling. Recovering, he stood and gazed at Fuller.

“What can we do?” he asked quietly.

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"There is but one thing, and that is flight," cried Fuller. "Deer Foot came to see me on business, and we chanced to hear of this. We came at once to warn you. From what was said we had ten hours' start. You must go! Let us tell the others!"

Bernard did not wait to ask more questions. Without another word he strode along, with Fuller at his side. Deer Foot remained at the water's edge, and busied himself with the canoes.

CHAPTER XIII

FLIGHT

AN hour later, Deer Foot, who had gone to the house and was waiting in stolid silence at the door, where all was haste and bustle, turned away, and tramped through the forest towards the river. All who belonged to the settlement were there, but not all were to go with Bernard. The men and women, save Pory and Edward Fuller, were carrying what belongings they could take in that swift preparation, and would move on to a distant settlement where Bernis would scarcely care to follow. But Bernard, with Clare, and Flora, and Hester, were to go with Pory and Fuller, under Deer Foot's guidance.

Presently came the gleam of water, and Bernard saw a dark patch on it, close up to the bank. Three of the canoes were gone. Deer Foot had destroyed them with his tomahawk, so that they should not be used in pursuit.

The red man pointed out the place each one should take, and was the last to step in.

"God go with you," was the farewell greeting from those on the bank, and Deer Foot turned the head of the canoe to the opposite bank, where the forest cast the dense shadows. With a grunt of satisfaction, he put his full strength and skill into the task he had in hand. Even with their eagerness those who were with the Indian

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were content when they saw how the canoe sped on. The trees slipped by with a swiftness which made them wonder. Dark creeks appeared, and were passed by almost before the fugitives realised what they were, and when the river narrowed, and the banks closed in, and the forest shut them into darkness, they could still see how, overhead, the giant tree-tops, which the moon tipped with silvered green, were left behind.

"You are a wonderful man on the water, Deer Foot," exclaimed Flora; the Indian's quiet response was, that no words should be spoken.

"What if the Spirit of the Forest should hear your words, and carry them?" he asked. He said no more, but went faster, now that the stream had gathered force and was flowing on in greater volume. There was no slackening in the Indian's efforts. Now and again he bent his head to listen for any token of pursuit; but none came.

"Deer Foot," Flora whispered, when she saw a faint streak of silver across the sky, "shall we travel when it is day?" She had bent forward, and touched the red man's knee to attract his attention.

"No."

The Indian seemed never to tire, and his persistency and endurance amazed them all. At last he set the dripping paddle across his knees, while he bent low, and peered into the bank. He saw a place where it was darker than elsewhere, and again he dipped his paddle. The canoe shot into blackness and came to a sudden stop. Deer Foot caught at some roots, and pulled the craft close into the bank.

"Step out," he said, now in a more friendly tone, as though he felt that for a time the tension had passed, and there was not such need for silence.

When they stood on the bank of the creek, they saw

the gleam of a fire, and by its light they caught a glimpse of some tents that were ruddy in the fire-glow.

"There are Indians yonder," whispered Bernard.

"They are my own people," Deer Foot answered, and from his lips sprang a musical cry, like the rich, tinkling notes of a bobolink, the feathered voluptuary of the Virginian forest. A young Indian emerged from one of the tents, and sent back an answering call; then came forward at an easy run.

"Is it Deer Foot?" he asked, standing before he moved into the darkness.

"Yes, and the pale-faces are with me."

The first to awaken after their retirement to the tents was Bernard, and even then the sun was past the meridian. Standing in the doorway, he gazed around, and far away towards the west were great stretches of prairie land, bathed in sunshine. An Indian loitered here and there, while the squaws were busy. They looked at Bernard in friendliness, although no word was spoken, and that alone was an assurance that he and his were safe, so far as the red men were concerned. But what of the pursuit? Might not Bernis and Rollin track them, armed with the authority from the Governor, to which the Indians might yield?

He looked around for Deer Foot, but he did not appear until the sun had gone down behind the trees.

"When do we start?" asked Bernard.

"At once," was the answer; and ere long the canoe was gliding down the river again, the red man persistent and watchful as ever, lengthening out the distance between the home they fled from, and lessening the journey towards the sea. The speed was greater than before, for there was a second Indian with them, as expert with the paddle as Deer Foot himself.

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"It will be many a day before we look on the great salt water, and behold the mighty boats with wings," said Blue Bird, and then for many a mile there was silence, not one of the Indians speaking, and each as untiring as a sleuth-hound. They only broke the silence when the stars were hidden by some gathering clouds.

"There will be a storm!" exclaimed Deer Foot. Ere long a jagged light leapt through the air, and the thunder rolled. It seemed to shake the stream, and the storm burst on them in fury. The lightning was incessant. Flora saw the Indian's face, his head-feathers, and the totem of his tribe. She saw his bow and arrows at his feet in one blinding glare of startling light.

For hours the storm endured, and while the incessant flashes lit up the dark and turbulent stream the rain came down in sheets amid the roar of the wind and the roll of thunder. The Indians laid down their paddles, and bade the others help to bale out the water which was threatening to swamp the frail craft. They wrought at the task till they were weary, not daring to land because of the storm's havoc in the forest which lined the river. But the tempest spent itself in one sudden, savage sweep of wind, and gradually the thunder rolled away. While the canoe still drifted, the first streak of the morning came.

Leaving his companions in a creek, and in charge of Blue Bird, Deer Foot disappeared in the forest. He was away for an hour, or more, but when he returned two other Indians were with him. He told Bernard that for a piece of gold the red men would find them food and shelter, and dry their clothes, in readiness to go their way at sundown.

Four nights of travel brought them to a part of the river where they went more warily, for the settlers were more frequent.

“To-night we shall leave the river,” said Deer Foot. “It will mean longer travel, but it will be safer.”

At times their way led through the high marsh-grass, but wherever possible the Indians sought the shelter of the forest. Flora thought, as she followed Deer Foot, that he was a man who never erred, who never seemed to sleep, who knew every creek and danger-spot, and was full of infinite resource. His red-brown body passed where the others thought any entry an impossibility. Sometimes he halted, and sent back among the alders or the pines a sibilant whisper which brought alarm to his companions.

Every mile the little company travelled lessened their care as to pursuit; for Deer Foot, going by the sun, or sometimes at night, moving onward by the moon's light, crossed the country in a bee-line. Sometimes he left them while they rested, when in the distance he saw tokens of the white man's settlement. Feeling in his waistband, to assure himself that he had his pass in readiness, if it should be demanded, he tramped to the overseer's house to purchase food—a change from forest fare—or to make inquiries.

More than once, although he kept the knowledge to himself, he was shaken out of his accustomed imperturbability when he discovered that in some inexplicable manner the news had spread of the escape of the Vincents, and that a great reward was offered for their capture. It caused him to plunge more deeply into the forest, and for days together he would not approach a white man's cabin. The freemasonry that existed among the red men enabled him to claim the help he wanted, and a resting-place for his tired charge in an Indian village.

Deer Foot and Blue Bird appeared to be fascinated with Flora's tenderness and beauty, and they made their stages

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fall in with her condition. When she looked tired they called a halt. If, in her jubilation at the freedom of the woods, she forgot fatigue, the red men lengthened out the journey. She was the gauge of the whole party's endurance, until she divined this, and first implored, and then imperatively bade the Indians make their journey fall in with the pace her mother and Hester were able to take.

"We come near to the waters," said Blue Bird, who had one afternoon gone before, and returned in swift strides.

The news electrified them. Could it be possible that the journey was nearly ended? And if the sea was near, would it avail them? Would they have to wait, or travel along the coast in the expectation of seeing the ship which Fuller told them a friend of his had promised to charter, and send out of port, in the hope of picking up these fugitives, if, in the mercy of God, they succeeded in reaching the sea?

They travelled a mile beyond the spot where Blue Bird met them, and, coming to a break in the forest, saw the ocean. In the great open sweep of the sunlit bay a ship was riding at anchor.

"The Motherland!" cried Fuller, who had been going hand in hand with Flora. "Mistress," he said, in a low voice which none but herself could hear, "God is opening out the way. We shall one day be home in England, and this land, which has been an exile's country for you and yours, will be left behind."

She gazed at him. Her eyes were gleaming, and there was a rapture in her face which thrilled him.

"If God wills," she said softly.

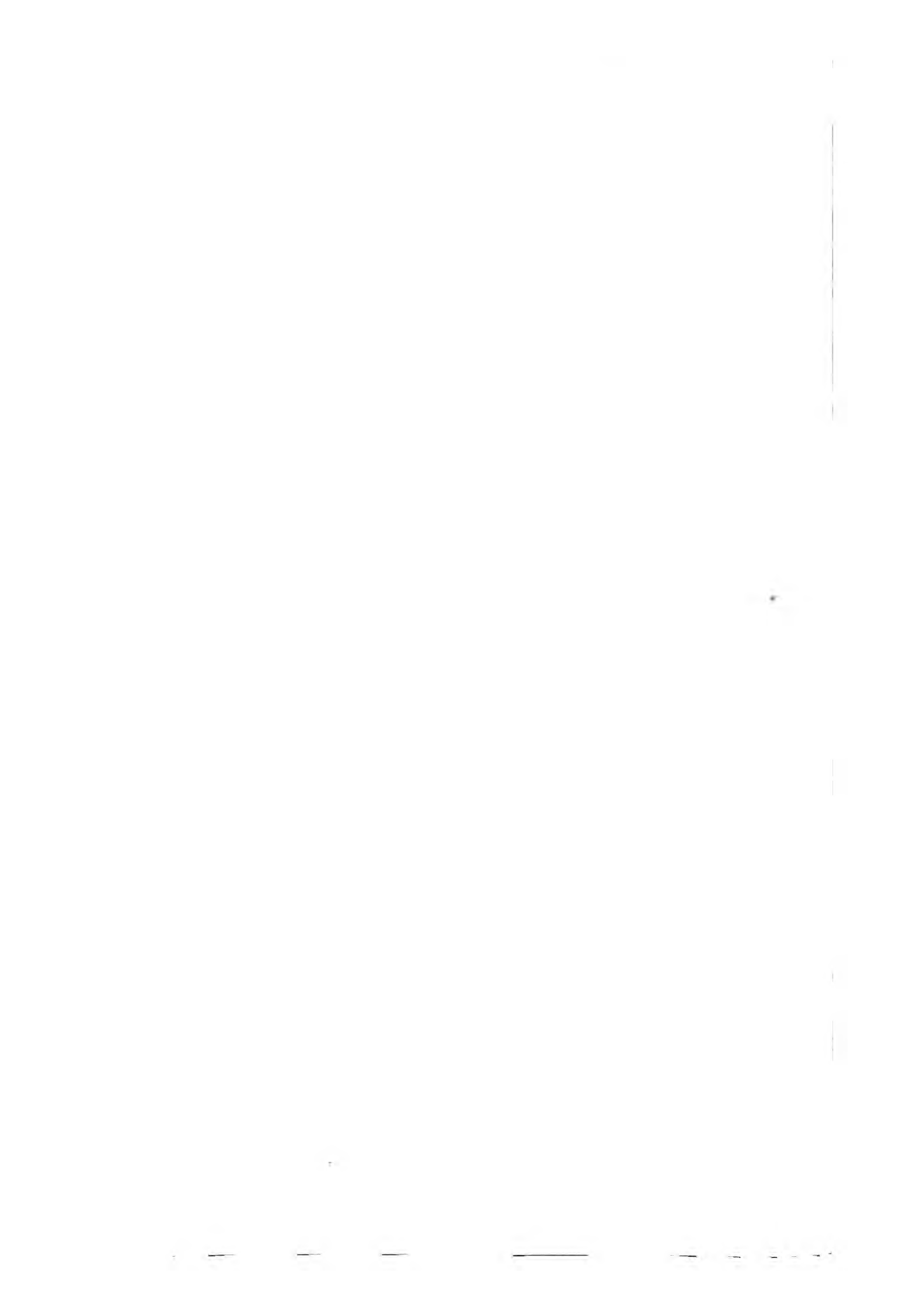
He turned away, and his shrill call travelled over the waters. Before long a boat was coming to the shore.

An hour later they were all on board, save Deer Foot and Blue Bird, and when the ship's bows turned to breast the ocean, the forms of the Indians grew less and less distinct. They faded away, and the shore itself was no more seen.



BOOK III

THE DECISION



CHAPTER XIV

FLORA'S JEOPARDY

EDWARD FULLER sat in a room in a London inn, overlooking a garden at whose distant end the Thames was flowing seaward with the ebbing tide. His thoughts were centring on Flora, whom, with her father and mother, he had safely lodged in his manor-house at Scrooby, confident that they would there be safe from intrusion, since it lay far back from the King's highway. He left them there because he had business on hand which called for his personal attention after so long an absence in Virginia.

The window was flung wide open, for the air was warm, and it was pleasant to catch the breeze. But that was forgotten since he was wondering whether, his business being done, he should return in the morning and ask Flora to be his wife. As yet they had been friends. No word of love had been spoken. What would she say to him if he put the question to her?

His train of thought was broken, for he heard the stamp of men's feet on the gravelled path below, and then some men, or two at least, sat on a garden seat below, and began to talk in subdued tones. But in the stillness he heard their words. Their voices jarred upon him, since they interrupted his reverie. But a few minutes later he sat upright and alert. He had heard Flora's name spoken

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by a man whose voice he did not know. He had certainly heard the other voice before.

What he heard brought him to his feet with a smothered exclamation of anger; but, going softly to the window, he looked below. He gasped when he saw that one of the men was Rupert Bernis.

"How came he here, in England?" Edward asked himself. "I thought he was to remain in Virginia for another year."

Fuller's hand clenched tightly, and his face paled at the suggestion of possible harm to the girl he loved.

"By the way, Bernis," exclaimed the other, breaking away from what his companion was saying, "I thought you were to stay in Virginia for many more months."

"True, but circumstances broke up my plan," said Bernis. "I came back at the behest of the Governor. I've nothing now to do but find Flora Vincent, and although I am so much older, I mean to have her, or I'll ruin her and her parents."

"But how?" cried Agnew, forgetful that they had been talking in low tones not to be overheard.

"Easy. I shall put it to her thus. If she refuses me I say to her, 'I'm going to the King, to tell him that the man called Sir Bernard Vincent is come back to England, and, as far as I know, is hiding somewhere in Scrooby.' Don't you see, Agnew? I have them all between the hammer and the anvil. She must have me, or I'll ruin her father—yes, and her mother, too!"

Agnew chuckled.

"How do you mean to set about it?" he asked. "You don't mean to say that you would marry one of those psalm-singing Puritans?" he went on, in an incredulous tone.

"You would, Agnew, if you saw how beautiful she is.

And there's her wealth. Her father's estate was confiscated, but he had hidden his money somewhere, and did I but whisper to him of the Star Chamber, Sir Bernard Vincent would find enough to give his daughter a handsome dowry, and pay my debts."

"What if the girl won't listen to her father, and refuses you, Bernis?"

"What then? I'll show her no mercy," was the fierce response.

Agnew laughed, but presently Edward heard what passed—what Bernis meant to do. His plan was to ride to Scrooby, perhaps at nightfall, find Flora, and present this ultimatum to her.

Edward was transfixed with consternation. Here was ruin threatening the girl he hoped to make his wife. He drew back from the window when, a little later, the two men walked down the garden to the river's bank, got into a wherry, and passed out of sight.

What if Flora became entangled thus? The thought stirred Edward Fuller to the depths. Could he save her in any way?

"I will do it!" he cried, after deep thought.

An hour later he was a long way on the road. He hoped thus to get a lead on Bernis, and he would be able to give Flora timely warning. His heart was all aglow at the thought. Once able to get her and her parents away to safety, he would contrive to have her all to himself, and he would make the opportunity for telling her of his love.

Blackthorn, the horse he rode, began to tire, and it was growing late. Fortunately the moon was full, and flooded the landscape, and seeing what looked like an inn, silhouetted against the sky, Edward determined to get a fresh horse and travel through the night. In his im-

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patience he had forced the pace, and worn down Blackthorn so completely that when the tired creature slowed down at the hill, his rider dropped out of the saddle and, looping the rein on his arm, walked at the horse's side.

"Can I have a fresh mount, Brinton?" Edward asked, calling for the landlord at the inn door.

"Not if you gave me fifty golden crowns, Master Fuller," was the discouraging answer. "I've nothing in the stables but tired animals."

To travel through the night was plainly out of the question. The day had been hot and tiring, and the horses in the stables were dead beat after the heat and dust, and a road which rang like iron after a long spell of drought. To be as fresh as possible himself, Edward went to bed as soon as he had had a meal.

"Did any riders call during the night?" he asked, when he sprang into the saddle in the morning.

"None after you, Master Fuller," said the landlord, and Edward was relieved. His fear had been that Bernis and Agnew had come on behind, riding hard to reach Scrooby.

He halted before he left the hill to go into the valley, and, turning in his saddle, gazed across the country he had traversed, anxious to discover whether by any chance he might see Bernis and Agnew on the road. He saw the meadows bathed in the morning sunshine. He saw as well the cattle and sheep that were there, the gleaming streak of the winding river, the cottages and farmsteads which dotted the countryside; but beyond a countryman here and there in the fields, no human being was in view.

Turning away from the road, he crossed the open country, saving many a mile. It was growing dark when he thought he should be nearing an inn where he and his horse could rest. In the morning he would start on the last stage of his long journey. The way now was round

the edge of a cliff which sloped dangerously on the left; but Edward knew it well. At other times he had travelled the road in almost total darkness; now, with the pathway dimly visible, horse and rider went forward confidently.

Blackthorn stumbled. There came the sound of moving earth, like the first sliding of an avalanche; then Edward and his horse were going down and down, with stones hurtling around them. Later, in those dangerous moments, they began to roll; man, horse, stones, and loosened earth all speeding down, until Edward lost all consciousness.

He lay like that for hours. In the fall he had the presence of mind to shake his feet from the stirrups, ready, if opportunity offered, to get clear of the plunging hoofs of the horse; but when he opened his eyes and gazed around, forgetful of the accident, he wondered what had chanced. The moon peeped from behind a broken cloud, and showed him his horse standing near with drooping head. About him, and part way covering his body, were stones and earth, and a tree which had been dislodged in the landslide. The tree pinned him down, so that he could not release himself.

The hours passed. The moon set. Dawn came. The sun rose, and the summer beauty, and the flood of bird song were around him. The brook he had heard in the darkness sparkled in the sunshine. Everything seemed to mock him in his helplessness.

The morning was advancing, and he heard a woman's voice. A man responded, and Edward, turning his head, saw them coming, staring at the landscape. The woman halted, and, clutching at her companion's arm, pointed to the spot where Edward lay, and then to the horse that was patiently standing at his side.

CHAPTER XV

THE COMING OF THE TROOPERS

BEFORE many minutes had passed Edward was released from his painful position, and, having been assisted into the saddle, he made his way to the inn. Two hours later, when the landlord's wife had dressed his feet with a herb lotion, and he was heartened with a meal, he decided to set out for the final stage of his journey.

He was at the bottom end of the passage, buttoning his doublet before going out to mount into the saddle, when the sound of horses on the road attracted his attention. Almost immediately a couple of horsemen drew up at the door, and, to his dismay, they were Bernis and Agnew, dusty and travel-worn. Neither of the riders dismounted, and having drunk the wine for which they called, and watered their horses, they gathered up their reins and rode towards the home Edward was so eager to reach.

He mounted into his saddle, with the landlord's aid; but the man said, as he gave him the reins :

“ Are you really bound to go, Master Fuller ? ”

“ I am,” was the quiet answer, but Edward's voice shook with the pain. “ A woman's life, perhaps, depends on this ride.”

Edward made as though he would ride on, and the

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landlord walked at his side a little distance, Blackthorn going at a foot pace.

"Master Fuller, are you going to your home at Scrooby?" the landlord asked, having first looked round keenly, to assure himself that none could overhear him.

"Yes." The word betrayed Edward's surprise at the question.

"One of those men was Sir Rupert Bernis."

"I know." Edward was alert to hear what would follow.

"I heard him say something to the man who was with him about a secret meeting of the Puritans in Ray Dene, and he expected to surprise the worshippers, and find Sir Bernard Vincent and his daughter there. Is that the lady you have in mind?"

"Yes," was the dismayed reply.

"Then ride hard, for I know Sir Rupert of old. When he talks as he did just now there's evil brewing."

Edward bent in the saddle, regardless of his pain.

"Gadsby, because I knew that Bernis meant harm to the Vincents I have been riding hard in the hope of saving them. I should have done so by now but for that landslide."

The landlord's face was full of concern.

"Take a shorter cut, Master Fuller."

"I don't know of one."

"Ride to the oak-tree yonder," said Gadsby. "When you get there, go through the plantation, and over the meadows to the church. That will give you a full hour's lead, perhaps more."

The man dropped back to leave the rider free.

Blackthorn responded to Edward's call. On he went, now by bog and stream, skirting at times the deep pine-woods, whose spaces were filled with the rosy glow of the

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masses of willow-herb. At times he swung along past the waters that were covered with water-lilies and walled in by reeds, winding in and out among the swampy bits of heath, where he slackened his pace.

"Can you keep going, Blackthorn?" Edward asked the gallant creature when the day was growing old, and the horse began to flag. The response was an instant but a tired one. Edward endured the pain of the long ride because of the safety and honour of Flora.

The sun was low and the daylight dying when he came in sight of his home. He had seen nothing of the two men who had gone before him. Was he in time? he wondered, when his horse dropped into a tired trot. It was dark when he entered the winding avenue of elms, and Blackthorn, of his own accord, stopped at the steps before the door of the hall.

Edward dropped out of the saddle, but an involuntary cry escaped him when his feet touched the ground, yet he would not be deterred. Mounting the steps, the raising of his feet being so many agonising stabs, he rang the bell.

An old servitor answered quickly, wondering at the loud summons.

"Are Sir Bernard and Lady Vincent here?" Edward asked quickly.

"Yes, Master Edward."

"And Mistress Flora?"

"Gone out."

Edward turned, and saw Blackthorn, with drooping head, and foam-covered. His mind was seething with alarm, but the tired animal was unequal to any further effort, and there was another mile or two to ride in order to reach Ray Dene.

"Garton," he cried, "tell them to saddle me the best

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horse in the stable, and instantly ! ” The man, looking at his master’s face, turned, and went as fast as his old limbs would carry him.

Going to the library door, Edward opened it, and saw Bernard at the table. The room was gorgeously furnished. Tapestries hung on the decorated oaken panels. The fireplace (a masterpiece of the carver’s art), the costly furniture, ornaments, and luxuries which had been brought from the Far East at a fabulous cost, gave the room a palatial appearance. But everything was subservient to the fact that the woman Edward loved was in danger.

“ Pardon me, Sir Bernard, for my abruptness,” cried Edward, entering the library quickly. “ Is Flora gone to the meeting at Ray Dene ? ”

“ Yes.” Bernard was startled at the sudden break in on his quietness.

“ Then I must go for her, and bring her away.”

He sank into a chair while he spoke, unable to stand for the pain which had been aggravated by the long ride. Sitting thus, he told rapidly of Rupert Bernis’ errand.

“ She is gone, but there may be time to see her,” cried Bernard.

“ I will go for her, then, and bring her here, Sir Bernard,” exclaimed Edward, rising, forgetful of his pain—forgetful of everything but Flora’s danger.

“ I will come with you,” cried Bernard, who stood weakly ; and then Edward saw that he was ill, and swayed as he rose from the chair.

“ Nay, but you shall not. Be ready when we return, both you and Lady Vincent, for any course I may suggest—for flight, if needs be.”

Garton was at the steps with a coal-black horse, fresh, and ready for hard work.

“ Mistress Flora is in danger, Garton,” said Edward

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when he sprang into the saddle. He might have come straight from his bed in the fulness of his young vigour, so alert was he now in the extremity of his need. While he gathered up the reins he told the old servitor to take Blackthorn to the stable and care for his comfort.

"Garton," he called, when the old man had turned away. "Have four of the fleetest horses ready saddled, and take them to the postern-gate. Tell Sir Bernard to go there with Lady Clare, in case there should be necessity for instant flight."

He said no more, but galloped across the park, going recklessly towards Ray Dene. When on the road, he overtook occasionally couples and solitary persons, men and women, old and young, all going his way. They were surely going to Ray Dene.

"Go back!" he cried to them as he rode by. "There's danger for you if you go on."

The people halted, and, startled at the rider's words, hurried into the darkness.

The moon floated out from behind a cloud, and a cry escaped Edward's lips; for the pale light gleamed on some shining steel in the distance, and it seemed to him that mounted men were riding towards Ray Dene. He measured in his mind his chances of success. Five minutes' hard riding should bring him to the barn door; the troopers would surely take longer to be there. He urged the horse onward, and the response was a thundering gallop.

He came at last to a big building whose roof loomed darkly against the moonlit sky. There were horn lanterns inside the barn, and he could see through the open doorway that there were people inside. Others going up the lane drew back into the hedges timorously, frightened at this horse that came on so wildly, scattering stones and dust with his iron hoofs.

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"Go home!" Edward shouted. "The soldiers are coming!"

A subdued cry of fear followed his words, and those who crouched in the hedges or had sprung into the ditch out of the way, scrambled out and ran down the road in terror, or broke through the bushes to get into the open, and reach the pine-wood.

Edward pulled up his horse at the open barn door, and, bending low in his saddle, looked in. Scores of people were there, some standing, some seated on the floor, or on bundles of straw, on anything that was available, and at the farther end one whose face he could not see. He might have been one of the Puritan preachers.

"Go!" cried Edward loudly. "The soldiers are coming!"

The worshippers rushed to the doors, but the preacher's strong voice bade them go more slowly, for it would mean an easier and swifter escape in the end. His voice brought to them reassurance.

"You are in God's keeping, brethren. Leave yourselves to Him."

Edward, still in the saddle, watched the preacher and marvelled. The man was restful in the tumult, and when a frightened woman passed him, holding a baby in her bosom, she looked, and recovered her presence of mind because of the calm on his face.

"Bring your horse into the barn, my son," he exclaimed, calling to Edward, for now there was the sound of horses' hoofs somewhere on the road, and the jingling of steel. "I will slam the door in the face of the soldiers. You can ride out at yonder door."

The horse went through the doorway, Edward bending low. But where was Flora? Had she not come to the meeting after all? He called her by her name, and while

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he was peering round anxiously, a soft, cool hand touched his own, as it hung at his side. He turned quickly.

"Flora! Thank God! Give me your hands," he cried, bending low in spite of the pain. "When I say 'Now,' spring, and you can sit up here."

She did as he suggested, and was speedily in the saddle, her arms about him, to keep herself from falling away.

At the moment the noise of the horses outside was deafening. A sword handle beat loudly on the heavy woodwork, and a loud voice demanded entrance in the King's name.

"Bend low, dear one," said Edward. She clung closer yet to him, and bent her body in obedience to his words, as they rode out into the moonlit night.

The meadows were dotted with sleeping cattle, and worshippers were moving in the deep shadows caused by the high hedges, where the soldiers could not see them. Neither of them spoke, not even when they passed out of the meadow into the lane; nor did they speak when the horse, feeling his feet on the hard road, went at a smart trot, ready, if the call came, to stretch himself out for a wild gallop. Edward was afraid to let him go, lest disaster should come.

Half an hour's riding brought them to the park, and, halting in the shelter of some trees, Edward turned to see whether they were followed. He saw the winding lanes and the open meadows, but no gleam of steel, save in the far distance, where there was an occasional glint, as though horsemen rode hither and thither, searching for any fugitives. It set his mind at rest, and then he spoke to the girl in the saddle before him.

"Flora, my beloved," he said, venturing greatly.

He wondered whether, now that the stress had slackened, she would resent his words; but she looked up at him.

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"I knew long ago that you loved me, Edward," she said, in a low tone, and her arms stole round his neck.

"It was long ago that I loved you, Flora. It was in those far-away forests of Virginia; but I did not dare to speak."

"Did not dare? Oh, why not?" Her lips were parted with her smile. Then, reproachfully, "Could you not read *my* secret—that I loved you?"

He bent, and their lips met.

"You will be my wife?" he asked.

"Some day, when we are in safer circumstances, and I shall count myself the happiest of women," was the swift response.

It was a strange place, and a desperate hour, in which to speak of love. While they halted a little longer among the trees, always watching the distant glinting of the steel, Edward told Flora of the coming of Rupert Bernis, and of his purpose. She shivered, but said no word.

"We must ride to the Manor-house and see what is going on there," Edward said, and the horse moved on again, but was kept in the deep shadows. Nothing but the faint clang of steel, and the sound of beating hoofs far away, came on the night air, but no soldiers were in view. They had not gone far, however, before they heard horses moving quickly; and presently, while Edward halted in the darkness of a plantation, they saw some horsemen ride out of the avenue into the open space and pull up at the foot of the steps before the door.

The foremost of the riders were Bernis and Agnew.

"What will they do to my father and mother, Edward?" asked Flora. She trembled and looked up to her lover. He could not see her face in the darkness, but he knew that it was wet with tears.

"He would not dare to do anything."

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In the night silence, only broken by the snorting of the horses, and the jingling of harness when they shook their heads, they saw Bernis drop out of the saddle and pull at the bell. Someone answered the summons, and Bernis, followed by Agnew, entered the hall.

The waiting was long and anxious, and Edward felt the girl, who was clinging to him, tremble. He was wondering, in those waiting minutes which seemed never-ending, whether Bernard and Clare had followed his suggestion, and had gone away to await his coming, ready for flight if the need arose.

"I think you shall put me down, Edward, so that I may know what the issue is," said Flora, in a whisper. "What if, on missing me, they take my father or my mother? Suppose Bernis took them to the Star Chamber?"

She moved as if to drop out of her place, but Edward held her tightly.

"Stay, dear one. If you go it will be worse for all."

They remained silent; but the waiting became intolerable. What was happening in the Manor-house? While the terror of the ordeal grew on them, Flora whispered her fears, and clung closer yet to Edward, her eyes, like his, fixed on the door of the hall, both wondering what they would see when it opened again.

"What will happen?" Flora whispered fearfully, but while she was speaking the door opened slowly.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DRUID'S STAIRCASE

THE light in the hall was dim, barely sufficient for those who watched to see who stood in the open doorway. Slowly, and apparently with reluctance, the two cavaliers stepped out, full into the moonlight, and lingered at the top step.

They had not found Sir Bernard, nor her mother, and Flora's heart beat quickly in relief. Surely they had eluded these hunters of the Star Chamber. Edward was meanwhile looking round to know in what direction they might ride if the troopers made any sign of searching the park. Flora pulled his sleeve to attract his attention.

"See!"

He turned and saw Bernis and Agnew descend the steps and mount into their saddles. Followed by the other horsemen, they rode down the avenue. The last gleaming helmet passed out of sight, the sounds of jingling harness and horses' hoofs and the clash of steel grew less and less, and before long nothing broke the night silence but the stamp of spurred boots as two sentries at the steps moved up and down on the gravelled paths.

"What shall we do now?" asked Flora, in a troubled voice, for she knew that it was impossible to enter the house to discover what had become of her father. Yet,

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to ride away and leave the matter unsettled would be desertion.

Before Edward could answer, something near by attracted his attention.

"Who goes?" he asked quietly, for the sound gave him the impression of stealth.

"Is it Edward Fuller?" was the whispered question.

"'Tis my father!" exclaimed Flora, starting in her seat.

"Where are you?" came another question.

"Stay where you are," Edward whispered; and, moving forward, he saw the dimly showing form of Sir Bernard and Lady Vincent with what might be Pory, each mounted, and the latter with a led horse.

"Have you found Flora?" was Clare's eager inquiry.

"I am here, mother."

After a few moments of anxious colloquy, the important question being what next should be done, they turned away as soon as Pory had lifted Flora into the saddle of the spare horse. Edward led, with Flora at his side, and the little company moved down a long pine avenue, which was in dense shadow, the horses trampling on the grass to prevent the sound of the horses' hoofs being heard. At the end of the avenue Edward pulled up suddenly, and the others halted in a confused bunch.

"What's wrong?" was Bernard's anxious inquiry.

"Look yonder," was the reply. Coming from some distant bushes were four riders, and so moving as to betray the fact that they were searching for someone.

"Ah, there are more!" said Edward.

Horseman after horseman came into view, until a dozen or more were standing in the moonlight, gazing about in all directions.

"I had thought to cross the meadow," said Edward.

"I must take you another way."



"AN UNSEEN STONE CAUSED HIM TO FALL, AND HIS SWORD SLID FROM HIS GRIP" (p. 122).



Clutching at the bridle of Flora's horse, he moved down an avenue at right angles with that which they were leaving.

"Are you thinking of trying the Druid's Staircase?" Flora asked.

"Yes."

"The horses will never descend it," she protested.

"They must. We shall all dismount, and the horses will take their course when once we have set them on the move."

It was a tremendous risk to run, but the moon shone so brilliantly that the horses would be able to pick their way down the winding path which led into an open space like the arena of a huge amphitheatre. There were stones of immense size dotted about, which, in the days of the old Britons, must have formed the steps which gained for the descent the name of "The Druid's Staircase."

Every step downward was crowded with danger, and the moments passed with such rapidity that Edward and his companions trembled at the enforced slow progress; but there was an element of encouragement, for none of the soldiers would dare to follow them by the dangerous zigzag.

When Edward took the last turn his lips parted in consternation, for at the point which he and his companions were compelled to pass, an armed soldier stood on sentry duty. The man, whose horse was quietly cropping the grass, was alert, his sword in readiness.

"Stand!" he cried.

"Move out of our way," was Edward's bold response.

What followed surprised him. Flora, gentlest of women, delicate and frail, rose to the peril of the moment. She realised her lover's danger, and was ready to play

her part. She drew from her bosom a stiletto, which gleamed in the moonrays; then, regardless of the loose stones at her feet, she hastened to Edward's side.

"He must not hinder us, dear," she said, pointing to the soldier. "Man, stand aside, and allow us to pass," she cried.

The soldier's answer was a loud laugh, and some coarse words; then these: "None pass me, mistress."

Enraged at what the soldier said, with a woman near, Edward went forward quickly, but an unseen stone caused him to fall, and his sword slid from his grip. The soldier laughed more loudly, and rushed forward to strike at Edward, but Flora hastened to intercept him. The man's confidence was his undoing. Ignoring the woman, he thought to deal with the fallen cavalier, but when he drew back his sword for a deadly stroke he cried out in pain, and, swaying, fell to the grass, groaning.

Springing to his feet, Edward caught at his sword. There was no time for words, for when he swung round to see whether the others had safely reached the level, he saw mounted men at the top of the Druid's Staircase. They feared to venture down, but shots came from them.

"Ride hard!" he cried, showing the way, when he and his companions were again mounted.

On this lower level the fugitives had a splendid start. With the pick of the stable, the horses fresh from their stalls, they had everything to help them. The ride went strenuously, but none who were with him knew of Edward's pain. He set his teeth to endure it. At odd times he thought the pursuit had been abandoned, for he saw no sign of any soldiers. He left the road in case they were following, his idea being to get into the forest, and in its shelter move on unseen to a cottage hidden in the depths of the solitude, where he could leave his friends

while he sought to discover what the danger might be.

Riding softly, for the moss was thick at the horses' feet, they wound their way in and out in a wilderness of silence. Sometimes a fox dashed by to get to earth, or a wood-badger went swiftly to his hole. The forest was dense, and although the moon lit up every little space that opened, there were no fields, no homesteads anywhere to indicate the nearness of human life; no cattle lying for the night. Occasionally in an open glade they saw the red deer, and these, startled at the unwonted intrusion, sprang to their feet and fled, leaving the solitude deeper than before.

But for this bit of moving life, the quietness impressed itself on the little company.

"None can possibly be awake but those soldiers who are looking for us, and ourselves," said Flora presently. Edward nodded; but a few moments later he called softly for a halt.

There was a break in the forest, a space wide enough to hold a hundred people, and brilliantly illuminated by the moon.

"What does it mean?" was the question which sprang to the lips of the riders, who saw that the spot was filled with people. Did it mean danger? It might be a wandering company of vagabonds about to start on a destructive errand, burning homesteads and maiming cattle. In the hush of bewilderment a man's voice was plainly heard.

"I know that voice. Can we venture a little nearer?" Flora whispered.

Going forward a few yards, they saw the meaning of the assembly; but it was the daring of it which amazed them. The frightened ones had fled from Ray Dene, but some of

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them who had traversed these long miles in their flight, had halted here for worship.

They listened in silence, and unseen, and the preacher was ending his sermon, full of words which were meant to calm the worshippers in their distress and persecution. When the prayer which followed ended, and the worshippers rose from their knees, a man in the assembly swung round and the light of the moon fell on his bearded face.

"'Tis Cayzer," whispered Edward; "but how can we get at him? If we ride nearer, the people will be alarmed, and there will be a panic."

"Help me out of my saddle, Edward," said Flora, and when he had done so, none were startled when she moved out of the shelter of the trees. What she did when she stood in the midst of the company, who stayed to talk before separating, surprised them all. Her sweet voice rang out over the subdued sound of conversation, and the hush was instantaneous.

"Dear friends, do not be alarmed at what I am going to tell you." By this time she had reached the preacher's side. "When the meeting broke up at Ray Dene, the soldiers came to capture my father, my mother, and me. They searched Master Fuller's house, but did not find us there. Master Fuller brought us away, and we are looking for a place of safety because the soldiers are hunting for us. Go carefully. Keep in the shady ways, but go! and may God have you in His safe keeping."

When Edward had watched her during their flight there was a hunted look upon her face; now it was transfigured, as though she had settled down in one of the quiet resting-places of life, far from danger, and in God's keeping.

"I can find you a hiding-place, mistress," said Cayzer,

drawing to her side while the worshippers were hurriedly separating. Flora felt her small hand in the strong grip of this man who took high place in the countryside.

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Flora, her face aglow at the thought that came. "God's hand is in it, Master Cayzer. But there are several of us—Master Fuller, my father and mother, myself, and our serving-man."

"Where are they?" asked Cayzer.

"Among the trees. They remained there lest the people should be alarmed."

She turned to speak to the preacher, but he was nowhere in view.

"He's gone," said Cayzer. "This is his last service, and he is on his way to the coast, to go to Holland to rejoin those who left Scrooby."

"Come this way," Flora said, taking Cayzer's hand, and soon he was talking to the others who were sheltering in the shadows.

"Mistress Flora tells me of your danger, friends," said the man calmly. "I can take you to safe hiding, and later we can decide on your further course; but let us ride at once."

Only waiting to lift Flora into her saddle, he brought his own horse, and led the way, first loosening his sword in its scabbard. Drawing nearer to the edge of the forest to gain the benefit of the moon, they rode as fast as it was possible to travel. At times they paused to gaze across the open country, but saw no sign of the troopers.

"If by any means we are separated," said Cayzer, "keep the river in view, and make straight for that tree-covered hill yonder. But there is no need to think of separation," he added. "We will go in single file, and let each one keep on the other's heels."

It was close upon daydawn when they came to a ruined

but for which Cayzer had been aiming. In the pale moonlight, which cast deep shadows, it was weird, but the remembrance of the trackless forest, and the isolation of the place, removed all sense of insecurity.

"I am sorry to bring you to such rough-and-ready quarters," said Cayzer; "but it is the only course. I am going to leave you for a time, and when I return I hope you will have had some sleep, and be ready for what may turn up in the morning."

Worn out with their experiences, they soon lost themselves in dreamless sleep. When Edward awoke, none of his companions stirred. Even the horses were too tired to get up and crop the grass. The day was so far advanced that the drone of the insects in the summer heat came on the air, and the wild lyrics of the blackbirds and their rival songsters dispelled any sense of loneliness.

Anxious for his companions to have their sleep out, he crept to the opening of the narrow avenue. He peered through the leafy hangings, and was relieved to find no sign of human life. A viper lay coiled on a flat stone, warming itself in the sun, but when Edward moved, it vanished among the undergrowth.

Edward went farther into the forest, going more cautiously when the trees thinned out. He came to a spot from whence he could view the open country. A mile away, the river was flowing, a broad sunlit braid of silver. The ground between was meadowland, with starlings foraging in troops, and other birds busy in the ripened grass. But nowhere was there any sign of human life until something stirred which caused him to gape with wonder. A company of troopers emerged from behind a copse midway between himself and the stream. Edward did not stir until the last glint of armour disappeared, and no more horsemen were visible.

He thought of Cayzer. What was he doing, and what were his plans? Would he hide them in his Manor-house? Or would he do as Sir Bernard had suggested—find means for getting them out of the country? Was it for that reason that he had brought them so near to the river?

Edward returned to the hut, and found that all were now awake, the better for their long sleep. While they sat outside the ruined building, they talked of the future and its possibilities. There was no safety for them in England, now that Bernis was on the quest.

“Could we not get away to Holland, and join the others who went there?” asked Clare.

“It would be well, if God should will it so,” said Bernard quietly. “Yet it will mean poverty, or something near to it,” he added, with a sigh.

“Not so, my dear,” answered Clare, laying her hand on her husband’s arm. “I have jewels about me which can be sold. The money we should get would keep us out of the reach of penury.” She smiled when she looked into Bernard’s face, which lost a great deal of its cloud because of what she said.

“That is much to thank God for,” he exclaimed. “I did not know. I was recalling the fact that I did not bring away more than a handful of gold.”

“Ah,” said Clare, with a quiet laugh, “you should trust a woman to think of the future. I caught up what I could find in the few moments that were to spare, when you told me that there was danger.”

They turned sharply at the sound of a jay’s harsh cry, thrice repeated. It was Cayzer’s sign, and presently he appeared. They were relieved when they saw his face, for there was no sign of concern.

“Bernis and his troopers have gone for the time,”

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he began; "but since it is so uncomfortable for the ladies, I have found you a place nearer to the river, and even safer than this, where you must be content to stay until I can find means for getting you to Leyden. And that I am able to do," he added, in a tone which served to banish many of their fears. "But you must have patience."

Four days and nights passed before Cayzer came again, and his long absence began to tell upon their courage and their patience. Clare suggested that he might have been detected in his attempt to communicate with them. It was a disquieting thought, but they could do nothing but endure, and pray.

They sat in silence on the fourth night, depressed and harassed, hope nearly gone since no word had come. Their stock of food had run low, and after to-morrow's breakfast they would have no further store.

"Something must have happened," said Clare.

She had scarcely ended when they heard a jay's cry, and, as before, it was thrice repeated.

"'Tis Master Cayzer!" exclaimed Flora, springing to her feet, and gazing through the window into the depths of the tangled vegetation of the deserted garden. A man stepped into the moonlight, and crossed the intervening space with swift strides, disregarding the thorns which caught at his clothing and tore across his hands.

"Where have you been?" cried Bernard, going to meet him when he stood in the doorway.

"Never mind that," was the quick retort. "You must come at once. Marden, the skipper of a ship called the *Sea Swallow*, is waiting for you, and he will carry you across to Holland, and if you go on to Leyden you will find Master Robinson, and many who once lived in Scrooby."

They were all eagerness to be gone. They followed him as he strode swiftly through the forest, which ended on the river bank, and, halting there, they saw a boat, with two sailors seated in it. Half an hour later the *Sea Swallow*, which had been waiting in midstream, was going down with the tide.

CHAPTER XVII

IN LEYDEN

“**W**HERE shall we find the Bradstraat?” asked Edward, who was the first to step out of a boat at the water-gate of Leyden.

“’Tis a long walk, master,” the warden answered, gazing at the face of the beautiful girl who was standing on the lowest step, just out of reach of the lapping water of the canal. “Come higher up, mistress,” he added, making room for her, so that Clare and the others might come away from the boat.

“In what direction shall we go?” asked Edward, when they were all standing in a group at the top of the steps, and gazing around on the quaint scene curiously. Before the warden of the water-gate could answer, Clare took Edward’s hand to attract his attention, and pointed to the wharf.

“See! ’tis Master Robinson!”

Master Robinson was passing along absent-mindedly, wearing a Genevan gown, and with a big book tucked under his arm; but when he heard someone mention his name he paused, looked back, and saw those who were standing near the water-gate. For a second or two he appeared to be puzzled, but when he drew nearer and saw more plainly, a cry of pleasure came from his lips.

“Edward Fuller!” he exclaimed, and, gathering up his gown under his arm, he came forward quickly.

“What brings you here, my son?” he asked, taking the young man’s hand and shaking it warmly. “And you, dear ones,” he went on, looking at Flora’s radiant face, and then to Clare and Bernard. “’Tis good to see you, but what does it mean? I thought you were all in Virginia?”

“It means that we came back to the old land, only to find that she has turned the cold shoulder on us, and made us plainly understand that if we remained it were to court death, or whatever penalty the Star Chamber might inflict,” said Bernard, clasping the venerable preacher’s hand.

“Did you come with the King’s licence?” asked Robinson, whose grave eyes began to twinkle.

“We did not wait for it. There was nothing for it but to come when we could, and not await His Majesty’s courtesy. That faithful servant of the King—Sir Rupert Bernis—hunted us night and day, eager to get my daughter’s hand, and what wealth I had; and to avoid my having to give him a refusal, we came away by stealth.” Bernard’s face was broad with smiles. “Master Cayzer bribed the master of a fishing-smack to bring us over at a cost which has made the seaman rich for life. But we are here, thank God!”

“And in safety,” cried Robinson, looking at each in turn. Their faces had been wind-swept on the sea, and care pursued them until the keel of the tiny vessel grated on the shore; but once in Holland the sense of security had removed much anxiety.

“Where do you lodge?” Robinson asked.

“We have yet to find a home,” said Bernard. “A man on board the vessel spoke of someone named Maartens, living in Bradstraat, and we thought of going there.”

“And not to me?” interrupted Robinson half reproach-

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fully. "Nay, I'll take you to a place where you may lodge among our own people. These good fellows in the boat can pull us up as far as the Mainstraat. Will you?" he cried, turning to the watermen, who were waiting at the steps for payment.

"Will we what?" asked one of the men.

"Take us to the Mainstraat?"

A few minutes later the watermen took them along the waterways—the quaint, tree-lined streets—passing under numberless bridges, and by imposing buildings and beautiful churches, with glimpses of big squares and market-places, Robinson pointing out things of historic interest, and reminiscent of the Spanish siege.

The boat shot up a waterway, one side of which was lined with willows.

"Stop at the steps this side of the bridge," said Robinson. "I would have taken you to my own home, friends, but it is too small. I have but three rooms—one where we sleep, another which is the living-room, and the third my study." He said it apologetically.

"Where will you take us, Master Robinson?" Clare asked, glancing at the houses which lined the waterway.

"'Tis here;" and at the moment the watermen pulled in their oars, one man clutching at a ring in the masonry near the steps.

Edward paid the men, and their stolid faces broadened with smiles when they saw the silver in their hands. He overtook the others as they paused at a garden gate. A buxom Englishwoman stood on her doorstep, and wondered who these were who were grouped on the bit of grass-land in front of her home.

"Mistress Mason, have you any rooms for these friends of mine from England?" Robinson cried.

The woman after a moment's pause made answer:

“I can only find you three, unless this good man will sleep in the room in the roof.”

“I’ll sleep anywhere, mistress,” came the response from Pory, who stood a little in the background.

“There is no need,” interposed Robinson. “I know of a place where Pory will be comfortable, so let him come with me.”

Master Robinson came in the evening, just as the sun was dipping behind the ruined tower in the centre of the city. The gladness which had made his grey-bearded face so winsome in the afternoon was gone. Now it was lined with care. He found them in the bower in the corner of the old-world garden, from whence they saw the elegance of the city, the beautiful Cathedral of St. Peter, the frowning castle, the imposing public buildings, and beyond the other bank of the canal the villages and fields.

It was a scene of peace and beauty, and sounds of country life were borne to them on the evening air, with the hum of the city, which was already putting aside the noise and commotion of a strenuous day.

Master Robinson was apparently oblivious to all this. Lover of nature though he was, he was impressed with things of greater moment, and they who watched him enter slowly at the garden gate were aware of the change.

“Has anything happened?” asked Bernard seriously. “You look more full of care than when you were with us three hours ago.”

“The care was with me then, Sir Bernard; but the joy of seeing you, so unexpectedly, and the thought that you had eluded your hunters, brought the serenity to my face,” was the quiet answer. “You have come to Leyden at a critical moment, and what I have heard since I left you has sobered me greatly.”

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"What is the crisis?" asked Clare, wondering as she watched the preacher. Had they come from one danger to another? she asked herself. Was it possible that they had escaped the minions of the Star Chamber to face disaster in another form?

"Perhaps, my lady," said Robinson, speaking still more gravely, "you do not know that in Leyden are scores of refugees like yourself—men and women who escaped from England because there was no liberty of worship?"

"We have known that from the first, Master Robinson. But you speak of a crisis. What is it?"

Robinson did not answer immediately. He was considering what he should say. How should he explain? At last he ventured, but did it somewhat stumbingly, anxious not to exaggerate, and fearful lest he should alarm his friends.

"I know that you are aware of what some have called the 'Exodus.' We came here, many of us from Scrooby, and settled down to many mercies, but to many troubles. Those who came away from England, poor almost to extremity, found life stern and hard. It became with some of them a struggle for bread, and many went under because of it. Some of the younger men, alas! went to the bad. They fell into dissolute ways, and it was a sore grief to their parents, who had sacrificed all their worldly goods for the sake of getting into untrammelled touch with God."

Robinson paused again. The others, grouped around him, felt a weight of anxiety, dread, fear, they knew not what, descending on them. They had thought to find Leyden a haven of rest. What, then, was this which faced them? The minister broke in on their thoughts.

"We are not altogether free from danger," he exclaimed. When he saw their startled faces, he hastened to reassure

them. "Do not be alarmed. It is not imminent. It may be a year in the future; perhaps further away than that. But the truce which the Dutch made with Spain, which was to last a certain number of years, is nearly ended, and prosperous and beautiful as Leyden is—look at it in the splendour of the setting sun!" he cried, waving his hand towards the glowing scene.

There was another pause. It was as if this old man, usually so eloquent, so free of speech, was at a loss for words, for he was speaking so haltingly.

"The Spaniards, when the truce expires, may sweep down on the city, and subject it to all the horrors of a siege, such as brought it to the verge of ruin not many years ago."

"Did we fly from one danger to as great a one?" asked Clare tremulously, laying her hand on the old minister's arm.

"I pray not. I think not, if the crisis ends as we hope," was Robinson's gentle answer, when he saw how her face, and Flora's, were white with dread. "We came here, dear lady, as Englishmen, but many of our sons and daughters are marrying with the Dutch, and are losing their distinctive nationality. Mistress Mason, with whom you lodge——"

He dropped his voice, not to be overheard, and glanced at the door to see whether the woman might be near.

"She had a son, a stalwart, handsome fellow, and he married one of the women here. They live yonder."

He pointed to a village among the meadows.

"He is lost to us, and has become Dutch in nearly everything. We are jealous for our nationality; for while we were compelled to quit England, we want still to be English."

The little group stood in silence. No sound came but

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the lapping of water at the steps, and the evening songs of the birds, and the far-off hum of the streets.

"It may be your will, dear friends, to travel farther, now that I have said so much."

Robinson thus broke the silence.

"Pastor Robinson!" cried Bernard protestingly.

"I know you are going to speak against what I have said," Robinson interrupted gravely. "We are not altogether out of the reach of King James, even here. The States of Holland are in constant dread of Spain. They fear the possibility of her armies sweeping into the country, and they are keen to keep on friendly terms with the King of England, and have him for their ally. His Majesty is angry because the States harbour us, and some of our number here print prohibited books, and send them to England for distribution there. 'Tis possible that one of these days, as the price of England's friendship, we may be ordered out of the country, or clapped into prison. That means that the most prominent among us, men like William Brewster, and Edward Winslow, and William Bradford, may be carried over to England. Their lot will probably be the gallows."

"And yourself?" asked Flora, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"I should be one of the first. But I am not thinking of myself, but of these people over whom I am pastor, whose lives are precious to me. I cannot ignore their possible fate. But what I chiefly have in mind is this—that gradually the thought has been taking shape among us, that we should found a Puritan Colony somewhere, far away, where we may enjoy liberty of worship, and yet remain English."

Robinson paused, for two men went by who bade him "Good evening."

“ You saw those men ? ” he asked, when they had passed on. “ That gaily dressed cavalier, and the other who has the bearing of an English trader ? ”

They watched the strangers disappear.

“ Who are they ? ” Bernard asked.

“ One is Sir Robert Cushman ; the other is Sir Thomas Weston, the great London merchant. They were at our conference this afternoon. As for Sir Thomas, he has long wished us to go to Virginia, and settle there ; but I told them of your experience. Some in England had much to say against his plan. Many in Virginia, when the suggestion was made, declared that we should prove rebellious and dangerous colonists. That meant failure, and now we have been considering the question : If not in Virginia, where lies the land ? ”

Again Robinson was silent, and the others waited for him.

“ Where is the land ? ” asked Flora eagerly.

“ In Northern Virginia, far removed from the present colony. Those of our number who are able to contribute sufficient money will go, but there are many whose handicraft will be needed if the settlement is to prosper. They lack the means. ’Tis here that the crisis lies. The King has promised Sir Thomas Weston that we may go thither, provided we do not scatter our literature in England.”

They watched Robinson’s anxious face.

“ The land is waiting for us,” he said. “ There are seventy merchants in London willing to find a portion of the money. We have two ships at our disposal, but the scheme is doomed to failure for lack of means. The men and women who should go are chosen, the hope being that the others will follow later. Yet, alas ! for want of money, we must remain in Leyden, and none but God can tell what will happen.”

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Master Robinson's voice vibrated with regret and disappointment, while his head sank low. There were signs of despair in his face. A tear rolled down his face; another, and yet more.

"To think," he exclaimed in faltering tones, "that after all this prayer and hope we fail because of the want of so small a sum! The future of a nation seems to lie in the balance; for if our people cross the ocean they will establish an Empire with God for its ruler!"

Silence followed. The songs of the birds had been ringing across the meadows, and among the trees which lined the waterways. The cattle had been lowing in the fields, and the sounds of music came on the air from homes not far away, and from distant spots. But the hush of the evening had come; the last song-bird dropped into sleep, and the cattle were silent; the music died away, and the last faint glow of sunset passing, night settled over the city and the meadows.

In the hush Edward was thinking of a course which neither he nor any man in God's world that day could estimate in its consequences—the building up of one of the greatest nations in the history of mankind.

Standing apart from the anxious group, he thought of the plans which Master Robinson had spoken of when he had brought them away from the wharf to this house where they were now staying.

"Would anyone dare to call these exiles rebels, or say that they were lacking in patriotism?" he asked himself. It could not be so said of them. So far from being unpatriotic, the men and women who were going forth as Pilgrims had determined that when they reached the wilds of the New World they should extend the dominions of the King of England. The land itself should be called "NEW ENGLAND."

But as for religious liberty, they were undoubtedly rebellious. That liberty should be theirs, or they would die. His Majesty should not be the arbiter of their consciences. He should not dictate to them as to the manner in which they should worship God—what they should do, and what they should not, what rites and ceremonies they should practise, and what they should repudiate. Master Robinson, heroic spokesman of these exiles, had told how they declared that everyone among them should discover and apply the truth as they saw it in God's Word, and refuse to yield tamely to the observances of worship imposed upon his subjects by the intolerant Sovereign.

Edward was standing at the edge of the waterway, thinking deeply of the matter, while the others remained to listen to Master Robinson. The more he considered the great issues at stake, the more resolute was he to throw in his lot with those who were ready to cross the ocean to the New World. He knew so many of them. He knew that they dared to have ideas on religious matters, and dared as well to face their logical results. None of them sought comfort, or worldly gain, or they would have surrendered to the King's decree; for the path they were taking was the way of sacrifice and suffering.

"They cannot go if the money be not forthcoming!" Edward exclaimed. He framed his resolutions swiftly, when he had thought of the possibilities, then moved towards the little group, silent now, and tearful. Master Robinson was rising from his seat at the moment.

"I must go home, friends, and lay this thing before God in prayer. I will be with Him as Jacob at the brook. It shall be a wrestle with Him, and I will say as the patriarch said: 'I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me!'"

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Something must come from that. Prayer is a very real power when a man or woman deals with God."

Edward laid his hand on the old man's arm.

"Master Robinson," he asked quietly, "would the first batch of Pilgrims be able to cross the ocean if the money were found?"

"Yes, my son. The *Speedwell* is now in Delft Haven, waiting for them, and the *Mayflower*, a much larger ship, is in Southampton Harbour, with a number of godly men and women ready to go on board. Sir Thomas obtained the King's licence for them to leave the country, but to-day, at the eleventh hour, when he thought that all was settled, he told us what money was wanted before the ships could sail. We have not so much among us all, although we have gone thoroughly into an examination of our resources."

Robinson was turning away heavy-hearted, but Edward detained him.

"Master Robinson, I will provide the money. I have enough in England, hidden away. I will go back for it, and it shall be at your disposal to hand over to Sir Thomas, if he will let me know the exact amount. It shall be delivered to his bankers."

Those who heard Edward, listened in amazement.

"Already God has answered my prayer by anticipation," the old pastor cried, grasping Edward's hand, and gazing into his face with eyes which glistened.

A hand came on Edward's arm, when Master Robinson had gone away, and, turning, he saw Flora's face, but only dimly in the twilight. Her hand shook, and her breath came and went in sobs.

"You heard what I said, Flora?" he asked, bending down to her, forgetful of all the others.

"I did, my beloved. And although I tremble for your

safety, since you must needs go back to England, I dare not say, 'Do not go.' I cannot. This is God's work, and from the bottom of my heart I bid you God-speed. Kiss me."

When Edward touched her lips with his, he knew that her face was wet with tears.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON BOARD THE *SPEEDWELL*

WHEN Flora bade Edward farewell at the water-gate, and saw the boat pass out of sight at the bend of the canal, a sense of loss and loneliness oppressed her. She walked back to the house with a presentiment of trouble. She had the feeling that she and Edward would never meet again in this world. For danger lurked everywhere, on sea and land; and since he was making his self-sacrificing venture so chivalrously to enable those who found life so hard and perplexing to travel to a land of rest and religious liberty, she feared for him. She was oppressed with a sense of coming calamity. Edward might fall into the hands of Bernis, and he, enraged at having missed her, and her fortune, would have his revenge by betraying her lover to the myrmidons of the Star Chamber.

She wished, but vainly, that she had persuaded him to forgo his enterprise. She would have endured privation in Leyden gladly if she could have had him with her. She would willingly have done something to earn her bread, if needs be, rather than have her lover face the risks, the prison misery, the almost certain journey to the gallows or the block.

There was, however, not much time for brooding, or for unavailing regret, for Master Robinson came that same evening to say that the company would start in the

morning for the port where the *Speedwell* lay at anchor. It was possible, because someone had advanced the money on the strength of Edward Fuller's engagement to provide the means out of his own treasure-chest.

When the morning came the sun was shining gloriously, and the still waters of the canal along which the Pilgrims were to pass lay like a long streak of burnished silver. A score or two of boats were waiting at the water-gate, laden with a scanty supply of goods belonging to those who were starting in the quest for the land beyond the sea. They were on the move when Flora went with her father and mother down the water-washed steps to take their places in the last of the barges.

Leyden had no attractions for Flora, save that she had the memory of going there in Edward's company. Ah! would to God she had not suffered him to go! It would have been a source of strengthening to have him sitting by her in the barge, to feel the clasp of his strong hand. In such a case, and in that glowing summer sunshine, she might have watched with interest the broad Dutch meadows, the quiet hamlets, the gardens rich with flowers, the quaint and unaccustomed scenes of this land where she and hers were strangers.

But he was gone, and she neither saw nor heard the birds, nor did she join in the hymns which swelled out from the long line of slowly moving boats. Her mind was on the sea where her lover rode, while making for the shore. Once there on land, he might well be face to face with death. Nor had she any regard for the streets of Delft when the barge bore her through the heart of the city; nor eyes for the beautiful homes of the merchant-princes lying behind the lime-trees and the willows.

The *Speedwell* was awaiting the coming of the Pilgrims, and Flora walked along the plank as one in a dream.

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"Let me be alone a little while, mother," she said falteringly, as she halted at the cabin door. "See!" she exclaimed, a moment later. "Master Robinson, and those who remain behind, are on their knees. The dear man is commending us all to God's safe keeping! But, mother, dear, I want to be alone."

Clare bent and kissed her daughter. She understood. Her child was thinking of the man from whom she had parted, who had taken such risks to make this pilgrimage possible. When she had drawn the door together and had gone, to lean over the bulwarks while Master Robinson's fine clear voice rose on the air in prayer, Flora dropped on her knees, and with her arms flung out on the rude table, she rested her face on them, and prayed that Edward might rejoin her.

When the *Speedwell* anchored in Southampton Water, a boat put off from the shore, and when it pulled alongside, the sailor who was in it called aloud:

"Is Sir Bernard Vincent on board?"

Flora heard the question, and her heart beat quickly. Did the man bring news of Edward?

"He is here," someone answered.

"I have a letter for him."

"I am Sir Bernard's daughter," said Flora, when the sailor stood on the deck. "Give me the letter, please."

She had the hope that it was from Edward, but her heart sank when she saw that it was addressed in writing she did not know. She took the crumpled missive from the man, and carried it to the cabin where her father and mother were standing at the window.

"Father, a sailor has brought this for you, and awaits an answer."

Bernard broke open the letter, wondering who would

write to him—who, indeed, should know that he was on board the *Speedwell*. His wife and daughter watched him, and saw how his face paled while he read. He did not speak until he reached the end; then the letter dropped from his nerveless fingers to the table.

"What is it, my dear?" Clare asked anxiously, for her husband was gazing through the window, unseeingly, and as if forgetful of those who were with him.

"Ah! I must read it to you."

He took up the letter and began to read:

"I will not tell you who I am, but Sir Rupert Bernis has discovered that you are on board the *Speedwell*, and means to search the ship for you and yours as soon as he can reach Southampton. It is his purpose to carry you and Lady Vincent, together with your daughter, to the Tower, which means that you will be dealt with by the Court of Star Chamber. You know the issue in such a case—ruin, or death.

"I have spoken to the Captain of the *Mayflower*, and if you will be ready when darkness falls, he will send a boat to take you to his ship, where he can put you all in such safe hiding that, in spite of the sagacity of Sir Rupert, he will not find any of you. The sailor who brings this letter will meanwhile take you ashore and put you into a place of safety, in case Bernis should arrive sooner than is expected."

There was no name at the end of the letter.

Bernard looked at the white faces of his wife and daughter.

"Shall we go, father?" Flora asked.

"There is no other course, my dear, for Sir Rupert will surely come on board."

"Who do you think wrote that letter, Bernard?" Clare asked, looking out of the window to see what boats might be on the water.

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"I can only give a guess, my dear ; but I think it must be Wilson, who served us so nobly in our flight from home."

Bernard was buckling on his sword while he spoke, but, bending down, he kissed his wife on the lips.

"We are in God's hands, beloved," he said, standing upright, and gazing through the cabin window, wondering whether the water would be clear for their escape.

"And Edward — is he, too, in the hands of God, father?" faltered Flora. She was wanting encouragement in an assurance from Sir Bernard's lips, for she was thinking of her lover, who might find Bernis barring his way, preventing him from coming on board with the Pilgrims.

"Edward? Yes, my child. We may all say, 'I will trust, and not be afraid,' for I believe God means to take us safely across the seas," he added quietly, and with such a look of confidence that Flora and her mother found fresh courage.

The sailor was on the deck when Bernard went out of the cabin. He did not wait for him to speak, but whispered in his ear. Bernard started at the words.

"The letter I brought spoke of Sir Rupert as possibly coming. He has come, and is on board the *Mayflower*, searching for you all. You must come with me at once, or you will be undone."

"We are ready," said Bernard, pulling himself together, for the sailor's news had disconcerted him. He stepped back to the cabin, and bade Clare and Flora gather what belonged to them, and quickly, and go to the boat. Meanwhile, the skipper was to put into it such goods as belonged to them.

None knew the reason for their going, nor did Bernard tell them. Some looked at them askance, thinking they

had changed their minds, already borne down by the discouragements, after a voyage in the leaky *Speedwell*. A scornful voice came from among the group of Pilgrims:

"No man that putteth his hand to the plough looketh back."

Bernard swung round, and those who watched saw the flush on his face.

"You mistake, my brother," he exclaimed. "None of us are looking back. We are on God's errand, and you will see us again."

"Pardon me," cried the Pilgrim, stepping forward swiftly, his hands outstretched. "I misjudged you, and I am sorry. I ought to have known that Sir Bernard Vincent, and those who are dear to him, would not forsake us."

The two men joined hands.

"I shall join you again, John Rigdale, in God's good time," said Bernard, turning away.

When the boat was let loose, the sailor plied the oars in stolid silence, pulling up the great channel as though making for Southampton, three or four miles away.

"Are you not taking us into the teeth of danger?" Bernard asked, half wondering whether the man meant to betray them. The sailor, with a reassuring look, made no answer. He did not speak until, by keeping inshore, the *Speedwell* was no more in view.

"Now I may venture to land you," he said. "I did not dare to do so while the ship was in sight, for who could say whether a spy was on board, who would watch where you went into hiding?"

The boat ran into a creek, with trees hanging heavily over it on either side. A few yards farther on, the branches hung over the stream like a curtain, screening those who were in the boat from all observation, and so

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completely that when Flora turned to look, she barely caught any glimpse of the shining waters on which the boat had been tossing.

Tying the clumsy little craft to a tree which overhung the quiet inlet, the sailor sprang out on the bank, and with his sun-browned, tar-stained hand, helped Flora to step ashore; then Clare and Bernard. They were going to talk, but the man's quick ear caught a sound somewhere, and he lifted a warning finger. Leaving them where they were, he moved away carefully, and concealed himself behind a dense bush.

"Come, but softly," he whispered back, and his beckoning hand caused them to move forward swiftly. Standing with them at the bush, curtained off completely from any who might be passing down the great waterway, they watched.

"Look up the stream," said the sailor.

A boat with half a dozen sailors at the oars was approaching swiftly. The helmets of half a score of soldiers gleamed in the sun, and the dress they wore gave token that they were in the service of the Star Chamber.

There was no need to ask who they were, or what their business, for when the boat drew nearer, those who watched from behind the bush saw Rupert Bernis sitting in the stern, and by his side sat Agnew.

CHAPTER XIX

WAITING FOR THE *MAYFLOWER*

“**T** WAS in God’s mercy that I went to the *Speedwell* when I did,” the sailor muttered when, having gone to the boat for a basket, he made his way in and out among the bushes, while the others were at his heels, traversing what seemed to them a perfect labyrinth, where they lost all sense of direction.

He led the way to a spot so densely surrounded with masses of vegetation that he had to go in on his hands and knees, the leaves brushing him as he moved.

“Follow me,” he said, reaching for the basket, and drawing it with him.

One by one the others crawled after him, and found themselves in a small, open space, roofed in with leaves so dense that the sun scarcely penetrated through them.

“My brother lived a hundred yards from this spot, but he is now on board the *Mayflower*. He told me to bring you here, as being safer than in his hut—safer, indeed, than beneath any roof, and here, please God, Sir Rupert Bernis will never find you. Yet, if it’s any consolation to you, crawl among the bushes and you will see the water. Perhaps, with patient waiting, you may see Sir Rupert returning, disconcerted.”

They sat down to eat, for the basket was filled with food; but an hour later the sailor returned from his

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watch, and his face betrayed his excitement. He came into the place unceremoniously.

"Now you shall see something," he exclaimed; "but you must come with me."

Following him, they halted at a bush from whence they could see the great expanse of water.

A boat was drifting by, for the sailors rested on their oars, and the boat was so near that the voices of the men could be heard distinctly above the wash of the waves. The sailors and those in armour were indifferent. They had no quarrel with the man for whom they were searching, nor with his wife and daughter; nor had they any love for Bernis, who sat in the stern with a face that was dark with anger because of his failure. Agnew, who was at his side, was cynical, and appeared to find pleasure in whipping his companion's rage with words which travelled over the water.

"My dear Bernis, why not go to the *Mayflower* again, and ransack it as thoroughly as you have done with that rotten old tub yonder?"

"I will," came the reply. "But I do not expect to find them there. The *Mayflower* only has on board those who have lived in England up to now, and have received the King's licence to leave the realm. You saw that, did you not, when we went through the ship from end to end?"

"They could have gone aboard while we have been down here," said Agnew. "What assurance have you that the Vincents got away to Leyden?"

"Dorling saw them there—saw them going along the canal at Delft, and that was enough, since the boat went through to Leyden."

The last words were scarcely audible, for at a signal from Bernis the boat began to move.

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They who were listening heard all this with dismay, for it dispelled the idea of going on board the *Mayflower*. It would be madness even to venture on the water. Better lie here, in the seclusion of the bushes and undergrowth, for days, and wait for a time when they could hire a ship in which to journey across the ocean. Sir James Wilson would, perhaps, advance the money, and Bernard would tell him where, when the way was clear, he could find the hidden store they had not had time to touch in their hurried flight.

Wayman understood their difficulty, and suggested that they need not hurry. If it meant a delay of days he knew of a house where they could wait securely. There would probably be a delay, because it was not unlikely that the London merchants who were finding some of the money for the venture, were waiting for Edward Fuller, or were worrying the leaders among the Pilgrims concerning petty details. At the earliest, in that case, a day or two would pass before the ships could put out to sea.

"Why not stay here in hiding, Sir Bernard, till the last moment?" Wayman asked, after sitting silently, ruminating on a possible course.

"What about food, Wayman?" asked Bernard doubtfully. "Suppose the stay here should extend over several days?"

The sailor made no response, but moved about, thinking deeply. He came back to them after a time.

"Sir Bernard, if you are content that I should leave you here, I will go up to the West Quay, where the *Mayflower* is anchored. I can bring back a week's supply of food, and find out the day when the ship will sail."

Flora looked up quickly. In those moments, so crowded with anxiety, she was wondering what would happen if

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Edward came, and she was neither on board the *Mayflower* nor the *Speedwell*.

"Wayman, I am anxious about one thing," she exclaimed, and her face flushed rosy red, for she meant to speak about her lover.

The sailor waited, but Flora hesitated.

"You know Master Edward Fuller?"

"I do, mistress. I have often met him."

"He is to come with us to America, Wayman; either to join us on the *Speedwell* or the *Mayflower*. If he should come, and we are not on board either ship, he might go ashore again to search for us, and that would be a grief to me were I to miss him."

The sailor saw the flush on her face, and knew that it cost her much to say the words. He saw as well how her eyes gleamed, and that tears were there, while her lips trembled. She had more to say.

"Wayman, his failure to come means that the man who is to be my husband will not sail with me when the Pilgrims commence their voyage. You understand?"

"I do, mistress. You want me to set someone on the watch for him, and give him word, if you be not on board; to tell him you are here in hiding, and to bring him here? Is that what you mean?"

"It is!" Flora cried eagerly.

"Then give me three or four golden crowns, and a promise of one or two more, if I need them later, and I will engage two men, one on either ship, to be on the look out, and the promise of money will keep them both alert. But why not put Pory on the watch?" Wayman asked.

"He is gone to say 'good-bye' to some of his friends in Devonshire," said Flora, who drew out a purse from her bosom to give the gold coins to the sailor.

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Wayman went away with the money in his belt, leaving the others in the darkness of the newly-come night, to the silence of the woodland and its loneliness; but he warned them not to venture to make a light.

He returned, far on towards sunrise, and awoke them.

"Master Fuller has not come as yet, mistress, nor is there any news of him. I left word with Chambers and a mate of his, and they won't let him go for want of knowing that you are near at hand."

Flora sprang up from her bed of leaves, and caught at the sailor's hand gratefully.

"Wayman, you make me your debtor!" she cried.

The man smiled, and pointed to the things he had brought with him.

"There's more in the boat, Sir Bernard; enough for a week for twice as many as you are. There's news as well."

"What is it?" was the eager question.

"The Merchant Venturers in London have sent someone with instructions to alter the terms of the contract. He went off in a huff because Master Carver and Master Bradford protested that it was not honourable to make demands for greater profits if the Colony prospered, than were agreed upon."

Bernard listened gravely, and the morning light showed Flora how great his distress was.

"If only Edward had been here!" he exclaimed. "Had he brought us that money, we could have bought out those grasping men, who are only concerned with gain, and have no single thought for the glory of God!"

"He may come in a day or two, father," said Flora quietly. "He may be here to-day."

"I pray God he may, my dear," was the fervent response.

The days went on, and morning and night Wayman

went on the water to see how matters fared. Flora was always at the mouth of the creek, peering out to see him returning, sometimes venturing dangerously in her anxiety, wondering whether her beloved would be in the boat, and, failing that, yearning to know what news the sailor would bring concerning him.

But Edward did not come, and Bernard and her mother realised their impotence. What could they say to encourage her? Wayman told them that no news had come of Pory, and spoke, as well, of the shortage of money among the Pilgrims. It was a stab at Bernard's heart, for he had money in abundance, hidden away in his home. He dared not go for it, nor could any messenger obtain it in his stead. He was reputed one of the wealthiest men in England, but had not the comparatively paltry sum required to equip the enterprise, making it independent of the London merchants, and enable the captains of the two ships to weigh anchor and commence the voyage.

"If only Edward had been here, my child!" he said, again and again, in those weary days of waiting, while the merchants were haggling over less than a hundred pounds, which the Pilgrims, with all their willingness, were unable to pay. The crowning of the trial came when Wayman brought word that in order to raise the money, agreed to as a compromise, the Pilgrims had sent ashore sixty pounds' worth of food from the *Mayflower*, in order to get away without further loss of time.

"If Edward had been here!"

A sob escaped Flora, for the long waiting was ending in despair. Would he ever come? Had he been taken in the net of Rupert Bernis, and was he lying in some fearsome dungeon, waiting for death, and unable to send any message?

One morning, when the *Mayflower* went down towards

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the sea, Wayman carried them off in the boat to meet her. The ship was moving when they ran alongside, and a rope was thrown down to the sailor, for time was too precious for her to stay her going. It was as though she were some mettlesome creature that had been long delayed, and would no more submit to hindrance.

"Is Pory on board?" Wayman shouted, while the others were mounting to the deck.

"No," came the answer.

"Then he won't come at all now," said Wayman.

Flora's thoughts rendered her forgetful of her father's faithful body-servant, and when her feet touched the deck, she gazed around. She had the hope that Edward was on board, and would come forward, and take her to his arms, telling her that his mission had been successful. There were three or four score men and women at the ship's side, taking their last look at the beauties of the landscape before the *Mayflower* swept down the narrow strip of water between the English shore and the Isle of Wight, and so on out to sea. They were strangers to her, and if one here and there among them glanced round, it was in curiosity to know who the lovely but anxious-faced girl might be.

"Master Jonas," she exclaimed, going to the Captain, who was marvelling at her beauty, "have you a gentleman lately come on board, and Edward Fuller by name?"

"Nay, mistress. Did you expect to find him here?"

Flora reeled with the shock of her disappointment.

"He went on an errand of importance, connected with this enterprise, Master Jonas. He started from Leyden, and was to meet us here. Are you sure he is not here?"

She was hoping against hope, clutching at any straw in this sea of her despair; but the hope was crushed, and hopelessness came on her like an overwhelming ocean wave.

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"I'm certain, mistress. I have the names of every man, woman, and child of all this company whom I am supposed to carry overseas. Come into my cabin, and you shall see the list."

Jonas swung round on his heel, and led the way to his cabin with heavy tread, Flora by his side. When there he flung some ill-written sheets upon the table.

"They are all there, mistress. What name did you say?"

"Master Edward Fuller."

The Captain moved his clumsy forefinger from name to name, too slowly for Flora's eagerness. He read each name with a deliberation which was almost intolerable, and when he came to the last her heart was as lead. The name she yearned to see was missing.

"Do you think he might by any possibility be on board the *Speedwell*?" Jonas asked, concerned to see her disappointment. "She is yonder," he added, pointing out of the window at the heavy-looking ship some distance away, rolling clumsily, and with her sails bellying in the freshly blowing wind.

"He may be, but I doubt it," was the faint response.

"Mistress, I'll get into touch with her as soon as possible. I'll send a man in a boat at once to put the question to Captain Reynolds."

When the *Mayflower* was abreast of her companion, Wayman volunteered to be the messenger, but he returned alone, and Flora did not need to put any question to him. She saw by his sympathetic face that disappointment was in store. Edward was not on board. So that she and her father and mother, and these on this vessel, and those on board the ship near by—a hundred and twenty in all, apart from the sailors, and who counted themselves among the Pilgrims—were steering for the Far West, and her

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lover left behind! The dear God alone knew to what misery, or to what fate!

For eight long days and nights they sailed west, going into the lonely seas, each hour taking Flora farther from the man who was so much to her; so much nearer, thought the Pilgrims, who did not know of her grief, to that other shore where they were to find freedom in worship.

Sinister rumours came across the waters which separated the *Mayflower* from her companion that the *Speedwell* had sprung a leak, and that Captain Reinolds did not dare to venture farther, lest, if bad weather came, she should founder.

The ships turned back, and Flora had fresh hope. Captain Jonas announced that he would make for Dartmouth, and she thought that Edward might hear of their running into harbour, and ride hard to reach her. No doubt ever crossed her mind lest he had fought shy of the great venture, or slackened in loyalty to herself. If he did not come he must have fallen into the hands of his enemies, or had come on misadventure in his journey from Leyden.

During those days, when the carpenters mended the broken places in the *Speedwell*, and sought to make her seaworthy, Edward did not come. She wished vainly that Pory had come back in time, for he would have gone in search of her lover; but he, too, had missed the ship and, like Edward, was too late.

The heart of the hopeless girl sank to the deepest of despair's dark depths when the *Mayflower* and her companion once more put out to sea. Hope came again when it was found that with all her patching the smaller vessel did not dare to face the journey, and a port was sought where the Pilgrims might be transferred from her to the *Mayflower*.

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Then the larger vessel put forth for the final venture. And Edward had not come.

The day was ending when Flora saw the last speck of land disappear—the end of England, where Edward was, and who could say in what plight? About her were the Pilgrims, some old, some young, all like herself gazing tearfully at a shore they might never see again.

"'Tis gone!" cried one, pointing to a spot which had become dim, and then had vanished.

"Edward!" cried Flora, clasping her hands, and resting them on the bulwarks. "Oh, my beloved!"

An arm slid round her, and she was drawn to her mother's bosom; but even in her mother's arms she swayed, and the world was blotted out.

BOOK IV
THE PILGRIMS



CHAPTER XX

THE *MAYFLOWER* AT SEA

THE *Mayflower* plunged onwards for three-and-sixty days. In rough seas men and women huddled together under the spar-deck, the voyage made more trying with contrary winds and terrible storms, when the hatches were battened down for days together, and the imprisoned ones panted for air; and when, as one of their number wrote about it afterwards, "they could only lie and groan and pray, in stink and misery; while the water from the ill-caulked seams dripped on them from above." Many a time, when darkness settled on the tossing ocean, they thought never to see the sun again in this world.

"We shall see the Sun of Righteousness, dear ones," said Master Bradford, "but never the sun we used to see at home."

Flora sat or moved like one in a dream, sick at heart. A woman whispered to her companion that the girl was love-sick. She was. She was longing for the man who was left behind.

The misery around her, however, made its appeal early in the voyage. The storms wrought havoc among those poor ones, and some lay on the floor, seasick, with no doctor to tend them, or do anything to lessen their sufferings. They were in pitiable plight, for the water which

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leaked through the deck overhead, or under the cabin door, washed about them as the vessel rolled.

It took her thoughts from her own trouble when she tended them, and showed the men the need for dividing the cabin into two separate compartments to secure privacy. The men followed her suggestions, and she pointed out many a thing they could turn their attention to, which made for comfort. Long before the voyage ended, men and women, and even the tiny dots who tumbled about in the storm-tossed ship, as well as the sailors, looked on Flora as one of God's sweet, ministering angels.

It was one of the mysteries of the going forth of the Pilgrims that Flora, whose heart was so near to breaking, was able to whisper encouragement and consolation to the despairing, and bade them go up on deck and look at the sun, when it one day broke its way through what had for weeks been a leaden sky. She smiled at them, and none suspected her heart-sickness.

One morning, after a sleepless night in the stifling hold, tending the sick, she climbed up the ladder to walk on the deck, for the second storm had gone.

It was daydawn. The sea was still moving in heavy swells, and the foam crests were on the waves; but the sun was rising, and dropping his light on the waters, which glinted like liquid silver. The sailors were busy mending the *Mayflower's* broken mainbeam, but they had a cheery greeting for her. After a walk along the deck, breathing in the fresh morning air, doubly sweet after the hours spent in the stifling cabin among the sick, she halted. She saw the Captain standing on the upper deck, and went to him, wondering what he was peering at in the far distance. She, too, turned in that direction, while her dark eyes were fixed on something in the west. A low

line of purple ranged along the horizon, and broadened moment by moment.

A sailor's cry rang along the deck:

“Land! Land!”

They who were below heard it, and all who were able to move came up to the deck. They saw a flat but forest-laden coast spreading away to north and south.

“What land is it, Master Jonas?” asked Bernard, who had been too sick throughout the voyage to do more than lie in helplessness in his cabin.

“’Tis Cape Cod, so I think—the eastern side of it.”

“Cape Cod?” exclaimed Master Carver. “You were told to make for the Hudson River. It was the agreement when the voyage was arranged.” He spoke severely.

“How could one choose a way in such a storm?” the Captain asked half defiantly.

Master Carver swung round on his heel, and walked away. It was something to thank God for, to have come so far on their pilgrimage, and be in sight of the land where, in some part of it, their home was to be. He and the leaders of the Exodus had met in council the day before, and had determined to call the spot for which they supposed they were making, **NEW ENGLAND**.

The same hour he gathered about him the men whom the Pilgrims looked upon as their leaders, and in a corner of the deck they discussed as to what their course should be, since Jonas had brought them so far away from their objective at Manhattan. They were talking thus when Flora stepped into the midst of this anxious little company.

“I have discovered something,” she exclaimed, breaking in on the troubled conversation.

“Ha!” said Master Carver, wondering at the flush on her face. He saw that she was greatly disturbed and that this was no idle intrusion.

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"Someone——" She broke off, while she gazed around at those who made up the group.

"Go on, Flora," said her father encouragingly; for he, too, had wondered at the expression on her face.

"My friends, you will not ask me to mention names when I tell you all. It was told to me by one who is dying, and I gave him my promise."

She paused, waiting for the assurance.

"We will ask for no such name, my child," said Bernard seriously. "I will answer for these."

Assured thus, Flora told her story.

"Someone told me a few minutes ago that before the *Mayflower* left Southampton some Dutch merchants met Captain Jonas at an inn in the town, and paid him down a big sum of money to steer wide of the Hudson River where we were to land. The wish of the merchants was to forestall the Pilgrims in respect to the rich country of Manhattan, where they contemplate making a settlement of their own."

The faces of the men became more stern.

"Compel him to stand by the agreement, Master Carver," cried Bernard, whose face grew dark with indignation. "He is not our master, and he shall not trifle with us!"

"Nay, he shall not!" the others exclaimed, some of them clenching their hands in their anger.

"So be it, friends. I will go to him at once," said Carver, turning and stalking towards the Captain's cabin. The others followed him, and when he threw open the door unceremoniously, they crowded in after him.

The sailor was seated at the table, looking at his chart, but he looked up in surprise at this noisy entrance.

"What is your will?" he asked, standing.

"Captain Jonas, 'tis said that you took money from

some Dutch merchants, not to land us at Manhattan,” said Carver quietly. The suppressed tone went further to disconcert the Captain than any abrupt and angry speech. “What does it mean?”

“As to the charge that I took money from the Dutchmen not to land you there, ’tis only true in part,” Jonas answered suavely. “They gave me a commission, that when you had settled at a likely spot I should see how the land lay for them, without doing hurt to those who are now on board my ship.”

“He lies, Sir Bernard,” whispered Bradford, but with his eyes still on the sailor.

“I am sure of it, Bradford. But let us not quarrel. Captain Jonas,” Bernard said, speaking aloud, and breaking in on the silence which had followed the sailor’s words. “You will take us to the place appointed?”

“I cannot. And, what is more, I will not, so long as the sea is what it is,” Jonas answered half defiantly. “The season is late. ’Tis now November, and there are shoals and currents off the elbow of the Cape. You can see that for yourselves,” he went on, pointing through the windows.

“I do not understand your inability, Captain, to sail away to the south,” Carver said, turning away from the window, and once more facing the Captain.

“The southern passage is dangerous,” came the sulky reply; “and I will not risk my ship. Surely there are scores of places on this American shore where you can land? Why not let me take you into the harbour yonder? ’Tis just round the crook of the headland. I could anchor the *Mayflower* there, and a few of us, going in the shallop, could look for a place which would suit your purpose.”

“We will put the matter to the test, and judge for

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ourselves," exclaimed Master Bradford, after a long pause.

The men turned away, and left Jonas fuming in his cabin. He wiped his face, and sat down when the door closed, and he was alone. He brought his clenched fist down on the table.

"How did they get to hear of that money?" he said, between his teeth, wiping his face again.

CHAPTER XXI

THE VOYAGE IN THE SHALLOP

THE next morning the shallop, which had been stored away, was brought on deck and put together—a little craft of fourteen tons; but there was dismay when it was found that the sections had been so strained that the water poured in at the seams. The ship's carpenter had to spend weeks at the task of rendering it seaworthy. By the time the boat was ready, winter had set in. Anxiety was added to anxiety when Captain Jonas made the announcement that within a few days he would sail back to England, with or without the Pilgrims.

Driven thus into activity, the chosen pioneers set forth on this voyage of discovery, in the face of head winds and blinding snowstorms. They went along the coast for five-and-forty miles before the clumsy craft entered a great harbour. They sounded it, and found that it was safer for the *Mayflower* than her present anchorage.

A few of the Pilgrims landed, each man well armed, and led by Miles Standish, a soldier who had served in the wars in the Low Countries, they went through the forest, and came to open spaces which proved to be cornfields.

“’Tis a lonesome country, and full of wild beasts,” said one, when the scattered party reassembled at the shallop,

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and stood with the forest behind them. They had their faces towards the ocean, which frowned on them, and saw the snowflakes dropping into the leaden-coloured waters.

"Is this the top of Pisgah, Master Carver, of which we have heard so much—the land where we were to see the King in all His beauty? And was that country we looked on just now the so-called 'pleasant land'?" one asked, in bitterness.

"Ay," exclaimed another. "Would you say that we return like the spies of Israel, and have traversed portions of the Land of Promise?"

"Hush, my brothers," said Master Carver quietly. "'Tis God's appointed resting-place for us. What say you, Master Bradford?"

"I think with you," was the answer.

The men gazed round on their fellows, and when the shrill winds blew on them, and caused their clothing to look like suits of frozen mail, there seemed no great hope for the outcome of their pilgrimage. Yet, standing in the midst of the storm, Bradford's strong voice rang out in splendid confidence: "In Thee, O Lord, do we put our trust! We shall not be put to confusion!"

Not one word more was spoken. Brushing the snow from their faces, the men moved slowly to the shallop, sat down in silence, and returned to the ship.

Two days later the weather-beaten *Mayflower* brought the Pilgrims round to what they had named as Plymouth Bay. The men and women gathered on the deck, as the vessel rode into the harbour, and they gazed at the land where their new home was to be. It was a wild and stormy day. The snow was falling heavily, and the keen and icy blasts of wind made their teeth chatter. Some of the women sobbed at the thought of what was before them, of the perils by storms, and tempest, and the



“’TIS GOD’S APPOINTED RESTING-PLACE FOR US ; WHAT SAY YOU,
MASTER BRADFORD?” (p. 168).



possible onslaughts of merciless foes, if Indians were near—who must be there since there were tokens of a rudely cultivated land.

William Bradford broke in on the joyless silence.

“It is as God wills, dear ones. He has brought us to the Land of Promise, and will make His sun to shine. Be sure of it! He may have hidden His face, and we are troubled; but the clouds will pass, and we shall prove the worth of all His promises. We knew when we started that the dangers would be great; but we knew as well that our condition was not ordinary.

“Our ends were honourable,” he continued. “Our calling was to leave all things and come hither. There are no friends to welcome us, nor inns to entertain or refresh our weather-beaten bodies; no houses, much less towns, to repair to or seek for succour; but God is here.”

Those who stood on the deck, gazing across the strip of water which lay between them and the shore, turned to look at Bradford, awed by the confidence of his tone, and they were won over by his simple trust in God. He said nothing when he knelt upon the deck, and they, too, sank on their knees.

Had Captain Jonas been reasonable, the Pilgrims might have gone farther, and, so far as comfort went, fared better; for they would have sailed southwards to a warmer clime, still leaving a broad tract of neutral ground between their settlement and Virginia. The heartless sailor, with the knowledge of the handsome sum of Dutch money which awaited him in London, was eager to be rid of his human cargo and sail back to England. It was nothing to him that those whom he engaged to carry across the sea, and among them a newborn babe who saw the light that same hour when the *Mayflower* dropped her anchor,

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should land in snow and gale on a wild and desolate shore without a roof to shelter them.

He was shamed into acquiescence, and did not venture to carry out his threat that, if the Pilgrims did not speedily come to some decision, he would set his sailors to work to carry the goods ashore, snow or none, home or none, or only God's heaven for their roof.

Where was the home of the Pilgrims to be?

The company were on their knees when one of them led off the psalm in a rich, deep voice: "In Salem also is His tabernacle, and His dwelling-place in Zion."

"Where is Salem?" Carver asked, when the psalm had ended, and there was a hush in the hold into which the Pilgrims crowded, save for the swill of the bilge-water while the *Mayflower* rocked at anchor.

"Let us go forth and seek for it."

It was Captain Miles Standish who spoke, and the soldier stood up before the kneeling men and women. They gazed at his diminutive body, for he was barely four-and-a-half feet in height; but they saw the flash of confidence in his large, dark-blue eyes. He was a soldier, every inch of him, clothed in doublet breeches, with velvet cap, jack-boots, a sword which had seen service at his side, and no token of dismay or fear.

"Let ten men join me, and we will go and find this Salem, our Zion, where God will meet with us."

Before any of the company had risen to their feet, he moved towards the ladder which led up to the deck; but he paused, and turned to where the women were. One, small and tender, was there, and he saw her sweet face, and her parted lips, as if she would speak to her husband.

"Kiss me, Rose," said Standish, laying his hand lovingly on her shoulder. "I am going to find that home.

I am going in the Lord's name and strength, dear wife, and then I shall know where my beloved will be."

She put her arms about his neck and kissed him, following him wistfully with her eyes when half a dozen men sprang to their feet, caught up their swords, and moved up the ladder after him.

A sigh came, and she turned to Flora, who was at her side.

"My dear, Miles goes to find this new home, but mine is more likely to be in heaven," she whispered.

Flora folded her arms about the frail woman, and, gazing into her face, read death in her soft blue eyes. She led her to a place whence she could look through the port-hole and see the sullen, leaden-coloured waters on which a boat filled with armed men was tossing. They were seeking for a "habitation" somewhere among the snowdrifts on the shore. She sighed when the boat disappeared, but she held Flora's hand and talked of that other home to which she was going as fast as her tired Pilgrim feet could take her.

It was a wild, fierce day, and the coats of the men in the boat were covered with spray, which froze on them until they were stiff with ice.

Night came and they had found no landing-place, but, running aground, they huddled together in the boat for warmth, and half slept, half watched, until the day dawned.

After breakfast some of them were told off by Standish, and landed, to look for Indians, but found none; at nightfall they rejoined their companions, who had gone into a sheltered creek.

"We'll make a bower of these logs and branches," said Standish, tossing down his weapons, and before it was dark they had a rough shelter for the night. They lit a

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huge fire, and a sentinel was appointed to watch while the others slept.

Far on into the night John Alden, standing with his back to the fire and the sea, peered on every hand for any threatening danger. Silence settled on the night, nothing moving but a Pilgrim turning on his bed of branches to sink yet deeper into tired slumber. With all his alertness, Alden failed to see someone moving stealthily from tree to tree, treading noiselessly in the snow, halting at last behind a tree within arrow-shot of the anxious sentinel.

Alden turned towards the creek, and an Indian came from behind the tree, leaving the print of his moccasins in the snow. In spite of the biting cold he was little more than half naked, his shoulders covered with a cape of bearskin, but his chest bare, and showing painted stripes of white and black down to his waist. Case-hardened, as it were, the savage did not appear to care for the cold, his whole attention being centred on the white man by the fire.

The dawn was creeping on, and what had been shrouded in darkness began to show out dimly, and Alden was feeling relieved. Look where he would, he saw no sign of life; for the Indian, satisfied with his own scrutiny, had withdrawn to the tree.

"'Tis all right," muttered the sentinel; but he had scarcely said so much when something whizzed past his face and tumbled into the burning logs. Alden swung round, and saw the flames curl round a barbed arrow. Another followed, caught at his cap, shifted it aside, and this arrow also found lodgment in the fire.

Straightening his cap, Alden turned swiftly to look into the forest. A cry of amazement came from his lips, for an Indian was standing a little in advance of the nearest tree, fixing an arrow to his bow for the third shot; but

behind him stole another red man, coming from a tree near by, a third, and then a fourth.

The forest appeared to be alive with savages, but Alden was swift to act. He raised his weapon, levelled it, and pulled the trigger. A flash, a loud report, and then a cry, and the Indian, whose fingers were straining at the bow, fell dead on the snow. The sound awoke the sleepers, who sprang to their feet and caught up their weapons.

From where they stood, with Standish in the forefront, the pioneers saw scores of painted warriors moving towards the edge of the forest. A cloud of arrows followed, and more than one feathered messenger brushed the little Captain's cheek, and passing, quivered in the timber of the shelter behind him. None of his men were hit.

"Are you ready?" Standish asked quietly.

"Yes," came the answer.

"Fire!"

Derisive yells followed, for as yet no Indian was hit for the Indians had drawn back among the trees.

"Let them come nearer," said Standish, who was cool in the midst of danger and tremendous odds. The Indians came away from the forest, defiant, and shouting their war-cry.

"Fire!" cried Standish.

The screams which followed the volley were no more those of derision, but of men who writhed in the snow. In a few moments the naked warriors were in flight, the wounded ones limping on the arms of those who had not been hit. One man, however, remained—a savage whose belt was hung with scalps, and whose feathered head-dress showed him to be a chief. From the shelter of the trees he shot arrow after arrow, careless of the flying bullets. He bore a charmed life, but even with his skill and daring

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he could not get an arrow home, so skilfully had Miles Standish disposed his men. The little Captain awaited his opportunity, and did not let it pass him. The Indian's elbow jutted out from behind the tree, and Standish, taking deliberate aim, fired. The shot shivered the bark, the Indian's arm fell helpless, and the bow tumbled from his hand. With a scream of pain the chief turned and fled into the forest to join his men.

"'Tis something to thank God for, comrades," cried Standish, whose eyes flashed, and whose breath came swiftly, for he loved a fight. His rough voice framed a prayer, and when it had ended William Bradford led off the psalm: "Whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

Gathering up the arrows as trophies of the fight, the pioneers, all of whom were scathless, returned to the shallop and renewed their voyage. But a storm burst on them. The mast snapped, the sail went overboard, the rudder broke, and the snow and sleet and wind came mercilessly; but they went on, realising the need for pursuing the quest. Three days later they saw a spot which promised great things so soon as spring-time came. They found a harbour fit for the ship to anchor in, and when they left the boat on the shore, with John Alden and a sailor to keep watch over it, they discovered sweeping meadows, and what had been cornfields, and running brooks whose rough moving waters left icicles on the frozen vegetation on the banks.

The pioneers returned to the shore, and stood on what one of them called "Plymouth Rock."

They questioned among themselves as to the decision. Would it be well to land here, gathering timber from the forest with which to build their huts?

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“Shall we go farther south?” exclaimed Bernard, who was one of the company.

“I can answer that question,” someone cried in sharp, half-angry tones—one who had been standing apart, half sullenly and silently, taking no part in the anxious deliberations.

CHAPTER XXII

LANDING ON PLYMOUTH ROCK

THE men swung round, and saw the Captain of the *Mayflower*.

“What do you mean, friend?” asked Master Bradford quietly, but disquieted at the look on the seaman’s face.

“I mean that you will settle to land here, or where my ship now is, and nowhere else; for I’ll go no farther. Nor shall my ship! You may take my word for it,” he added, with a sneer upon his face, “that you have found your Salem.”

He turned and strode down the beach to the boat, into which he stepped. It seemed to those who watched him and saw him speak to the sailor, that he was about to pull out to sea, and leave the pioneers on the shore.

John Alden, guessing the Captain’s intention, when he saw Jonas grip an oar to push away, made his protest. It did not avail, for Jonas bade the sailor cast off.

“If Wilmot does as you say, I’ll put a shot into him, Captain Jonas, and another into you!” Alden drew a pistol from his belt while he spoke, and sprang up from his seat in the boat.

Jonas swore again, but Alden’s face convinced him that he would not dare to carry out his scandalous intention.

"We must take it as God's leading," said Bradford, as the pioneers walked slowly to the boat.

"I'd rather strip the fellow to the waist, and lash his bare back with my belt," cried Standish angrily. "Are we, who have been his paymasters, to do as he shall tell us? Is he our servant or our master? I'll begin with him even now," the soldier went on, with gathering temper, but Master Bradford put a hand on his shoulder.

"Friend Standish, we'll take this as being the Lord's will. He often makes a sinful man His mouthpiece, and since we were undecided we must believe it to be God's leading."

Standish drew his shoulder away impatiently, and looked sulkily at the Captain; but his face cleared after a brief silence.

"I'll take it so, Master Bradford. After all, 'twill be a pleasant land when the winter is past."

"What news?" cried Master Bradford when the boat reached the ship, and he had climbed on board. He and the others saw that there was something amiss. Some women were grouped about the Captain's cabin, and all in tears, while the men stood a little apart, their faces serious. From among them stepped John Carver, and, grasping Bradford's hand, he looked into his friend's face.

"What is it, John?" asked Bradford, turning pale at the thought that something sad had happened in his absence.

"God's hand must be in it, William," Carver said, with a halt in his voice. He was gazing among the others who had just come back to the *Mayflower*. "Friend Bernard, come here," he exclaimed, holding out a hand to Flora's father.

"What is it, John?" said Bernard, unconsciously re-

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peating Master Bradford's question. His own heart sank. He looked around, and could not see Flora; he did not wonder that Clare was not there to welcome him, but where was Flora? But perhaps she was with her mother, who had been sick through so many days of the voyage.

"John," exclaimed William Bradford, "I do not see her here. Is there bad news? Nor do I see Lady Clare; but that I can understand, since she was sick when we went away."

Bernard seemed tongue-tied. He could only stand there, his hand in John Carver's clasp.

"Bernard, Clare has gone home. What is left of her is in the cabin," he faltered, bending over Bernard's hand, and the hot tears fell on it. "Go to her, and God send you comfort, and Flora also."

Bernard strode away to the cabin, and those who watched him and saw him pass in, gazed in speechless sympathy at the closed door.

"John, are you speaking to me of my beloved wife as you spoke of Clare Vincent?" said William Bradford, when Bernard had passed out of sight. "Is Dorothy ill? Nay," he added, with bated breath, which went like an agonised whisper to the ears of everyone in the little company, "is she dead?"

"I know not how to tell you, William," Carver faltered. "It has torn my soul to tell Bernard. It is grief beyond words to me to tell you, brother, that your Dorothy was straining her eyes through the snow and mist, wanting some sign of her husband's coming, and in some way, I cannot tell you how, she slipped. The waters closed over her, and we could not find her. William, she and Clare are both with God."

Dropping his friend's hand, Bradford walked slowly to his cabin and, entering, closed the door behind him.

None could hear the story that night of what the pioneers had seen. The loss of dear ones overbalanced every thought of curiosity, and, instead, the hour before the Pilgrims went to their rest was spent in prayer for those who were bereaved.

When morning came the company assembled in the ship's hold to hear what the land was like. Since every man had returned unscathed, in spite of the perils from the red men, the listeners heard with wonder of the adventures, as William Bradford and Bernard, stifling their own sorrow for the time, spoke of what they had seen. Flora sat behind all the others, anxious not to have others see her face. Her thoughts were not on the story, but on her mother, who had been buried at daydawn, and what was said she did not hear.

"What shall we do, brothers and sisters?" asked Bernard, whose pale face was tense with his great loss.

"Master Bradford," exclaimed Standish, stepping forward from his wife's side, "let us make Plymouth Rock our settlement. The harbour is splendid, and when in God's dear mercy we have established our home on what you just now called 'this wild New England shore,' we can trade with the old country. Were we to land yonder we could not do half so well."

He pointed to the shore, which was dull and dismal in the sunless morning.

"The Indians are there," said Carver.

"What if they are? I will show you how to hold them back, provided you give me a free hand, and full control of our fighting men. And there be some fine fellows here who will show how an Englishman may hold his own against naked savages."

Standish named the men who would serve to make up his little army; then he sat beside his wife again.

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Silence followed. The only sounds which broke it were the wash of the waters against the sides of the ship, the creaking of the vessel's timbers, the howling wind which swept the bay, and caused the bilge-water to slap and gurgle with the *Mayflower's* rolling. The smoky lanterns swayed, and cast a yellow light on the faces of the men and women who sat or stood in that wretched hold.

Flora gazed about her, and saw how strained and tense the faces were, but no murmur was heard, expressive of discontent. The leaders sat together, with bent heads, and Flora, careful for her father in their joint sorrow, saw how changed his face was from when he started in the shallop on the voyage of discovery. But so much had happened since then. The loss was so irreparable to them both; the consolation they were in need of was so great. Yet, because the good of others was at stake, and the issue was so great, her father cast aside his own sorrow in this crisis which had come.

"Speak, William," she heard her father say.

Bradford rose to his feet slowly, and Flora noticed how he had lost much of his alertness, and how his shoulders bent under this new weight of pain. The tears sprang to her eyes, not for her own trouble but for his, and she prayed for sustaining grace for a saintly man whose life had been rendered desolate.

"Friends," he said quietly, "it is not with us as with some whom small things discourage, or small discontentments cause to wish themselves back in Leyden, or in their English home again. None of us are craving to return from our wilderness to the life in Egypt, I trust. You have heard our story. It seems to me that Plymouth Rock must be our new home. You heard what Miles Standish said? His was ever a great heart, and his trust, I know, is not alone on that keen sword which is belted on his side,

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but in God. Because God appears to me to have pointed the way, I suggest that we move the *Mayflower* into the harbour, and begin to build our home. But let us first kneel and pray before we say 'Nay' or 'Yea.'

The little company knelt, and there was a short time spent in silent prayer.

"What shall we say, brethren?" asked Carver, who was first to rise.

"What other answer than 'Yea'?" asked Brewster.

A murmur of assent came; it was subdued. There was no token of enthusiasm, but it was as if everyone had said, "'Tis the will of God. We can do no other."

When morning came the *Mayflower* was running heavily before the wind, heading for Plymouth Rock. It was midday when Captain Jonas cast anchor, and every man and woman, save such as were too sick to move, went ashore to look at the spot that was to be their home.

The sun shone out with a watery light from among the clouds, and while Standish kept watch the others toiled, their guns and swords near at hand, in case the Indians should burst on them from the forest. It was the strangest Christmas Day men ever spent. They went to their task with feverish energy, some bringing from the forest the timber with which to erect a barricade. The encircling ring of timber was barely finished when darkness came.

"I shall stay here to-night," cried Standish, glancing round the rude enclosure, and his arms akimbo.

"'Tis ill to do that, friend," said Brewster. "There will be a storm."

"Ill to stay, said you, Master Brewster?" cried the little soldier, in a tone of scorn. "What! Shall we suffer the naked redskins to steal in during the night, to burn up our handiwork? I'll call for a dozen volunteers.

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Brothers, who will stay with me to keep the place to-night?"

"I am one, Miles," said John Alden, stepping forward, looking to his powder-flask and gun, to see that all was right.

"I call that sanctified common-sense, John," exclaimed Standish, his face broadening with satisfaction.

"I am one," said Bernard, content to serve under Miles Standish.

Within a few minutes the Captain had a score of men around him, and more were coming, who were going the round of the palisading to mark any weak places in it.

"I will not have more than a dozen of you, so we will draw lots," said Standish, gazing at his comrades admiringly. "We start our little kingdom with brave men. Not a laggard among ye all."

One by one the men were chosen, and as the lot fell for them they ranged themselves behind him. The others, smiling at his enthusiasm, yet reluctant to leave him, went to the boats.

"Bring more tools in the morning and some food. The dinner we have gone without to-day savoured little of Christmas fare," Miles cried, laughing loudly. "As for you, John, you shall sleep to-night, for I'll do sentry duty for once, and see that none of those naked rascals come near. But see to your arms, all of you, and be alert should I call."

The storm that night burst on them furiously. The watchers, unsheltered, were in the blinding rain, which soaked them through and through, and chilled them to the bone. Throughout the voyage the Pilgrims had spoken of high resolve, great suffering, and heroic endurance, and as Bernard watched his companions he felt that they were displaying a heroism which was sublime. To

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prevent the blood from freezing in their veins, as Standish suggested, they kept on the move the long night through, traversing round and round the palisading in pelting rain and blinding sleet.

“Hast seen aught like Indians, John?” asked Standish, meeting one of the company, his teeth chattering while he spoke, and his garments crackling, since they were casing with ice.

“I’ve seen naught, Captain; yet I heard something out yonder, and was on my way to tell you.”

Clutching at the frozen sleeve of the little Captain, John Tilley pointed into the darkness. They gazed, but saw nothing. A low yelp came in the wind; then all was quiet, for the wind fell, and the rain had ceased its fierce swish on the snow, and the trees in the forest. Another yelp was heard, long and low; then a scream, as from a man in pain. The yelp changed into howls which thrilled the listeners, and one by one the men within the barricade drew near to Standish. A cry came—the cry of a man; and yet another; then cries as of many in a deadly conflict with the wolves.

“’Tis wolf against Indian,” exclaimed one of the men. “What if they come here, Captain Standish?”

“Let us make for yonder corner, behind the spare timber,” Standish answered. “We shall have something solid and substantial behind and before us, should they leap the barrier.” But the cries died away, and the night settled into silence.

The day was as full of misery as the night. From where they toiled they could see the waters washing the decks of the *Mayflower*. The sea was so wild, and the wind so fierce, that no boat could bring them food. The sun shone for a few moments, and again the clouds massed up, and left the watchers in semi-darkness. A

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mist dropped on the sea, and the ship was hidden in it. They sought to light a fire, but an hour passed before they succeeded, and were able to warm themselves.

When the sun sank low behind the forest, and sent his red slanting rays across the soddened snow, and over the tossing waters of the bay, the shallop came and took them on board, tired, shivering, famished, almost too distressed to eat or sleep, and not a man among them who was not drenched to the skin.

Ashore again next day, the men worked with an eye to defence in case the Indians raided the settlement. It was Standish's idea, and the others fell in with it, to erect a strong timbered house twenty feet square, and so designed that, if an alarm came, all who were in the Colony could gather there, and the space would be within their power to defend.

The place was to serve other purposes also. It was to be the storehouse for all their material, as well as the fortress of the Colony. Standish determined to leave nothing to chance, and when the building was complete, he set sentinels at each corner on the roof, to watch for the coming of what he called the human wolves.

The spirit of the Pilgrims was displayed in the Council which was held before the building of this Common House commenced. Standish drew a rough but useful plan of the so-called fort, and dilated on its advantages from a soldier's point of view.

"We do not expect to be always fighting, friend Standish," said Brewster; "nor do we expect to labour without intervals for worship. And where shall we worship?"

Standish shrugged his shoulders.

"I am a soldier, Master Brewster, and everything appeals to me from the fighting man's standpoint," he

said half apologetically. "Forgive me, for I love the Lord, and yet I am justified in scheming for our safety."

"Friend Standish," said Brewster quietly, but there was firmness in his tone, "you surely do not forget that worship is as much a demand upon us as that we should meet the fact that there are Indians to be fought."

"As you will," exclaimed Standish. "The house shall be one for worship, but we'll fight when the Indians come."

The stern faces of the men about him relaxed. They were aware of the fine loyalty of the little soldier, and recognised in him a tender, loving heart in spite of his fire-eating speeches.

Before the Council ended they debated as to how they should proceed. They were by no means a company of dreamy, euphemistical saints, with an aptitude for martyrdom, and an inordinate development of affability. Here, on the brink of their momentous enterprise, they argued every point, none conceding where they were not convinced as to the wisdom of the proposals made.

"We will divide our company into nineteen families, and the single men shall be allotted to these in fair proportion," said John Carver, who had just been chosen Governor.

"That means nineteen houses, Master Carver," Bradford exclaimed, speaking from the bottom of the table.

"Just so. And they should be so built as to form a street lining the stream, with land for each, three rods long, and a half a rod broad, for every member of the household. What say you?" Carver asked, watching each face in turn as his eye passed round the assembly.

"I agree, if I may have John Alden in my house," cried Standish, who had scrutinised the plans while the Governor was speaking, to see how far they fell in with

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his ideas of defence. "He's a quiet man, but I love him, and he is a soldier after my own heart. Shall it be so?"

Carver looked round on his companions, and each nodded a grave approval.

They knelt in prayer before they separated. For a while, when Brewster's prayer was ended, no man stirred, but knelt at the table, with bowed head and clasped hands, as if loth, though so far into the night, to leave the presence of God. But when they arose they were more brave at heart than they had been before.

When morning came they were ready to enter on what someone has called the bright and sombre side of that primal life—its inadequate shelter, its sickness and weariness, its long pressure on the verge of famine and assassination, its roughness, its grim toils, its ignoble wranglings and meannesses, its incongruous outbreaks of crime, its steady, persistent ascent into prosperity through sagacious enterprise, hard work, and indomitable faith; its piety, its military exploits, its philanthropy, its acute diplomacy, its far-eyed statesmanship.

The men went ashore in the morning to start on the task of building the houses. The women watched them from the deck, and their hearts quailed many a time when they saw half-naked Indians moving among the trees of the forest. They saw Standish, and Alden, and Flora's father taking their stand at the top of the hill to look for the coming of the redskins or the wolves. Flora's heart thrilled, and Rose's hand closed over hers, so that her trembling for the safety of the man she loved was known to her companion.

Toil and privation told their tale as the days went by. The able-bodied men worked strenuously, the sooner to get the women away from the fever-haunted ship; but before it was completed the Common House became a

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hospital, and Flora was among the women who braved the perils of human foes, and nursed the sick who were carried ashore. No day passed in the early weeks but someone reached the end of the earthly pilgrimage.

One evening, while she sat in the doorway of the Common House, greatly worn with her incessant nursing of the sick, Flora recalled the words she had spoken when she and Edward talked of the prospect of a home beyond the seas :

“Think o.

Stepping on shore and finding it heaven!
Of taking hold of a Hand and finding it God's!
Of breathing a new air and finding it celestial air,
Of feeling invigorated and finding it immortality,
Of passing from storm and tempest to an unknown calm,
Of waking up and finding it HOME!”

Her face was pale with pain, for the death of her mother was always in her dreams as well as in her waking moments. Her mother had found the “unknown calm,” but it had not come to her, nor to any of these who were with her. As for HOME, this was a desolate land, for neither her mother nor her lover were here.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE COMING OF MASSASOJET

IN the days which followed, the men wrought hard to build the little town, goaded to effort by the ill-temper and increasing impatience of Captain Jonas. Death was busy in those eager weeks. The hundred and twenty Pilgrims, who had looked across the waters to see the wild snow-driven shore, had dwindled to less than sixty by the time three months had gone, and a little plot of land not far from the tide-mark was the resting-place of Pilgrims whom Death had met upon the way.

During those days there were two who worked hand-in-hand among the sick with unwearying care. Rose Standish lay in the little graveyard, and her husband found solace in hard work, seconding the efforts of Flora. He drilled the men, who at first were a strangely awkward squad, but by constant endeavour he pulled them into shape as soldiers. When the daily drill was ended he left the parade ground, mentally commenting on their want of military capacity, and entered the houses. He was ready for anything—to nurse the sick ones tenderly, or help the women in their household drudgery. No one but loved the little soldier who sought to lessen his grief in activity.

Flora was sitting outside the Common House one morning, worn out with her long night's vigil, when

Standish passed down the street. He halted to ask her how the sick ones fared, but before the answer came he swung round, his face towards the forest, an exclamation of wonder coming from his lips.

An Indian was stalking down the street, disregarding the challenge of the sentry, and moving towards Miles Standish. What did it mean? Standish thought that he might be the first of a hundred painted savages, and, lifting his trumpet to his lips, he blew the call for his fighting men. The sound had scarcely died away before men hurried in from every quarter, buckling their swords on their thighs, or looking to their guns, and wondering what the summons meant. They wondered more when they saw the red man in his war paint, naked, but for a leathern girdle, his long hair hanging over his shoulders.

Their wonder grew when they saw the stranger toss away his bow and arrows, and throw his tomahawk among the trees. The knife from his belt tumbled into the brook when he flung it away carelessly, and approached with uplifted, open hands, in token that he came in peace.

“What can this mean?” exclaimed Standish, whose fingers were playing with the pistol at his belt. “Mistress Flora, this is neither the place nor the time for a woman to be present. Go into the Common House, and hold yourself in readiness to bar the door if this should mean treachery.”

“Nay, indeed. I shall stay and see this thing through,” was Flora’s bold reply. “The man is disarmed, and is so of his own free will. You did not tell him to throw away his weapons.”

She broke off suddenly, for the Indian spoke. The men listened in amazement, for his words were in English.

“Welcome, Englishmen!”

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"Who are you?" asked Standish, not waiting for the Governor, who was coming up quickly from his house, the nearest to the sea.

"I am Samoset."

The wonder grew.

"How comes it, Samoset, that you speak our tongue?" asked Master Carver, who by this time was at Standish's side. He glanced at the naked warrior, and beyond him to the forest. The fear of treachery was uppermost, for this might be a subterfuge to put the Pilgrims off their guard. The answer came on the instant:

"Samoset will tell the White Father. Away, yonder, where the sun rises out of the waters at the dawn of day, some fishermen once came from the far land beyond the sea. They said they were Englishmen, and the men of my tribe were kind to them. The Englishmen traded with us, and we grew to be friends. But why talk of that? I come from the Great Chief, Massasoiet, whose home is far away in the forest. He bade me tell you that he would be your friend."

The Indian's stolid face relaxed, and, in the centre of the group of Pilgrims, he talked for two long hours, telling of his country and his tribe. At sunset he gathered up his weapons, and strode away into the forest.

Two days and nights passed, and nothing happened; but when Flora was wandering about on a bit of meadowland, which stretched between the fort and the forest, she was startled to see two Indians emerge from among the trees. She hurried down the slope and met Standish, who was resting on a fallen log.

"Captain," she cried breathlessly, "two Indians are coming out of the forest, and one of them is he who called himself Samoset."

"Ha!" exclaimed the soldier, alert, forgetful of his

weariness, and the trouble over which he had been brooding. The trumpet-call rang out, and Standish challenged the red men, who threw their weapons away.

“Why are you here again, Samoset?”

The Indian answered, raising his voice because of the noise of hurrying footsteps from the men who were answering the Captain's call.

“I am here with Tisquantum. We come from the wigwam of the Great Chief, Massasoiet. He has sent us here to say that he is on the way to greet the White Fathers and their sons who have come across the waters, in the hope that they will become his brothers. But let Tisquantum speak, for he knows the land from whence you came.”

The Pilgrims were amazed. The Governor turned to Samoset's companion, who was gazing at the roughly built houses and the strongly defended Common House.

“What does he mean, Tisquantum, when Samoset says that you know the land from whence we came?”

At first the Indian seemed not to hear. He looked at Carver and Standish stolidly, but his eyes brightened when he saw Flora.

“I remember it, mistress,” he cried. “In your land I saw maidens, beautiful like yourself, and you have come here, and so far, in the great ship with sails which swell out before the winds. Why have you come?”

“I came with my people to find a home, Tisquantum,” was Flora's quiet response. “Will you not answer the Governor's question?”

The Indian turned to Master Carver.

“I will tell the White Chief. I am Tisquantum. Some Englishmen came over the sea in one of their ships, like that which rocks upon the waters.” He pointed to the *Mayflower*. “They enticed me and my two

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brothers to go on board, to see the wonderful water-bird with white wings. The ship went out to sea, and they carried us to a land called Spain. They sold us into slavery ; but I escaped, and the captain of a ship carried me away to your great city, where I lived for many moons. There came a day when the master whom I served sent me in a ship which was to trade with the red men, because I knew your tongue. When I found myself near the land where my own tribe dwelt, I escaped into the forest. But none of my people lived. The wigwams were burnt. None but the dead were there."

The stolid face softened for a moment ; then it filled with savage hate, and the red man's fingers went to his belt where, in his forgetfulness, he thought to find his weapons.

"The day will come when I shall avenge my people," he said slowly. "Already I carry with me the scalps of many of my enemies."

He pointed to them, more than a score, and Flora shuddered.

"What happened, Tisquantum ?" she asked. "Where did you go when you found your wigwam burnt ?"

"To the Great Chief, Massasoiet. He was a friend of the Patuxets, and allowed me to dwell with his people."

The Indian paused. He gazed about him, and the savage look passed from his face.

"What is your mission, Tisquantum ?" the Governor asked.

The Indian turned, and spoke to Samoset in whispers, before he answered :

"The Great Chief is on his way through the forest, with a hundred of his warriors. He desires to speak with the white men, and be their friend."

It was decided after a short conference that one of the

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Pilgrims should go back with Tisquantum, while Samoset should remain as a hostage.

An hour later Edward Winslow went with the Indian, taking presents for the Chief, but there were many heart-searchings while this "brother beloved" was absent.

It was morning when a band of warriors stepped out of the forest, with the Indian Chief at their head and Winslow walking at his side.

Massasoiet crossed the brook, his red men following. Unknown to them, the guns on the roof of the Common House were trained, in case of treachery. Suddenly a cry rang out from the Chief, and the warriors, halting, threw aside their bows and arrows, their tomahawks and knives, far out of reach, and stood unarmed, in token of their peaceful errand.

Massasoiet gave his weapons to Master Winslow, before he strode proudly to the spot where the Governor waited for his coming. A few paces behind him was Tisquantum, ready to act as interpreter.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PILGRIMS' EMBASSY

WHEN Massasoiet returned to his wigwam he was the pledged brother of the Pilgrims. A few days later it was determined to send an Embassy to the Chief, to seal yet further the treaty of friendship and mutual defence.

It was suggested that Standish should go with a number of men well-armed, to impress the Indians in their own strongholds, but Flora's father objected that it might be counted as a challenge, with disastrous consequences.

"Let me go," said Bernard to the Council.

"If Sir Bernard goes, I would ask to go with him," Edward Winslow exclaimed.

"I, too, would go," cried Stephen Hopkins, who knew that he and the other two, in making this offer of service, carried their lives in their hands. "We shall be in God's keeping, brethren, and if you do pray as believing men while we are absent, we shall return in safety."

There was a sublimity in the frail man's faith; a full measure of the Puritan rapture which distinguished those saintly men who knew so well how to cast all their care on God.

"Two are sufficient," said the Governor, who watched Flora's face when her father volunteered to be one of the

Embassy. "Sir Bernard, you must remain here. I shall want your counsel, and Edward Winslow and Stephen Hopkins are able to speak for us."

"I would like to go. I ought to go," responded Bernard.

"You must remain here," was the decisive answer, and Bernard, who had already risen to his feet, sat down by the Governor's side.

The others started on their perilous mission shortly after daydawn, going straight from a meeting for prayer, to which the most decrepit went, if able to crawl from their beds. As Winslow and Hopkins halted at the forest's edge to look back, they heard the sound of a psalm rising on the morning air, commending them to the care of God.

They journeyed carefully, Tisquantum, as their guide and interpreter, always leading. The way lay through forest glades, sometimes past the river, into entangled depths, then where great open spaces showed that the early spring was giving token of its coming.

It was late in the afternoon when Tisquantum halted unexpectedly. One hand went to his belt, and the other was lifted to bid his companions be still. A warrior's eyes peeped from behind a bush, and the Pilgrim ambassadors saw a knife gleam in the Indian's hand when he parted the bushes.

The eyes of the red men met.

"Hawkeye, did you meet the Great Chief on his way to his wigwam?" asked Tisquantum.

The savage, now that he had been discovered, came forth in his naked splendour, tall, sinewy, painted, with his dangling scalps, and his left hand holding a knife, while his right was free to grasp the tomahawk at his belt.

"What said Massasoiet?" asked the guide, standing at his full height.

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"That if the white brothers came at any time they were to pass through the forest in safety. Will the white men stay in the wigwam of Hawkeye, the Chief of the Namasket?"

Winslow and Hopkins gazed at the Indian keenly.

"We will stay, for we are tired, and we will smoke the pipe of peace with Hawkeye," Winslow answered.

While the sun was declining, and the shadows of the night were creeping on, the Pilgrims sat before Hawkeye's tent. The Indians brought to them platters of parched maize and beans, and thin maize cakes. Young Indian maidens were standing near, and sang a plaintive song, in which they told of the hope of their tribe that the White Fathers from beyond the sea would become their friends, and help their warriors to do battle with their foes.

Later, Winslow and Hopkins sat in the doorway of the wigwam, and watched the barbaric scene which the blazing logs lit up luridly. The warriors had come together in the open space, joined by Tisquantum. At times the red men turned and looked at the strangers almost fearfully.

"What do those glances mean, Stephen?" asked Winslow, who, like his companion, watched the Indians with anxious solicitude.

"I cannot say, Edward; but this I know, that we are safe, for we are in the hands of the Lord. He sent us on this mission, and it is not with us as with other men, whom small things can discourage, or small discontents cause to wish themselves home again."

Winslow gazed at the man by his side, and saw that he bore himself as one who was above fear, looking far beyond the red men, as if into the very heart of God, confident that he was safe. He heard him speaking in

low tones, his hands nervously clasped, and Winslow made out the words: "Yea, though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me!"

Stephen paused, and turned suddenly to look at his companion.

"Edward, we are safe. I know it. I feel it. For I have prayed that you and I may come through in peace, with our end achieved. We shall return to Salem with good news. And more than that. The day is coming, my brother, when these forests shall disappear. The land will become the home of a people who shall achieve greatness, and stand to the fore in all that goes for progress, and honour, and helpfulness, and justice—a nation worthy of the country from whence we have come!"

He laid a hand on Winslow's shoulder while he spoke. His fine face glowed with something like a holy light, and Edward Winslow, who had been disquieted, felt his confidence return.

They had not travelled far the next morning, on leaving Hawkeye, before they saw tokens of havoc wrought by a pestilence of which Tisquantum had told them in the forest journey. They passed through villages which had been swept by the plague, and when they peeped into tents, or glanced down forest glades, they saw the fleshless bones of the dead.

Tisquantum halted towards evening, and sent forth a loud bird cry. Some Indians answered the call.

"The White Fathers have come to greet the Great Chief," said the guide. "Deer Foot, where is he?"

"He has gone to Sowams, but I will bring him."

Deer Foot sped through the forest, fleet as the creature whose name had been given him for his swiftness.

"How long may he be?" asked Winslow, who sat on

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a fallen tree, hungry, and worn with the long day's journey.

"An hour," was the laconic answer. Tisquantum said no more to the white men, but turned to talk with the warriors. Before the hour had ended Deer Foot returned and announced the coming of the Chief, who would meet the White Fathers at his wigwam door. Going thither, they sat to eat, and while they did so, Tisquantum entered the tent abruptly.

"White men, the Great Chief, Massasoiet, comes. Why not greet him as Captain Standish did when he visited your people?"

"Do you mean with a gun salute?" asked Hopkins, smiling.

"Yes."

They went to the door of the tent, where they saw the Indians, the squaws, the maidens, and the children, all who were not in personal attendance on the Chief, assembled in a semicircle, their eyes turned curiously towards the wigwam where the white strangers were lodged. As Winslow and his companion stepped into the open the Chief appeared, and behind him were a score of his warriors. It was the signal for the salute; but as the powder flashed, and the two guns sent forth their loud report, there was a cry of fear. Except for Massasoiet, and those who had accompanied him to Salem, they fled into the forest with screams of terror. They crept back when they saw Massasoiet greet the strangers with every token of friendship, and lead them to his own tent. When they assembled again, Tisquantum quieted their fears by telling them that it was the white men's manner of doing honour to their Chief, and that it was a salute alone for kings.

The Pilgrim Envoys had not come empty handed, for they brought presents for Massasoiet. The stolid face of

the Chief relaxed when Winslow unstrapped the bundle which Tisquantum had carried. His eyes gleamed when he saw the embroidered coat they brought, and while his warriors and the squaws gazed in wonder, he put it on, amid their cries of admiration.

“My White Fathers are welcome,” Massasoiet exclaimed. “Let them be seated, and we will smoke the pipe of peace.”

“What has brought the White Fathers so far into the forest?” he asked, when the Calumet had gone its solemn round.

Hopkins looked to Winslow to make answer.

“We came, Great Chief, at the request of our brethren, to crave your friendship, and to declare our desire to live near you in love and peace. We have come across the ocean to this land, to make a home; yet it can only be such if the Great Chief, Massasoiet, and his warriors are our friends.”

Massasoiet smoked on in silence, a hush on every hand. The Indians, too, sat down, forming a great half-circle, and waited, expectant, for the answer of the Chief, who looked on the ground, and gave no token of his intentions. It seemed to Winslow and Stephen that the answer would never come, for the red man continued to sit as though turned to stone. The forest itself sank into a breathless hush. The face of the Indian was like a mask, and the Pilgrims felt a sense of dread pass through them. Would their mission fail? Were they to go back, and say that Massasoiet and his braves would have no more to do with them?—that the friendly greetings and the soft words of the men of the forest were naught?

Massasoiet looked up when they had given up all hope. The cloud had gone from his face. He set the Calumet on the ground, and spoke.

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"Very welcome to the Wampanoags are the faces of the White Fathers, who have come across the waters. My people rejoice. The enemies of the White Men of Salem are our enemies. If the war-whoops of the red men are ever heard in your street, my warriors will fight for you, for the Great Massasoiet loves the White Men, and will be their friend."

He rose to his feet and, beckoning to his visitors, led the way to their tent, waited for them to enter, and turned to Tisquantum.

"Guard them well. Bid them have no fear." Swinging round, he strode away to his own wigwam.

Two days later, the tired travellers began their return journey with a hundred of the Sachem's warriors for their bodyguard. They halted at the edge of the forest, in view of Salem, and when the red men turned to travel back to their home, Winslow and his companion moved across the open space. The sentry on the Common House fired his gun as the signal that the absent ones were coming, and men, throwing down their tools, and women, leaving their domestic tasks, came out to give them greeting and hear their story.



CHAPTER XXV

FLORA'S APPEAL TO CAPTAIN JONAS

FLORA was one day wandering along the beach, gazing at the ship which was still in the bay, to be near in case the Pilgrims were brought so low that those who survived would decide to return to England. So many had died, and among them was the Governor of the little Colony. Captain Jonas, once assured that he had carried his point in forcing a landing at the Plymouth Rock, was in no hurry to set sail, and was as ready to have the Pilgrims on board again as he had been eager to see them disembark.

Since Flora had gone on board the *Mayflower* she had adopted the dress of the Puritan women with whom she had cast in her lot, not to be singular among them. She was dressed thus that afternoon, and in her neatness and simplicity charmed the most serious-minded. With her lace-trimmed petticoat, and her straight and simple gown, just showing her shapely feet and ankles, and high-heeled shoes with blue rosettes, and her white kerchief and simple cap, the men and women who watched her when she passed their doors were proud of her unmatched beauty.

Yet she knew nothing of their thoughts.

Again and again she cast longing glances at the ship which was soon to weigh anchor and return to England.

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It was a sunny day, and for the first time it gave her the sense of warmth. The birds had begun to make the forest gay with song, while the shimmering waters glistened and glanced in the sunlight. It was the first touch of spring since the Pilgrims had landed; this was the first warm breath that had floated down to the little town.

The sight of the *Mayflower* made her long for England, because her beloved was there, and her heart was sick with love for him. She yearned for Edward Fuller so greatly that she felt that she would gladly return with Captain Jonas to see what had detained her lover. She might get news of him. Perhaps he was in disgrace; in danger; possibly a victim of the Star Chamber!

She had with her some jewels which she had hidden about her in case a day of need arose. She drew away to a spot where none could see her, and, opening her dress, she drew them out. As they lay in her lap, while she sat on a fallen tree, out in the full sunshine, they blazed with many-coloured glory. They were worth many pieces of gold, and if she offered them to Jonas he might accept them in payment for a berth for the homeward voyage.

A boat lay on the beach, and a sailor was washing it out. She called to him.

"Wayman, will you row me out to the vessel, that I may speak with Captain Jonas?"

The sailor's face lit up with smiles, and, pushing the boat so that it half floated, he lifted Flora in, and before long she was alongside the *Mayflower*. She offered him a piece of silver.

"I won't take it, mistress," the sailor exclaimed. "'Tis my pleasure to do a trifling thing like this for you."

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When she was on board, she went to the Captain's cabin, and knocked on the door. No answer came to her repeated knocks, and, opening the door, she peeped in. The Captain was sitting there, at the table, looking at the outspread chart.

"I knocked three or four times, Captain Jonas," said Flora, who stood in the open doorway.

"I never heard you, mistress," said Jonas, smiling when he saw who his visitor was. "The sun has come at last, and I shall soon be leaving you to find my way home. You will have glorious weather now to make amends for the winter. I almost envy those who are remaining here."

He laughed, but Flora paid no heed to what he said.

"Captain Jonas, I want to go home with you," she said, stepping up to the table, and laying her hand on the sailor's shoulder. "Will you take me? I cannot give you money, but this would be ample payment."

She opened her free hand, and the sunshine which stole in through the cabin doorway brought forth a hundred dazzling rays.

"Gladly, and be too well paid, mistress," the Captain said, eyeing the jewel she had chosen. He knew that it would secure him a handful of gold in England.

Flora's eyes danced with laughter because of the man's readiness, but her face clouded over when, after looking at the jewel a while, Jonas shook his head.

"I am not likely to start for a month or more."

"A month? So long?" she cried, in dismay. "By then he might be dead!"

Jonas stared at her, fascinated with her beauty, and wondering at the words which had tears in them.

"Of whom do you speak?" he asked.

"Of Master Edward Fuller, the man I was to marry,

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and who in some way missed the ship when the *Mayflower* set sail from Southampton. I have a fear, Captain Jonas," she continued tremulously, and her eyes filling with tears, "that some harm may have come to him. He may have fallen into the hands of the emissaries of the Star Chamber, because he was rich, and they would care to have his wealth."

The mention of the Star Chamber awed the sailor, who gazed at her, his hand going to his lips in a gesture which betrayed his dread.

"Mistress, I will not take you back," he said, in bated breath, after he had watched her in silence. "From what Wayman told me, you and your father are wanted by those men who control that murder-dealing Court. You are too lovely, mistress," he went on, without caring what she might think of his words—"too tender to go to the Fleet, and they would send you there if they could lay hands on you."

"I want to go, Captain Jonas," Flora cried, laying her hands on his shoulders, and looking into the weather-beaten face. "I must go! You must take me! See! I will give you this to take me," she went on, putting the jewel back into her bosom, and drawing forth another of double worth.

"No," said Jonas seriously, turning his face away, as if from temptation.

"Then this as well." She drew a yet more costly diamond from its hiding-place. She was reckless as to cost if she could but win her way.

"No, mistress," said the sailor slowly, looking at the jewels and then at her. The man, hard, almost callous, with few of the finer instincts of life remaining, was touched by her eagerness. "How much more you may have I do not know. Much as I love money—and I do!—

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were what you have ten times the worth of these"—and he pushed them back to her across the chart—"I would not take it. Nor will I carry you back to England. What! Do you think I would take such as you across the water to find your way to the horrors of the Fleet Prison, and perhaps to your death? Nay, I will not! I will not!"

The Captain paced the little cabin to and fro.

"It cannot be! It shall not be!" he cried.

"You will break my heart, Captain Jonas!" Flora cried, the tears starting again to her eyes. "I want to go. I want to find the man I love. I want to know whether he lives or is dead."

She fell on her knees and, resting her elbows on the table and burying her face in her hands, she wept. She wept so much that the rough sailor—the man who had gone so far past feeling and honour that he had betrayed the Pilgrims of the *Mayflower*—rested his great hand on her shoulder, and in his clumsy way sought to comfort her. A thought came while he strove vainly to say something that would lessen her grief.

"Mistress, you cannot go. You shall not go with any help from me; but perhaps I can serve you. I will take the first jewel you offered me, and when I get to England I will change it into gold. Then, if you will, I will search for Master Fuller, and tell him where you are, and bid him—ay, and aid him if he needs the help—to come here to you."

She lifted her wet face, and looked at him through her tears.

"Take it, Captain! Take all three! Find him, and send him to me! Tell him that my heart aches for want of him!"

"I will only take the one," responded the sailor. He

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gasped a moment later, for Flora took his big, tar-stained hand in hers, and, bending over it, kissed it with her soft, warm lips.

"Send him to me, Captain Jonas, and no words that I can ever speak will tell you sufficiently of my gratitude."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE FRENCHMAN IN THE FOREST

FLORA left the cabin, the Captain staring after her. When Wayman had pulled her to the shore, she thanked him, and walked away slowly, turning from the houses where the men were busy putting on the finishing touches, or making use of the spring sunshine in getting the ground ready for sowing. She wanted to be alone, to think of the message she should send to Edward by the sailor whose rough gentleness was a bar to her return to England.

Where she went she did not know ; nor did she know how far ; for her thoughts were centred on the man for whom her soul was longing. She had no doubts concerning him. Not for a moment did she suppose that Edward had wearied of her, that his love had waned in any degree, or that his failure to meet her could be so accounted for.

But for the occasional tap of a hammer in the little town, the wash of the waves on the shore behind her, the songs of the birds in the forest, the bark of a fox, and the gliding of a snake among the leaves to get into the sunshine, there was nothing to distract her thoughts. She went on leisurely, with downbent head, seeing nothing of the great aisles of the forest which were filled with purple sunlight, and hearing nothing of the chattering squirrels,

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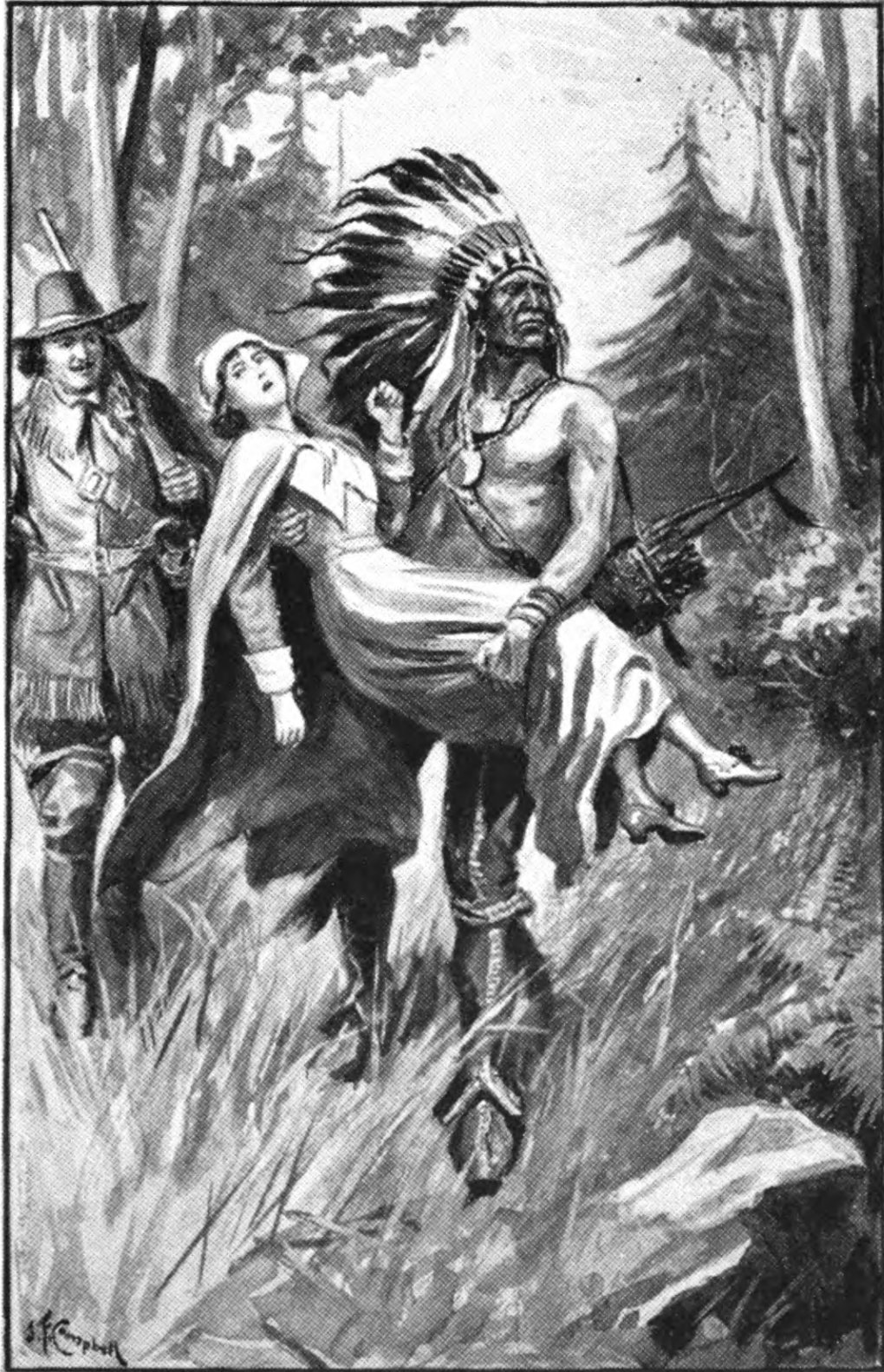
As for any thought of danger, she had none. She was thinking of Edward Fuller, and her longing grew the greater for him. Then her mind went on to others. There was Rupert Bernis, and she shuddered when he came to mind. She wondered whether, out of enmity and jealousy, he had in any manner waylaid Edward, and had been the means of hindering him from reaching the *Mayflower*.

By a swift transition, and unaccountably, her mind went to Jules Rollin, the Frenchman whom she had met in Virginia, and who had forced his attentions on her. She had never seen him, nor had she heard of him from the day when Pory had hurled him into the river. She recalled what she had heard of his riding away, shaking his fist, and flashing his dagger threateningly in the morning sunlight.

What if he were still in Virginia, and some ill-fate should bring him to the home of the Pilgrim Fathers? She thought of the menace, and shuddered at the thought. She recalled it all; but her mind travelled back to Edward.

A sound broke up her reverie, and she looked up. Realising where she was, the sea not visible because of the intervening trees and bushes, no glimpse for her of the town, nothing but forest around her, she recoiled with fear. Her lips parted with horror at what she saw; her whole being leapt with the thrill of her blood, and her hand went to her bosom because of the wild beating of her heart. The spaces between the trees, away from what appeared to be an open track, winding in the forest depths, were filled with bush, and it was not possible to see what lay behind. A hundred red men might have lurked there, and she would not see them.

But here, close by, two dark hands divided the bush,



"SHE COULD NOT SCREAM FOR AID, FOR IN HER TERROR SHE HAD BECOME DUMB" (p. 211).

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holding back the heavy creepers, and in the space thus made was the face of a man whose eyes were fixed on her.

It was the painted face of an Indian warrior. She saw his feathers, the tomahawk at his belt, and the scalp-locks. Behind this naked warrior was the face of a white man, his chin at the Indian's shoulder.

Flora's impulse was to turn and run into the open glade, where she might hope to be seen by her own people, but her limbs failed her. All that she could do was to gaze at those two faces, the red man's terrible in its stolidity, and hideous with its paint and decorations, and the white man's beyond, whose eyes opened wide, as if the more fully to take in all he could of the beautiful girl standing by the fallen tree.

The white man spoke in a low tone to the Indian, who, parting the leafy curtain yet more, stepped out swiftly. As he approached her, with bent knees, his eyes were peering in all directions, and he listened for any sounds which betokened danger to himself. His tread on the dead leaves seemed horrible.

The white man had followed the Indian from behind the festoon of leaves, but he stepped to the front, so that Flora saw him plainly. Even in the extremity of her fear she wondered at the incongruity of his appearance. He had discarded the thickly wadded trunk hose of a gentleman of fashion. Now he wore a buckskin tunic, and into his belt he had thrust some silver-mounted pistols, carrying a gun in one hand and his hat, which lacked the usual cavalier's plume, in the other.

At first she had thought him an Englishman, but now, with his head bared, she knew him, and a sound of greater dread escaped her.

"Mademoiselle," said he, a mocking smile on his face,

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"we have met before. Do you not remember me? I am Jules Rollin, and I found you long ago in that far-away spot in Virginia."

While she gazed at him, Flora felt a rising terror at the malignity in the man's eyes. He laughed when he found that she made no answer.

"Surely you remember me?" he repeated. "I told you once that I loved you."

Still she did not speak. She was, indeed, incapable of speech or movement. All she could do was to gaze at the man before her. The Indian she did not notice, for she had eyes only for the Frenchman, who looked her up and down with a boldness which bewildered her.

"Mademoiselle, it was your entrancing beauty which befooled me. Now that I behold you again, it seems to me that in your Puritan dress you are more lovely than before; for truly the little Puritan maiden needs no adornment."

Flora crimsoned with anger. The man's words were an insult. The spell of terror which held her broke, and she turned away. She walked down the forest aisle swiftly, while Rollin stared after her.

"Stay, mademoiselle," he cried. "I need you. I have important words to speak."

She paused and, turning, looked back. Rollin was still holding his hat in one hand; the other was now on the Indian's shoulder.

"If you have anything to say, M. Rollin, come and say it in the presence of my people," was her answer.

She said no more. Something in the other's face enhanced her fears, and she began to run, her feet brushing among the leaves, and her heart wildly beating while she fled. Behind her she heard the weird tread of moccasins on the rustling floor of the forest. She knew the meaning

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of it. The Indian was following, and there was also the heavier thud of a white man's feet.

The sounds were terrifying, and she ran more quickly yet. Thinking to hide herself in the bushes, she made an unexpected turn to the right—the side of the open avenue which was nearer to her home. She passed from bush to bush, pausing at times to look behind.

What the purpose of the men was she could not think. She only knew that peril threatened her. Then the conviction came that Rollin meant to carry her away from her people.

She was growing breathless, and in her wild flight had scratched her hands. The thorns tore the lace trimmings of her petticoats.

A low cry escaped her when, glancing back, she saw that she had not eluded the Indian. He was near, but Rollin was not in view. Perhaps he had lost himself in the maze into which she had plunged, and which appeared to have no exit. She felt her strength leaving her, but she did not pause. She entered a narrow path which ended in bushes which looked impenetrable, but to her dismay her retreat was cut off. On either hand were thickets which appeared to be all thorns, which would defy all her attempts to break through them.

She sank in a heap, in the extremity of her despair. She heard the swift tread behind, and when she looked up the Indian was close upon her. He passed round to stand before her, and gazed about as if to know whether others had observed him. She could not scream for aid, for in her terror she had become dumb, and the only sound that escaped her was a sob of breathlessness. Her terror grew when, as she gazed at the Indian, she saw him swing his gun round to his back; then he caught her up in his arms, treating her weight as little more than nothing, and hold-

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ing her firmly, so that her face rested on his painted breast. He moved with long, swift, noiseless strides, winding in and out among the bushes, but so holding his arms that none of the sharp spikes of the thorns could touch her.

When he came to a more open space he paused, and gazed around. Not seeing Rollin, he sent forth a cry, imitative of the tinkling notes of the bobolink. The answer came—the same bird's call. A grunt of satisfaction came when Jules Rollin emerged from a cluster of laurels.

"You have her, Great Bird!" Rollin exclaimed, advancing swiftly.

"I protest, mademoiselle," he said, gazing at Flora's face, "you look more lovely than when you treated me so badly that day in Virginia. You are a beautiful, fluttering bird, caught in the toils. I will carry you, and make sure that you do not escape me."

He took her from the Indian's arms, and bore her away, the warrior stalking behind. Her terror was too great for struggle. She was robbed of everything save the power to fear, and the fear was bringing her something of the foretaste of death.

The Indian stepped from behind, and went on before, for the deeper they penetrated into the forest the more tortuous was the path. They went on thus for a long time, the Indian sometimes taking Flora in his arms, and carrying her, not daring to allow her to walk, lest she should endeavour to escape.

The Indian stalked on down the silent aisles without a word, whether he carried her, or gave her up to his companion; but whenever Rollin's turn came he dropped endearing words which incensed her. Her face grew hot when she saw his face. She would have screamed aloud,

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but she knew that no cry would reach her friends. Among the music and the other forest sounds her voice would not travel far, and it would be vain to struggle. Even were she to wrest herself from Rollin's arms, and hurried among the bushes, it would be as before, for Great Bird would track her down, and she would be in his hands again. Her only course was to wait. There might be a moment when escape was possible, and with the aid of the sun, and God's dear mercy, she might find her way back to her people.

What did this capture mean? Miles Standish had more than once warned her that she was venturesome, for at any time the Indians might meet her in the forest. Had Rollin seen her when she was strolling among the trees, breathing in the full, sweet air, after that fever-filled atmosphere within the hospital? Perhaps the word had gone as far as Virginia, where she had last seen him, of the coming of the Pilgrim Fathers, and it was possible that the names of the Pilgrims had been given. In scanning the list he would see the names of Sir Bernard, his wife, and Flora. With the rush of his infatuation, or his hate for her resentment of his treatment of her, when he seized her, and put his lips to hers, he had come all that distance, perhaps, to find her, to await an opportunity to carry her away, to press his suit, and compel her in her helplessness—probably, too, by threats against her father and those who had also come with her to the New World—to be his wife.

She thrilled with disgust at the thought. Rather than be this man's wife she would die.

"Mademoiselle, you are very lovely in your quaint, Puritan dress."

Flora looked up at Rollin. Her movement drew her lips away from his breast, where they had rested while he

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carried her. He halted on the instant, and, bending his head, he kissed her passionately, although she sought to hold his face away.

"'Tis cowardly, like all your treatment of me!" she cried, her voice thrilling with indignation.

"Ah, you say so. But 'tis what a man must do when he loves a maiden as I have loved you, ever since I saw you for the first time."

He bent down to kiss her again, but drew his face away with a cry which caused Great Bird to halt and look round. Flora had remembered what, in her confusion and terror, she had forgotten. In her bosom she had a gold-handled stiletto, and she drew it out. The sun was penetrating the forest just then, for the trees had thinned somewhat, and the keen blade glistened in the sunlight when she flung back her hand in readiness to strike the man who had taken such a disgraceful advantage of her. Rollin saw his danger, and to escape it dropped his burden. As Flora fell, Great Bird bent down, gripped her delicate wrist, and took the weapon from her.

"Such a little spitfire!" cried Rollin, who breathed with relief now that the danger had passed. "Why seek to kill a man whose love for you is so great? Great Bird, give me the weapon. I will put it in my belt. It will be a memento of this day's doings."

Great Bird pointed into the forest depths, and stalked on, leaving Jules Rollin to follow with his burden. By the look on the Indian's face the Frenchman read the warning that Flora might be missed, and it was well to be gone.

She saw how swiftly the Indian was moving, now turning to set his feet on the mossy floor rather than on the soft, damp soil, where he would leave betraying foot-

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prints; then to another side to pursue a devious path among the crowding bushes. Flora wondered how many more miles they meant to carry her.

Rollin began to tire. His feet caught occasionally in the uneven soil, or at the spreading roots. When at times Great Bird stepped over a fallen tree lightly, Rollin slackened his pace and passed over the obstacle with difficulty.

"Great Bird," he cried, halting in sheer weariness.

The Indian halted, and waited for Rollin to draw level with him.

"How far is it to the canoe? We have travelled miles."

"Close by," was the curt reply, the Indian pointing to some dense foliage. "Come," he added, moving forward again, after having bent his head to listen. A few minutes later he pointed to the stream which rolled by sullenly.

Beads of perspiration were on Rollin's forehead when he halted at the river's bank, and saw a canoe hidden among the reeds. To reach the frail craft with Flora in his arms was impossible. He feared to set her on her feet lest she might make a dash for liberty.

"If I set you down, mademoiselle, will you promise not to escape?"

Flora did not reply. It had been her hope to do the thing he feared, if at any time she felt her feet touch solid ground. Better be lost in the forest than be in this Frenchman's hands. In spite of his protestations he might be bent on a deadly revenge for her refusal to fall in with his desire.

"You are dumb," said Rollin angrily, when he received no reply to the repeated question. "The opportunity to escape shall not be yours. Great Bird,

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hold her while I step into the canoe. Then hand her down to me."

He set her on her feet, careful not to loosen his hold on her. She felt his hand grip about her arm; then the Indian clasped her other arm so tightly that she cried out with the pain.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE JOURNEY THROUGH THE FOREST

IT seemed to Flora, in her helplessness, that she had come to the end of her hope. There was nothing but misery before her. She tried not to think of it. Her whole being seemed to be affected by her surroundings. She missed no sound in the forest. Her eyes saw everything when she looked around her despairingly. Here was the canoe, which lay hidden under a bower of overhanging branches, and the moving water, with leaves and loose wood floating on it, and the reeds which were a screen to the frail barque.

Rollin caught at the tufts of grass on the bank to hold the canoe, while Great Bird drew Flora with him so forcefully that resistance was unavailing.

“Step in,” said Rollin peremptorily.

She did not move.

“Throw her in! Do anything! Force her in!” the Frenchman cried passionately; and Flora felt herself lifted from her feet, as though she had been a child. A few moments later she was sitting dejectedly in the bottom of the craft, between Rollin’s knees. Great Bird stepped in, and taking up the paddle sent the canoe dancing on the river.

Flora sat in perfect stillness while the canoe was driven against the flow, and the sound of the rippling water

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broke up the silence of the stream. All she could do was to sit in fear, and wonder what fate was in store for her. What if Edward lived, and was not a prisoner? What if he had only missed the *Mayflower*, and would come across the ocean on board another ship? What if, when he set foot on the New England shore, he found that she had disappeared? She imagined his distress, and it tormented her more than any thought of her own peril. For here, in the forest depths, she would be so completely lost that, however boldly he would set forth to find her, he could but fail.

Great Bird plunged his paddle into the water untiringly. As they moved on, she saw bits of open glade on which the sun fell slantingly, and showed the brown coats of a herd of deer feeding, only to dart away when the startled creatures heard the splash of the paddle, and saw a canoe moving on the stream. Unexpectedly Great Bird, with a quiet stroke, glided his craft beneath some overhanging branches.

"Indians!" he whispered.

Far up the creek something moved, and Flora, startled at the word, clasped her hands in fear. Some brown and ragged tents were clustered on the bank, almost out of sight. She saw men moving, or lounging at the tent doors. A squaw went to the creek's bank and dipped an earthen jar into the water.

"Mademoiselle," said Rollin, bending to speak to Flora, "if they see us it is death." He was afraid lest she would scream for aid, thinking that the Indians would effect her release.

She thrilled with the sense of danger. She had heard so much of the cruelties of the red men, and hateful though Jules Rollin was to her, and distressing though her lot might be at the end of this journey, the present

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danger made her count his presence and Great Bird's some protection. All she could do was to clasp her hands and close her eyes, and pray for safe-guarding and deliverance.

She felt a man's breath on her cheek, and Rollin was laughing softly, but in mockery.

"You believe in that sort of thing, mademoiselle?"

"What sort of thing?" she asked, her face flushing at the Frenchman's taunting tone.

"You believe in prayer," he exclaimed, and he spat out the words like so many pellets of mocking scorn.

Flora's courage blazed.

"I do!" she cried, forgetting the need for care, for her indignant words rang out over the waters. "I do! How could I do other when it has so often been my solace in sorrow and my help in danger?"

A dark hand swept to her lips, and closed over them, while a guttural protest came. It was the Indian, and his eyes flashed angrily.

"You will bring death to us," said Rollin, looking towards the camp to know whether Flora's voice had been heard.

She realised her indiscretion; but this man had mocked what was so dear to her. He had seemed to smear a rough hand over her sensitive soul, and made her inner nature smart. She thrilled at what she saw. A shadow flitted among the trees. The dark limbs of an Indian came full in view; a moment later she saw an uplifted hand, and the gleam of a tomahawk, as the savage moved cautiously as though peering on every side, until he reached a bush which overhung the river. Flora saw his scalp locks and feathers when he came full in view, and gazed beneath his hand. His eyes were sweeping the stream and the forest recesses. The Indian was puzzled

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because he saw nothing. Yet he had evidently heard a woman's voice.

Flora looked at Great Bird, and shuddered. His paddle lay across his knees, ready to his hand, but his fingers were on his gun, while he gazed through the heavy foliage, which so completely hid the canoe. It was the murderous look on his face which startled her.

"Will you fire, Great Bird?" Rollin asked, in a voice so low that Flora scarcely heard it.

"If he gives the alarm."

Great Bird had scarcely spoken when he raised the gun, and levelled it. For a few moments he remained in this posture, his finger on the trigger. Then he fired.

"He saw us," said Great Bird, and when Flora looked, the Indian lay still on the leafy floor. The gun went down swiftly, the paddle was caught up, and, bidding Rollin use his, also, Great Bird sent the canoe under the cover of the other bank. On and on they went, Rollin swinging round, with his back to Flora, and paddling till the sweat drops rolled down his face. It was a race for life, and he and his companions knew that some nameless horror was in store for them if they were overtaken.

Flora sat in helplessness. All that she could do was to look beyond the Indian, and watch for the coming of any pursuers. She realised what her indignant protest had done. This Frenchman had mocked at her religion, and she had answered boldly, bringing this terror on herself and her companions.

"Are they coming?" Rollin asked.

"I see no sign of them."

In those thrilling moments the supreme thought was to escape from the avengers. The horror of the situation swept over her, while she peered down the stream. She

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knew that no Indian could lie like that unavenged. Whether Rollin should mock her or not, she clasped her hands and, bending forward, prayed for succour.

She opened her eyes presently, and saw the long, broad stretch of waters. No canoe dotted the surface, yet she heard the yells of the Indians in the distance.

“Have you seen them, mademoiselle?” Rollin asked anxiously, when the stream bent suddenly.

“No.”

“Then we will seek the Massasoiet Creek,” said the Indian. “Can you keep going?”

“I fear not,” Rollin answered.

Flora swung round quietly.

“Give me the paddle. I may do something to help Great Bird, and you can rest.”

Rollin’s hands trembled with the unwonted exertion. He handed her the paddle, which more than once had nearly slipped from his fingers. She had watched how the Indian plied his, and she did her best to copy him.

The darkness deepened when the canoe swung into a creek, and a vague horror crept into Flora’s soul when she landed with the others. She was alone with these two men. About her, in the gloom, the forest was like a great wall. Trailers fell on every side like heavy, flower-bespangled curtains, so that even the water of the creek was hidden.

In sheer weariness, and in spite of her hunger, she fell asleep the moment she sat with her back against one of the trees.

Four days, and as many nights, passed, each of them having some gathering horror. Every stroke of the paddle in Great Bird’s hands was a stroke which carried her away from all that promised happiness; farther from

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her people; farther from Edward, if in God's mercy he was free to come to the New England home. In the darkness she had the vision of his journey across the ocean, his eyes always turned towards the land where she was; for never did she doubt his loyalty and constancy.

But to add to her misery she had to face Rollin's persistency.

"Marry me," he cried, over and over again.

"I will not," was the constant and resolute answer.

"You do not consider the consequences of refusal," he said once, thrusting his paddle into the water savagely. "I am taking you to my camp, a stronghold where there are scores of my countrymen, men of such hardihood, who have made a name so terrible, that even the Indians would fall back were I to march out my men to burn their wigwams. What if I led them down to the sea where your father and the other Pilgrims are? If we went so far, not one of your people would live, for we should take with us, and let loose, Indians who would not rest until your so-called Salem was in ruins."

He had hoped to frighten her, and he succeeded. She hid her face in her hands to shut out the vision which came. When she opened her eyes again, and gazed into the tangled forest, her tortured imagination pictured it alive with painted savages on the way to Plymouth Rock.

Rollin broke into laughter when he saw her face.

"Flora, when we get to the station where my men and hundreds of Indians are at my call, this is my plan. I shall send Great Bird with a written message to your Governor. I shall tell him that I have carried you away. I shall tell him that the New World belongs to France, and that I will not tolerate an Englishman on the soil of this part of America. They shall have a week's notice to quit, and if at the end of that time they do not go,

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returning to the land from whence they came, leaving their tools, and arms, and ammunition—all their belongings—behind them, I shall put you to the torture.”

Flora sat without uttering a word. No sound came from her betokening surrender—nothing but a sob. Suddenly a cry rang out, piercing the silence and travelling far—a cry from an overwrought soul, so full of anguish that the stolid Indian stopped, and held his paddle half poised, just above the sparkling waters. He stared at her, his lips apart.

“God help me!” she wailed. “I have no other but Thee!” the cry came; and then it ceased, and she sat there at the prow like one who was already tasting the bitterness of death.

The boat was gliding now in still water, and while Rollin’s paddle was resting across the canoe, Great Bird’s eyes, in the dawning of the morning, were alert to avoid the snags and mudbanks, winding in and out among them to a spot where he thought it safe to land. He had been watching Flora for the last two days, and now a strange expression was on his immobile face, which neither she nor Rollin saw. Pity was rare in the stolid and almost unimpressionable heart of the man of the forest, but he had been watching. More than once a savage light gleamed in his eyes when he glanced at Rollin.

The gentleness of the White Squaw had broken through the crust of Great Bird’s moroseness, and she had begun to interest him. Again and again he looked at her, and saw that she was suffering mentally. He noticed, moreover, that the suffering was intensified whenever Jules Rollin spoke to her. He watched the Frenchman’s face. It struck him that the man was deliberately torturing Flora’s soul, and his innate chivalry sprang into activity. When they stepped on the bank to sleep, and Rollin had

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loitered at the canoe for a few moments, the Indian whispered to Flora :

"If you are in trouble or danger, awaken Great Bird."

It was not so much the words as the tone which surprised her. She looked up into his face gratefully, and although it was as stolid as ever, she felt comforted. For the first time since she had been carried away from her father and friends, she felt she had someone to help her in the vast and lonely forest.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DERELICT

IT is well that the future is hidden from us like a heavy curtain which no human hand may lift. Otherwise, when Edward said "Good-bye" to Flora at Leyden, had he been able to look into the coming days to see what they had in store for the maiden he so devotedly loved, he might have flung himself down in deep despair, from which no words of sympathy would have roused him.

Flora, standing with him at the water-gate, before he started for England, spoke of the hope which lay beyond the seas. She put her arms about his neck, and their lips met for a good-bye kiss. When Edward, having stepped on the barge that was to take him forward, looked back, she was gone.

In Delft Haven he found a skipper who was ready to carry him over the sea. As the voyage proceeded he wondered whether he had chosen wisely in making this daring venture; whether in returning to England he was walking into the jaws of death, or going towards a prison door which would never move back on its hinges for him to come out into the sunlight again, unless for a walk to the gallows.

He had thought of this the moment he had spoken to Master Robinson, but through the long hours of the

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sleepless night which intervened he so controlled himself that Flora was not conscious of his misgivings when they met in the morning.

On board the ship there were things at hand which called for his immediate attention: a skipper who wanted to be told explicitly where he wished to be set ashore, and then to show him his quarters. They were rough; yet they were the best in the crazy craft, which did not give great promise to outlive a storm, should one come sweeping on her. A smoking lantern, hanging on a nail on the rough joist, and swinging with the movement of the ship, enabled him to avoid the beams overhead, when he went below.

Worn out after a wakeful night and the weariness of the days of travel which had preceded it while they were on the way to Leyden, he threw himself on the rude plank which served as a bed, and was soon lost in heavy sleep, in spite of the tramping of noisy feet on the deck above him, and the calls and curses of the sailors.

When he awoke from his dreamless slumber, he threw out his feet to the floor and buckling on his sword, and seeing to the security of his belt, in which he kept his gold, he stood up carefully, lest he should strike his head against the sharp-cornered beams.

The monotonous clang of a bell went on ceaselessly, while there were shouts which sounded like the tumult of Bedlam. Going on deck to know the meaning, he saw that a fog had settled on the waters. The sailors, moving about in all directions, were blurred and shapeless figures.

"How long have we been in this?" Edward asked the skipper, scarcely hearing his own voice in the clamour.

"A couple of hours. We went straight into it, or, rather, it came down on us suddenly, like a falling blanket," the sailor bawled into Edward's ear.

“Can I be useful in any way?” Edward asked.

“Go yonder, Master Fuller, and look for anything in the shape of some other craft. And shout for all you’re worth, whether you see something or nothing. ’Twill let ’em know we’re here.”

Edward stumbled over to the spot the skipper indicated, and, gripping a rail to keep himself from falling in the alarming swaying of the ship, he bawled his loudest, until he grew hoarse. The bell, which was not far away, clanged so much that the noise of it and its monotony got on his nerves.

The hours went on, and the fog gave no sign of lifting.

“It may last a long time yet,” said the captain, coming to Edward’s side.

“And must we bawl like this till then?” asked Edward, whose head throbbed with the unwonted effort.

“’Tis that, or take our chance of being run down,” was the gloomy answer. The sailor looked down on the deck, and saw a plate of iron leaning against the ship’s side. Bending, he banged on it with a marline-spike, and added to the din.

“’Tis this or disaster,” said the skipper, when he saw Edward thrust his fingers in his ears. “The bigger the noise, the greater our chance of safety; for, if there be another ship near us, she will hear, and for her own sake sheer off.”

He broke off with a cry of horror, and Edward, turning, saw the black bow of an immense ship come out of the fog; then a crash flung every sailor on the deck. It was as though a flail beat down on the smaller craft and tore her side away, then swung her over remorselessly, so that her deck slanted and rolled some of her mariners into the sea.

Edward felt himself going, but clutched at the windlass

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near by, and, gripping it tightly, looked around. The captain was gone. Three other men who had been near before the crash were also gone. Two or three sailors were holding on to anything which offered, and were staring up at the black mass which was moving on as though its endeavour was to turn the smaller vessel keel uppermost.

Edward saw a loose rope hanging from its bowsprit, and, gripping it, he hauled himself up to a projecting spar, where he sat astride. When he looked for the ship he had deserted, she had drifted away and was lost in the fog, which seemed denser than before.

Wondering why all was so silent on this vessel which had done such destructive work, why there was no clanging of bells on board, why no voices were shouting out warnings, he crawled along the bowsprit carefully. Presently he was on the deck. He paused for a while, afraid to move, but the fog began to lift. It lifted yet more, until he was able to scan the deck from end to end.

He was appalled to discover that no one was within view from bow to stern; no one on this upper deck; none in the waist; no one on the stern deck.

He looked out on an empty sea, for the fog had gone. Gaze where he would, he saw no other craft. The sea spread far and wide, and nothing but this ship on which he stood was visible; no vessel whose sail was spread, no bird. Nothing broke the waste of waters but some spars which had once been part of the craft on which he had sailed.

He understood. It meant that the vessel he had chartered had been swept away, broken and sunk by this one which was wallowing her destructive way through the sea, without men or skipper to control her going. He was dismayed to find himself on board a derelict, floating

about, blindly and cruelly, sweeping the waters, roaming on aimlessly until a storm should send her on the rocks and end her mischievous voyaging.

The sun broke through the clouds, and its morning rays glinted on the crests of the waves. For a long hour Edward gazed but vainly, hoping against hope that some of the men with whom he had sailed were on the wreckage. Hopeless and distressed, he turned his attention to the ship.

Every mast was broken off, and the sails and cordage lay in a mass on the deck. No attempt had been made to cut it away. The *Golden Lion* had been swept by a storm, and lay helpless.

Edward began to search the ship, in case someone had been left on board. She was a huge craft, cumbrous in size and blunt in the bows, which lazily buffeted the waves. She rolled heavily, so that Edward found it difficult to walk the decks. Wherever he went there was no sound of life. He went below, and groped his way in the darkness where lanterns without lights swung from the beams. Nothing lived on board save the rats which scampered away when he moved towards their corners, and he heard the patter of their feet in all directions.

Growing hungry, in spite of his misfortune, he began to search for food. The provisions were plentiful, but they were rat-mauled, or mildewed, and what biscuits he found were unfit for human food. It seemed to him, while he pursued his search, that he was not only alone on the desolate sea, but doomed to starve.

The hours went on. Night fell on the waters, and he sat disconsolate in the captain's cabin. He had looked for candles, but the rats had eaten them, and he sat in the darkness. In sheer inability to keep awake, he fell asleep, his head resting on his arms, which lay on the table.

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Morning came, and again he looked on an empty sea, and no land was in view. Again the night came round, and he moved about in the horrors of loneliness, wondering what the end would be. He broke away bits of biscuit, although it was barely possible to find any that was eatable; but there was enough to keep him from starvation.

The third morning came, and the sea was not so empty. On the horizon was a ship, but she was clearly in distress, for her sails were broken and flying out in ribbons in the wind, which now blew fiercely, while the waves broke over her, as they did on the decks of the *Golden Lion*. After a while she ran out of sight.

Night dropped down like a black canopy, shutting out stars and waves, leaving nothing but darkness for the tired eyes to strain into.

The storm came. Edward lay flat on the floor of the cabin, for in the swirling mass of waters it was neither possible to stand nor sit. Even the rats gave token of their terror, and all through the long hours he heard their squeals.

When day began to dawn he saw through the open doorway the dark outline of something which brought him to his feet.

"Land!" he cried, reeling where he stood, and, eager to see more, he staggered towards the door. The sea was like a boiling cauldron, but not a hundred yards away was an inlet into which the waves rushed. Grey cliffs were on either side, frowning in the light of the sunless morning.

The storm was terrible, lashing the waves against the rocks and hurling them up the narrow gorge, only to be flung back with a roar and a swish of retreating waters, coming again for a wilder plunge. Edward felt his heart leap with hope. It was fearful at the best, but might it

not mean that he was within the reach of men? The intolerable loneliness would be gone. If they who dwelt on the shore saw him, would they not do something for him?

He dropped on his knees in the cabin doorway, and prayed that it might be so; for life was precious, and so much depended on his mission having a successful issue. And Flora! She was waiting for his return.

The storm, while he was praying, appeared to devote its strength to the task of destroying the *Golden Lion*. Wave after wave sprang over her, or swung along to the narrow neck of the inlet. The vessel shivered, but floated, rolling and dipping, sometimes going on towards the water-lashed cliffs, against which flakes of sea-foam flew, and falling back again a little distance when the waves receded. Edward wondered what would happen if she were caught up bodily and smashed against the grey rocks. Would he, too, be broken, maimed, and beaten out of life?

Flora was in Leyden, unless, as he thought, by now she had gone with the Pilgrims down to Delft Haven, to go on board the *Speedwell*, thence to Southampton to join the *Mayflower*. She would be waiting for him when she judged that he had sufficient time to travel to his home for the needed money; and from that day, which she would calculate, knowing nothing of his disasters, she would be watching the coming and going of boats, straining her eyes to catch the first glimpse of him.

His heart sank, for he knew that she would look in vain, right on to the last hour, when the anchors would be weighed, and the *Speedwell* and *Mayflower* would begin their voyage to the shore on the other side of the ocean. On the strength of the fact that he had guaranteed the money, Sir Thomas Weston would provide what was needed and expect to be repaid by Edward.

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What would Flora do when he did not join her?

The roar of the sea, more terrifying than before, broke in on his thoughts. He glanced along the length of the *Golden Lion* and saw a wave coming, greater and more awful than any he had yet seen. It struck the ship at her stern. It seemed in some way to get under her, to clutch at her, and carry her in watery arms like cork upon the crest. The ship was borne on, past the cliffs on either side, the waters swishing, and the wind screaming and sweeping the faces of the rocks. He saw as well the seething cauldron into which the *Golden Lion* was being borne.

He could only gasp, and wait. A crash came which threw him heavily in the doorway of the cabin.

CHAPTER XXIX

TOO LATE!

WHEN Edward opened his eyes he was lying amid the ruins of the cabin. The door, broken from its hinges, lay over him, and the jambs of the doorway, having fallen together, saved him from being crushed by the timbers overhead.

It had been grey morning when the ship had been lifted out of the sea; but now the sun was shining, as though laughing at the frowning waters which had drawn back with the falling of the tide.

How long he had been lying senseless Edward did not know, but it must have been many hours, for the sun was low in the west. The wonder as to how the time had gone gave place to what he had longed for during those days of drifting on the derelict—the sound of human voices and the shuffle of feet.

He heard a woman's voice:

“Alan, a man is here!”

An answering call came, but before the man approached, the woman raised the door, and, putting it aside, went on her knees.

“He lives, Alan!” she cried, when her blue eyes met Edward's. “And he is a handsome lad,” she continued, laying a gentle hand on Edward's cheek, to turn him that she might better look at him.

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"Ay, he is," said a man who came, with others at his heels, along the deck.

"How came ye here, lad?" the question followed, when the man bent down. Without waiting for any answer, he lifted Edward in his strong arms to prop him against a broken mast.

"What brought ye here, lad?" the question came again.

"The ship," Edward answered, with the faintest of smiles. "Can you get me away somewhere, where I may have something to eat, and then a sleep?" he asked, for a sense of exhausting hunger and weariness came to him.

"Of course, dear lad," cried the woman, standing on her feet to look around. "Alan, take him in your arms, and you, David, and you, Tom, drop down on the sands, so that we can lower him into your hands; but be gentle with him, for he is sadly bruised."

Alan, who was almost a giant, bent again, while the others, going over the smashed bulwarks, disappeared. In a short time Edward was being borne gently over the sands, and up a rocky path which led to a great stretch of wild moorland. Where they carried him he did not know, for he closed his eyes and saw nothing until he found himself on a bed of heather. When he looked around he saw that he was in a room beneath a roof, and close to a window from whence he could watch the angry sea.

Bruised, and in pain, every moment near to an agony, he counted the hours, and spent them in regrets that were altogether vain. From what Master Robinson had told him when he left Leyden, the *Speedwell* was to leave Delft Haven for Southampton Water on the 20th of July; but the days of his helplessness had been so many that that day had come and gone, so that, had he risen from his heather bed to ride hard, he could not hope to reach the port in time.

What would happen if he failed to reach the port where the ships which were bound for the New World weighed anchor? Sir Thomas Weston would probably find the money; but what if he declined to do so? Those who had them would sell what valuables they possessed, and at a loss, and, scraping sufficient money for the great venture, would sail without further waiting.

It was maddening; something too intolerable!

He called to Mary Andrews, and asked her to help him to his feet. She protested that he was not fit, yet she did as he desired, and propped him up against the wall.

"Laddie, 'tis silly work, for you're none fit," she exclaimed reproachfully. While she spoke he tumbled in a heap, a mass of pain, with a heart that went far towards breaking because of the knowledge that he would fail his darling, and those who expected such great things from his generous mission. God alone could tell what Flora would think of him; but he believed that her heart would never doubt his love, and would conceive that he had been trapped by the Star Chamber troopers.

More than once the thought came of Rupert Bernis; and as many times, and more, he thought of the Frenchman, Jules Rollin, whom Flora had such cause to fear when they were in Virginia. What if she had started for the New World, and storm or some other disaster should send her to the shore of that land where that dissolute man had made his exile home?

He dropped asleep, and dreamt of things that accumulated horror on Flora's behalf. He thought that Bernis had found her, and since she would not marry him, he had taken her to the Tower, where she would be handed over to the tormentors. He awoke and felt relieved because it was only a dream.

When he slept again, another came. Then Flora was

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standing in the midst of a forest, dense and impenetrable, among rotting leaves, yet within reach of the sea's roar. She was listening to the songs of birds and the chatter of squirrels, and peering down the purple forest aisle, when some painted savages appeared, armed and fearful. They surrounded her before she realised that they were near. One of the men came bounding from among a thicket of dripping bushes, with scorn on his face and cruelty in his eyes. He caught her in his arms, and carried her away. It was Rollin's face, so he thought. It was that which brought a cry from Edward's lips.

Thus were his hours of enforced waiting peopled with nameless dreads and perils.

Many days had gone before he was able to start on his journey, first to his home at Scrooby, to get the money, and then to Southampton, in the hope that by some accident he should not after all be too late. The hope had no warrant, for had the *Speedwell* been up to time, Edward was nearly a month behind when, in the dead of night, he rode down the avenue to his manor-house.

He had been compelled to go warily, not knowing even now whether Rupert Bernis loitered in the neighbourhood on the chance of finding Flora, or seizing Bernard or Clare, to hold them as hostages for her surrender.

He saw no one, for, as fortune had it, the weather, which had been so brilliant when he started on his long journey, had changed to wind and soaking rain, and no one ventured out of doors unless compelled. Bernis was too much a lover of comfort to go riding on such a night.

When he dismounted at the stable gate he found it closed and bolted. He was therefore compelled to go to the front of the house and ring the bell.

The old housekeeper's head appeared at the window,

but when she heard her young master's voice, she hurried down the stairs and across the hall, barefoot. Throwing the door open, she put out her plump hand and almost pulled him in.

"I must see to my horse, Martha," said Edward. "Call up one of the stablemen; then dress and bring me something to eat. I must have a fire in my room to dry these sodden clothes."

Martha waited to hear no more. He saw the woman's bare feet moving on the stone floor when she went away to the lackeys' quarters, and before long the tired horse was snugly housed, and Edward sitting in dry garments before a blazing fire. Comfort surrounded him, but he sat in hopelessness. The gallant hopes which caused him to leave Leyden had vanished. More than ever now did he believe that he would find no Pilgrims' ships in Southampton Water. They would be gone, and Flora with them, since neither she nor her father nor her mother would dare to land while the Writ from the Court of the Star Chamber was out against them.

Was it worth while to go farther?—to carry this money for which he had come?

He sat before the blazing logs long after Martha had gone to her room. His mind was centred on that growing possibility, that when he rode into Southampton he would find that Flora had sailed to the New World without him, having no other choice. What should he do in such a case? Should he come back to his home, and fall into the easy-going life of a country gentleman? Should he spend his energies and days in looking to the improvement of his estate?

The suggestion roused him to revolt.

When his perplexity was at its greatest a new thought roused him. It lessened his dismay, and he sprang to his

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feet with a cry almost of exultation. He paced the room to and fro to walk off his excitement. After awhile he sat in the chair again, and, turning it to the table, he set forth the items on a sheet of paper as to the cost of hiring a vessel to overtake the *Mayflower* and the *Speedwell*.

It came to a great amount; but what of that if he could find Flora? Twice that amount—ay, ten times—should not count, for the expenditure of the money was not to be compared to the joy of being with her again.

Edward's fatigue after so hard a day no longer affected him; nor would he be hindered by the pain of his bruised body.

There was a secret chamber in which he kept his treasure-chest, and, entering it, he threw back the heavy cover and contemplated its contents; but not with any miser greed. The question now was to decide on the amount he should take in order to carry out his daring scheme. At first he determined to take gold, but when he had counted out the amount on the floor, necessary to charter a ship for a voyage across the ocean, the heap was so great that the bulk was too much for him to carry.

He returned a great portion of it to the chest, and drew out a bag. Opening it, he took a handful of precious stones, portable, yet costly and convertible, if he could find a jewel merchant in Southampton. He could carry it all about his person. Yet a mist came to his eyes when he saw them sparkling in the lamplight, gorgeous, precious, and dazzling; for most of them were heirlooms, and he was loth to part with them.

"I cannot do it!" he exclaimed, and he bent over the chest to replace the jewels in the bag. He paused half-way. They were not for himself, nor for any ill-occasioned debts; not to repay any doubtful debts of honour. They

were for Flora—to find her, rather than lose her for ever.

Before the day dawned Edward was riding on the road to Southampton; but while staying for the night at an inn, he heard that the Pilgrims had already sailed. The *Speedwell*, however, was found to be leaky, and they had put into Dartmouth. It was news which awakened a hope in Edward's breast. It caused him to cut the night's sleep short, for before daylight came he was on the road again, and riding for the port where he was assured he would find the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower*.

It was nearly noon when he saw the castle at Dartmouth, its grey walls flooded with sunshine; but what he longed to see was the harbour where the Pilgrims' ships were said to be at anchor.

When he rode to the point from whence he saw the harbour, he was dismayed to find it empty of anything but fishermen's boats.

Two sailors were sitting on the gunwale of a boat near by, and, dismounting, he went to them.

"Where is the *Mayflower*?" he asked.

"Gone to America with those whom people call the Pilgrims," one of the men answered carelessly, while the other looked on, smiling grimly.

"What of the *Speedwell*?" Edward asked anxiously.

"They emptied her of all her cargo and passengers, and sent her back to Southampton. She was a crazy old craft, and would never have got across, even if the sea had been a mill-pond. She leaked so badly that even her crew grumbled, and almost mutinied at facing the risk of going back to Southampton."

Edward felt faint for a few moments. His limbs trembled, and he sat beside the sailors, who looked

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askance at him. He realised now that he had come too late.

Leading his horse to the inn, he went to a quiet spot in the harbour. He wanted to think out this matter. It was one thing to make a plan, but now he was face to face with the question as to the possibility of carrying it out. The *Mayflower* was on her way, and every hour was carrying his darling farther and farther away, and league on league of storm-tossed waters were between them.

He sat for hours, seeking the final solution of the problem.

"I'll do it!" he exclaimed, rising and moving away, eager now to carry out his purpose. "I am going across the ocean to find her!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE VOYAGE OF THE *SLEEPING BEAUTY*

THE *Sleeping Beauty* was the best ship that money could buy in a short space of time, unless Edward rode to London; but when he had completed her purchase, none of the sailors in Dartmouth would sail in her unless he had her put into thorough repair. She was beached and thoroughly overhauled, and then his heart sank. He understood, now, why the seamen would have nothing to do with her, for so many of the timbers were rotten; the wonder, so they said, was that she held together.

The time which the shipbuilders named as necessary to render the *Sleeping Beauty* fit for sea brought absolute dismay, but the days the man mentioned were few compared to the weeks which lengthened into months before a sailor in or near Dartmouth would agree to go on board and face the contemplated voyage.

Edward spent the time between watching the labours of the ship carpenters and making purchases which would be useful in the New England Colony. He had gone to see Sir Thomas Weston, to pay him the money agreed upon, and heard how the stock of the Pilgrims had been depleted. Plainly, it was his duty, with his means to supply their lack.

From scraps of conversation with the sailors at Dart-

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mouth he discovered even more than Weston could tell him. The men of the *Mayflower* had gone ill-provided with almost everything essential—food for the voyage, and little, if any, for the days when they would set foot on shore. A sense of despair came when he was told that most of the food had been brought from the ship to pay the bills before they were permitted to put out to sea. As for tools, with which to break up the soil and lay the foundation for a harvest, he could not hear that there were any on the *Mayflower*. No man who helped to transfer the cargo on board the *Speedwell* remembered to have seen any.

It was the happiest day Edward had spent since he said "Good-bye" to Flora, when the *Sleeping Beauty* moved from her moorings and went out to the shining sea. He had with him a number of emigrants whom he had chosen as likely to work well in the Colony, and they brought with them seed corn, and much that would be valuable.

The days occupied in the voyage seemed never ending, and many an hour, in day and night, he walked the deck, his eyes turned constantly towards the land beyond the tossing waters.

When the *Sleeping Beauty* had been at sea for nearly nine weeks, beaten sorely by the wild waves, someone spotted a tiny object on the waters. It bobbed as the waves moved, and every eye was on it for want of something else to do. It lay in the path of the vessel, and after a time they saw that it was a boat, a derelict which had either broken loose from a storm-tossed vessel or had been caught on a tide-swept shore and washed out to sea.

Edward read the name, and a cry broke from his lips. The name was partly worn away, but enough remained to spell out the word *Mayflower*.

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What did it mean? Had the boat been washed off the vessel's deck in one of the hurricanes of which home-coming sailors had spoken while the carpenters were working at the *Sleeping Beauty*? Or did it mean so much worse—what filled Edward with an unutterable sense of sickness and alarm—that the ship in which Flora sailed had foundered, and that this was a boat which had broken away from the wreck?

The New World loomed up before him one day, wild, rugged, and forbidding. It was an iron-bound shore, against which the waves lashed ceaselessly. Nowhere was there any sign of human life. Look where the sailors would, they saw no landing-place.

Sailing south, they saw a forest-covered country, with deep gorges, down which torrents rushed wildly and tumultuously. Occasionally the *Sleeping Beauty*, with her face always to the south, passed open meadows, sweeps of rich land where buffaloes fed, and the men on board, weary of the salt meat on which they had lived for so many weeks, landed with their guns and obtained fresh food.

Edward was too eager to linger long. He was racked with anxiety as to the safe landing of the Pilgrims, for ever since that drifting boat had been seen he had visions of the worst. Whenever twilight began to fall the captain dropped anchor, lest in the night his ship might pass by the place for which they sought. Mile after mile of fertile shore, thick bush, sweeping meadow, and dense forest were seen, but no settlers' huts ever came into view. At odd times a painted savage peered out of the forest, and drew back into hiding when he saw a ship on the waters.

One evening the *Sleeping Beauty* ran up a narrow inlet, where she anchored for the night. Some of the men

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landed with Edward to search for fresh water. While they moved alongside the creek, in the hope of finding game to shoot, Edward took his way in and out among the trees. His thoughts were on Flora, so that he failed to note the music of the dying day amid the forest; nor did he mark the sweet perfume in the air.

Something roused him from his reverie, and he halted to look around. Not many yards away, in an open space, half a dozen white men were standing, each one armed. Close by some sheltering bushes were the smouldering embers of a fire. Each man's face was turned towards the forest, out of which came an Indian in war-paint, and on his back was slung a quiver full of arrows.

One of the men went forward to meet the red man.

As yet Edward had not seen the faces of the men, who were all gazing at the Indian; but something about the man who strode over the grass to meet the newcomer seemed familiar. Was it possible that he was one of the men of the *Mayflower*? Were these a few of the hundred and twenty Pilgrims with whom he had hoped to travel? Were they here on a hunting expedition? or were they mere adventurers passing the lonely shore?

The white man and the Indian talked, the red man pointing at times into the forest. They turned after a while, so that Edward saw the white man's face. A loud cry escaped him, and he hastened forward.

"Sir Bernard!" he shouted, as he went.

The cry, ringing over the open space, caused Bernard Vincent to look up. At first he seemed bewildered, but then it dawned on him that the approaching man was someone whom he knew, but not a Pilgrim. He had not watched many moments before he recognised Edward, and, moving swiftly, the two men met.

While Edward went forward he marked the face of the

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elder man, and felt afraid. The face was lined with care. Trouble was plain in every one of those deep marks, and there was pain lurking in Sir Bernard's eyes.

Edward's heart sank. Had anything happened to make the elder man's hair so white?

He would not wait to think of these and other things. His thought was all for Flora, and while the two men embraced his question came:

"Where is Flora?"

"Only God can tell," was the answer, which told of absolute hopelessness and grief. "She is gone, and we are searching for her."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE SUBTERRANEAN PASSAGE

K NOWING nothing of the coming of Edward, but always thinking of him, Flora went on her compulsory journey, but no longer on the river. For days it was the same perpetual journey through the forest, no longer by night, but in the broad daylight.

The Indian, however, grew ever more kind in his stolid way. More than once a snake glided by, and Great Bird, alert, flung his tomahawk with deadly skill, and killed it. He stopped at one point to peer down a side aisle in the forest, looking for a stream. Flora was transfixed for a moment when he went on his knees to gaze beneath a bush; for from among the leaves, where he could not see it, something darted, and fastened on the Indian's naked back. The red man twisted his head round, as if in pain. A moment more, disregarding her own danger, Flora sprang forward, caught at the thing swiftly, and tossed it away before it had time to turn on her. It was a deadly snake, and it disappeared.

"You are hurt, Great Bird!" she exclaimed. "What will you do?"

"Nothing, for it is where I cannot suck the wound."

"What, then?" asked Flora, startled, and gazing at the spot where the bite had left its blue-black mark.

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“He will die,” cried Rollin, whose face was pale with horror.

“Is it really so, Great Bird?” she asked.

The Indian nodded, and stood up, stoically facing his fate.

Flora looked at him in wonder. Could she not do something for him? It was a fearful thing that a man so strong, so splendid in his savagery, should die. She braced herself for the task she resolved upon at the moment.

“Kneel down, Great Bird, and let me look at the wound.”

The Indian dropped on his knees without a word, and Flora, having examined the spot, put her lips to the wound.

“Do not!” cried Rollin. “It may injure you.”

“If I do not he will die.”

She began to suck out the poison, only thinking of this, that she was fighting for a man’s life, and, God helping her, she would not permit herself to be beaten.

“’Tis enough, I think,” she said at last, when she was convinced that the poison was gone; but she swayed, threw out her hands to save herself, and would have fallen if Great Bird had not swung round and caught her in his arms.

She lay there, helpless, but had not lost her senses. The red man carried her, as gentle with her as though she had been a child, down the forest aisle to the water which was flowing at the distant end. He laved his hand in the stream to clean it; then lifted some in the hollow, and held it for her to wash her mouth. The taste of the cold water revived her, and, slipping from his arms, she knelt at the stream.

When, after a little while, she looked up at Great Bird,

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she saw a strange expression on his face. She had thought he could not smile, nor show anything like emotion, but she knew now that the red man's heart was stirred. His stoicism vanished for a few moments.

"Mistress, I am your servant," he said in a low tone, so that Jules Rollin could not hear him. "It shall be my work to see that no harm befalls you. Ask me for any service, and it is yours."

Three days later they came after dawn within sight of an immense clearing, where cornfields were showing green. In the centre was a settlement, a group of log-built huts, surrounded by a stockade wall. The palisading ran down to the river's edge and passed along the bank, broken nowhere but in one spot where there was a narrow doorway, closed at night to prevent the entry of Indians from the river by surprise. On a solid cross-bar of timber above the door hung a shield, on which were emblazoned the arms of France.

A chain hung outside, and when Rollin pulled at it he stepped out of the canoe by which they had crossed the stream; the clang of a great bell resounded on the morning air.

"Is this the fort?" Flora asked of Great Bird, for whenever possible she ignored Jules Rollin.

The red man nodded.

"It is your home, so monsieur says, so long as he decides to hold you prisoner, or, as he put it to you, a hostage."

The Indian's eyes flashed when he glanced at Rollin, who was waiting impatiently at the door, and looking through the iron grille. When he saw the startled look on Flora's face, he whispered, so that the words barely reached her ear, as he bent forward, ostensibly to lay his paddle in the bottom of the canoe.

“You want to return to your people?”

“I do,” she answered, but more by the moving of her lips than by any audible word.

“Great Bird will not forget, nor will he fail you.”

The Indian caught at a snag on the bank to keep the tiny craft from drifting down the stream.

The gate in the palisade opened, and Flora had a glimpse of a great courtyard, lined with out-buildings, where horses and cattle were kept, and goods and provisions stored; dog huts clustered about a larger building, which was evidently the house of the Governor.

In the open space men were grouped, some of them French soldiers, dressed half-way between their national and the Indian costume, and Indians who had come to the fort to barter the skins from the forest. In one or two places were some squaws looking round on the scene. Every eye turned to watch Rollin's entry. A young French officer, who was lounging in the doorway of the Governor's house, started into activity when he saw Flora. He moved across to meet Rollin, his face betraying his curiosity.

“What have we here?” he asked, doffing his hat and bowing low to the pretty English Puritan maid, as he spoke of her, later.

“This is Mademoiselle Flora Vincent, De Monts. She is an English lady whom I knew in Virginia, and whom I was fortunate enough to meet when I went to the sea to reconnoitre the settlement of those so-called Pilgrims.”

De Monts bowed low again to Flora, and Rollin went on, venturing greatly and mendaciously:

“She is to be my wife; and ere long, when the priest returns from Port Royal, the fort will witness one of the prettiest weddings that ever took place away from Paris.”

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Flora was startled at the unexpected words, and her whole spirit was in arms. De Monts, who was gazing at her with undisguised admiration, saw the colour in her cheeks and marked the flash of anger in her eyes.

"M. de Monts," she exclaimed half scornfully and wholly angry, "M. Rollin speaks untruthfully. He has stolen me away from my people, and is forcing this marriage on me. I resent it wholeheartedly."

She spoke with such decision that Jules Rollin coloured, especially when De Monts turned to him inquiringly. He did not say a word in answer, but called to a middle-aged, white-capped woman who had come to the door, hearing that the Governor had returned.

"Nanon, take mademoiselle to a room, and look well to her comfort."

Flora went with the woman, who looked at her sourly. She caught the look, and a sense of fear stole over her. Was it the dislike of a Frenchwoman for one who came from England? Or was there some other motive for this antagonism which Nanon made no attempt to conceal?

Flora followed wearily, wondering what the end would be. The woman led her through a great hall, almost barbaric in its medley of the forest and the city. The logs of which the house was built were visible in places, but here and there the walls were hung with tapestry, such as would have graced the chateau of a nobleman in France. Some of the furniture was the work of a half-skilled woodsman; some, again, the handicraft of the Parisian workman.

The woman moved on sulkily to a door at the other end of the hall, and, opening it, waited while Flora entered. The room was sparsely furnished—a chair, a *prie-Dieu* in the corner, a carpet spread between the couch which

was to serve as bed, and the table, a small cabinet—that was all, save the tapestry which partially hid the log wall.

“Is this my room?” asked Flora, looking round the comfortless place.

“Yes,” was the curt response.

“And my bed?”

“The couch, over there. We do not boast luxuries here, in New France. Shall I bring you food?”

“Please, for it is many days since I sat to a proper meal,” said Flora wearily.

“You might have expected it, and thought about it, before you so madly undertook such a journey,” Nanon said sharply, looking at Flora, marvelling at her clothes, which were torn with the thorns and the rough usage of her travel through the forest.

“I had no choice,” was Flora’s protest.

“You did not choose?” the woman cried incredulously, her blue eyes open wide in astonishment. “I heard M. Rollin say that you were to be his bride. You must have come of your own will, for you are here.”

Flora gazed at the woman, wondering how far her protest would serve her, but Nanon had more to say.

“Why M. Rollin should choose an Englishwoman, beautiful though you are, when there are so many fair maidens in France, I cannot think!”

Flora understood the woman’s curtness now. Nanon was jealous for her own countrywomen, and had the natural dislike for one of another nation coming hither as the wife of the Governor. She went to the door and closed it; then returned to Flora, who had sunk on to the couch, too trembling to continue to stand.

“Mademoiselle Nanon, I did not come of my own accord!” exclaimed Flora. “Shall I tell you all?”

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The woman relented when she looked at Flora's tired and troubled face.

"Tell me what you will," she said, now kindly, and standing before Flora.

Flora hesitated. Should she tell the whole story, and set herself right with Nanon? The woman was no common servant, but the Keeper of the House, and was jealous, doubtless, at the coming of a stranger, and she of all women, one from England! She was come to usurp her authority and place. Yet, why not speak?

Then the story came, and Flora, looking at Nanon through her tears, saw that the hard face had softened.

"Mademoiselle, I understand. I was jealous because I felt that by your coming you would depose me from my place. Will you marry M. Rollin?"

"I could not, and I will not, for my heart is in another man's keeping," said Flora earnestly.

"He may compel you," said Nanon, who knew Jules Rollin, and understood too well that he would stand at nothing to gain his end.

"I can die," sobbed Flora.

Nanon slipped her arm about Flora's neck, and sat in silence while the poor girl, so overwrought, wept. Then the woman in her lent her speech.

"Mademoiselle, were I not a menial, or were I of your own station, I would love to kiss your tears away, to bring you any comfort that could come of sympathy."

Flora turned in surprise, and saw the woman's face.

"Kiss me, Nanon!" she exclaimed. "It will be something to have your sympathy."

"I will spoil M. Rollin's wicked plans, if it be possible," cried the woman, kissing Flora once more, and then she left the room.

Two days went by, when Nanon entered with a letter.

"M. Rollin bade me bring it," she said reluctantly.

Flora opened it, read the note, and, dropping it in her lap, buried her face in her hands. It told her that, if in twelve hours she did not consent to marry him, he would take his soldiers and a great company of Indians and wipe out the Colony of Pilgrims.

"Read the letter, Nanon," Flora cried.

The woman's face reddened with anger when she read it. She crumpled it up in her hands in a fury which almost frightened Flora.

"He must be Satan incarnate!" she exclaimed, her words thrilling with passion. "And to think of it! He says that in twelve hours Great Bird goes forth to gather Indians for the war-trail!"

The afternoon went by, and once or twice Flora saw Rollin in the square. Indians came and went, some bringing skins to sell, some coming in their war-paint. Great Bird once crossed the open space, without looking to right or left. The same imperturbable look was on his face, and, viewed by anyone who had not seen him in his softer moments as Flora had done, he was the Indian in whom cruelty only slumbered. He moved with the stealthy tread of his race until he halted at the door of a hut, as fully armed as though he were out for war. He gazed about him with the usual sinister light in his eyes, and yet with all the pride of a warrior who had many a deed of prowess to his credit.

Flora gazed at him through the window, recalling what he had said he was ready to do for her, if ever she should be in need of a friend. God knew that her need was great. Would Nanon take a message to him from her? Surely, with his native cunning and prowess, he could devise something by which to frustrate Rollin?

The door at which Great Bird stood opened, and Rollin

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appeared. There was a long conversation, Rollin talking mainly, the Indian listening stolidly. Then, side by side, the two men walked to the water-gate, and Flora saw Great Bird step into the canoe and paddle away.

A cry of anguish broke from her lips, for she felt certain that the Indian had gone to gather the red men for Rollin's murderous enterprise. She reeled with the shock of what she deemed disaster, and thought that one who might have helped her was passing farther and farther away with every stroke of the paddle, to bring later the men of the forest and the prairie to do her own people such deadly hurt. It was a friend's hand that was unwittingly striking a fatal blow, something which spelt ruin to so many.

An hour passed, crowded with intolerable dread and dismay. Flora was driven now to consider, once for all, how far she should go—whether she should defy this man, and lose her own life, and doom those who seemed to be at her mercy, or send to Rollin and say that she would marry him.

She knew not what to do. Sometimes the loathing she had for the man made her determine that she would take the stroke of death. At other moments life made its demand on her, for she was young. Others, however, had their claim to consideration. What was her own security, or her happiness, when the ruin and death of the Pilgrims were involved? Had she the right to place her own comfort in the balance?

She was considering this when some horses ready for a journey came from the stables, and with them ten Frenchmen, all armed, and half a score of Indians. They waited in the saddle, grouping about the door where she had seen Great Bird standing. Rollin came out after some delay, sprang into his seat, gathered

up the reins, glanced round the square, called up an Indian and spoke to him; then, when the red man dropped back, sullenly, he rode through the gate on the side farthest from the river. The gate slammed when he and the others had passed out.

Nothing remained but for Flora to sit in despair. What else could she do? No hope was left to her, for Great Bird was gone on his errand, and she could not appeal to him, and probably Rollin was gone in another direction to gather up his forces. She had no expectation but for the worst, and she lay crouching on the floor, with her head bent on the bed. She wanted to pray, but the words would not come. She was dumb with anguish.

Nanon came to the door when it was dark, but could not enter, for someone had locked it unknown to her, and the key was gone. Did it mean that Rollin meant to starve her into submission during his absence?

Flora rose to her feet when Nanon whispered through the keyhole, and, creeping to the door, she told the woman she was within.

"I cannot open the door, mademoiselle. M. Rollin has taken the key away. But listen! Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Should any sound come at midnight behind your couch, do not be alarmed. It will be all right. My room is next to yours, and it will be the noise of my own movements. I must go," Nanon added hurriedly. Nothing followed, save a woman's step along the passage.

Flora sat on the couch in the darkness. The sounds of the fort, such as she had heard in the daytime, ceased, one by one, and a silence fell which was almost disturbing. If anything could be heard at all, it was an officer going

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from point to point within the stockade, to see that every sentry was at his post.

It was so dark when the laggard hour of midnight came that Flora could see nothing. There was no moon, and as far as she could remember, it was not due for the next two hours.

What was the midnight hour to bring? She asked herself the question, but could think of no possible answer. A sound came, like the tap-tap of some animal on the woodwork behind her. At first it startled her, because her nerves were at such tension, but she recalled what Nanon said, telling her not to be alarmed. A few minutes later she heard a sound like the opening of a door. She could see nothing, but Nanon's voice reached her ear.

"Mademoiselle, are you awake?"

"Yes."

"Step over to the back side of the couch carefully. Bend low when I bid you, and take my hand."

Flora stepped over the couch, and, groping in the dark, felt the woman's hand.

"Bend low—very low. There is an opening here, near to the floor. Go on your knees, which will be better. A beam works on hinges, and I am holding it up, so that you may crawl through. Feel with your hands, and you will not strike your head."

Flora followed these whispered instructions, and presently she was in another room. The beam dropped into place with a thud which was scarcely heard, and there was a click as of a latch. A moment or two passed, and Nanon snatched a cloth from a lighted lantern. To Flora's amazement an Indian was near.

"Great Bird!" she cried; but the red man raised his hand by way of caution.

“Say nothing,” he said slowly, as if searching his mind for words with which to make himself understood. “Time is precious. Follow me.”

Flora gazed around the room, and saw that it was windowless, so that no one from without could see the light unless through any possible cracks in the timbered walls. It was full of lumber, and of arms stacked in one of the corners, ready to serve out to any who were to share in the defence of the fort, if the garrison should be hard driven. She understood this in that one swift glance. But there was more. Three short logs which helped to make the floor were moved from their place, and below was a black space.

“’Tis a way of escape, mademoiselle,” whispered Nanon. “It is a secret passage, supposed to be known to none but the Governor, so that, if there was treachery and he needed to escape, this would afford him the opportunity. When I told Great Bird of your peril, he said that he knew of this. He was sent forth to gather Indians for the war-trail, and he said he would pretend to go, but would return at midnight to take you to your home by the sea.”

Nanon offered a tiny dagger, but Flora drew out a keener and more effective one, which she had meant to use if need came.

“Use it, mademoiselle, if you should fall into the hands of any Indians,” the woman whispered. “Drive it into your bosom, for ’twere better to die by your own swift hand than be tortured by them. Now go, and the dear God go with you.”

Flora returned the dagger to her bosom, and, throwing her arms about the woman, kissed her gratefully. The Indian took up the lantern and went down into the dark opening to show the way. Following him carefully, Flora

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found herself descending some solid timber steps. At Great Bird's word she halted while he turned and assisted Nanon to lower the floor logs to their places.

"We will go," he said, in his curt manner, taking up the lantern and showing the way.

Descending a score of steps, Flora found herself in a subterranean passage which ended in darkness.

"Hold my belt," Great Bird whispered, and they moved so swiftly that Flora wondered at the pace. In some parts the path was dry, and her feet appeared to be treading on loose gravel; but at intervals they came to spots where pools of water gathered, and the ground was treacherous to the feet.

"I will carry you over this," said Great Bird, flinging his strong arm about her waist. He went carefully, lest he should slip, but set her on her feet when the path was dry again.

At times something crept past them and fled into the darkness with a snarl or a frightened snap of the teeth. At every step Flora saw lizards and slimy creatures crawling to escape from the light and the unwonted tread of human beings. Thus they went, Flora shivering in the chill air where no sunshine had ever come.

"Not far now," said the Indian, who noticed the shiver.

He held the light so that Flora saw some ascending timber steps, and she mounted eagerly. Great Bird's coolness, his indifference, almost, lessened her fears; and although she was in this subterranean way, alone with a red man who was terrible to his foes, she felt that she was safe with him.

They came to the topmost step of all, and Great Bird blew out the light, setting down the lamp at his feet.

"We want it no more," he said quietly; and Flora heard him moving his hands among the earth and leaves.

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“Keep close to me,” the Indian whispered, “but come in silence. You must crawl, for the opening is the burrow of some beast. It is so hidden with grass and bush that none ever looked on it save the paleface, Rollin, and myself. It was by this way that I returned to the fort to bring you away.”

CHAPTER XXXII

THE HOMEWARD FLIGHT

FOLLOWING the Indian, Flora felt the grass brushing against her face; but when the fresh air played on her, Great Bird's strong hand caught at hers.

"Keep your head low," he whispered.

Flora crawled along with him, and presently he spoke again:

"You can stand up."

He did so himself, and lifted her with his hand. By this time she had grown used to the darkness, and when she glanced around she saw that the forest was everywhere about her, and at her feet lay the water. She made out the form of a great tree which spanned the creek, and near to it, fastened to the bank, was a canoe.

"I went away in this, and M. Rollin thinks that I am gathering the Indians of my tribe for the war-trail," said Great Bird.

He lapsed again into silence, but was more watchful than ever when Flora and he were in the canoe. Taking up the paddle, he sent the little craft down the creek noiselessly, keeping near the reeds until they entered the broad river, whose steady flow was towards the sea.

As the canoe went onwards, and trees came in turn and were passed, Great Bird took the bends in a silence so

profound that the paddle scarcely gave any token of its moving, and nothing was heard but the soft droppings from the blade, or the swish of water among the reeds. The speed was so great that Flora's heart beat high with hope. In an hour the Indian, with his wonderful skill and strength, which made the frail craft bound, covered miles, and she felt that if no mishap came they would be out of reach of all pursuit by dawn.

No word was spoken. The Indian was peering in the night, now far on in front, now into the forest darkness on either bank, now among the reeds which bunched thickly in the stream. Nor did Flora want to talk. Her thoughts travelled on before her to those who were in Salem—to her father and her friends, and far beyond them all to the man she loved.

Where was he? No woman ever prayed more fervently than she for her father, who was mourning for his wife—her darling mother—and then he had the added sorrow of his daughter's disappearance. And the prayer went up as well for God's speeding to the canoe which flew on the waters like a swift arrow from the bow.

Great Bird watched her as she sat with her hands clasped and her head bowed. Knowing the way of the "palefaces," he muttered to himself, "She is praying to the Great Spirit to carry us safely through."

The dawn was not far away when Flora bent forward and whispered:

"Great Bird, shall we travel in the daytime, or will you go into hiding?"

"Into hiding. Often roving bands of Indians are here, and I know not whether they would be friends or foes."

She shuddered, but in the full confidence of prayer she said to herself, "In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust. I shall never be put to confusion."

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The Indian heard the words, just audible, although she was not aware, and he marvelled at her quiet calm.

There was a grey light in the sky towards which they were speeding, Great Bird apparently no more weary than when they left the fort. Flora saw it, and was going to tell her companion, but he had been watching for some time past, and the moment dawn intruded on the darkness, even faintly, he turned the canoe towards some reeds near the bank, over which the branches hung as a canopy, giving shelter whether the sun should scorch or the rain fall.

"Lie down and sleep," said the Indian. "I will go and find food."

Gathering up his bow and quiver, he stepped into the water, which rose to his waist, and, parting the reeds, moved to the bank. Satisfied that all was well, he disappeared among the pine trees.

Flora shuddered at the thought of being alone, but no thought of desertion entered her mind. An hour went by, and Great Bird had not returned. Another wakeful hour passed, and she was still waiting. Her anxiety became so great that she could scarcely lie still in the canoe. She had thoughts of sending it close up to the bank, to go into the wood to look for her companion. When the third hour had gone, and Great Bird still tarried, she took up the paddle and sent the canoe softly to the bank. She was going to climb out when she saw the Indian approaching, but bending as he came, to cover his trail. On his back a small deer was slung.

She had learnt sufficient to know that there was danger, or Great Bird, always vigilant, would scarcely take such infinite pains. He reached the river bank at last, but as he came he limped. When he bent to hide the last trace of his feet on the soft soil, she saw that he was bleeding.

"You are hurt!" she exclaimed.

“Hush!” he replied. “There are Indians near. We must go into hiding elsewhere.”

Stepping into the canoe, he made it slide in and out among the reeds like some sinuous creature. Sometimes he made fierce rushes from one group of reeds to another; then, in stealth, he reached a bunch of rushes so dense that Flora feared lest the canoe would crash into something solid and overturn.

“If they come now, they will not find us,” said Great Bird, still moving the canoe beneath bushes and overhanging trees, and to a gloom so great, after being in the full brilliance of the morning sun, that she could scarcely see what was near. The little craft then came to an abrupt standstill.

“I wanted to reach this, but was afraid to venture this far after the dawn had come, lest we might be seen; but we are safe now,” the Indian said, laying down his paddle. He stood up to his full height, and stepped out on solid ground. Turning, he lifted Flora bodily from her seat. When she felt her feet on hard rock, she looked back, and saw the daylight from whence they had come. Overhead she saw what looked like an archway of stone.

“I am going to sink the canoe,” whispered Great Bird, going on his knees. Taking out the paddle and the deer, his arrows, bow, and gun, he turned the canoe on its side, and, thrusting downwards, got it beneath the waters, where it touched the bottom.

Flora felt his handgrip on her arm. His lips were close to her ear.

“They are coming,” he whispered.

She looked towards the mouth of the cavern, and her heart beat quickly. Without were the shining waters, and on it a canoe with half a score of red men, all of whom were gazing in every direction. Something was

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said by one of them, and the canoe shot up the stream, and passed out of sight.

"They may return; but come. They will not find us, so do not fear."

The Indian slung his weapons on his back, and threw the deer across his shoulder. Carrying his paddle in one hand, he led Flora over some rocky ground. At times she stumbled, but the strong hand of the red man never failed her. She was climbing a steep and rocky incline, but more than once a gasp of pain escaped her companion.

"You are hurt, Great Bird?"

"Yes; but I will look to my wound when we get to the place I have in mind," was the quiet response, and a few moments later Flora saw daylight. They had turned a corner, and stood on a platform of rock.

She was standing in a cavern whose scarred walls gleamed as the sunlight poured in through an opening in front of her. The ceiling arched, but came down on either side in jagged flutings to the uneven floor. She heard the sound of trickling water, and, looking round, saw a tiny line of whiteness. It was water sliding down into a hollow like a basin.

Moving away from her companion, she went to the opening. It was broad enough for two or three to stand side by side, and from that vantage-spot she saw the winding river, gleaming in the sun, and the forest ranging far and wide. In the distance were great mountains, and here and there broad stretches of savannah—treeless plains on which wild deer and buffalo were feeding. Had she not been dominated by fear of pursuit and the terror of being hunted, she would have feasted her eyes on the forest beauties and the splendours of the far-spreading country; but death was near.

She turned and saw the Indian, and noticed that he winced with pain.

"Where are you hurt?" she asked anxiously. She found that he was wounded sorely in the thigh.

"Come to the spring," she exclaimed, and he followed her. She made him lie on the rocky floor, and the giant-statured Indian became as docile as a child. She bathed his wound, taking her kerchief from her neck to do so more effectively.

"It gives me ease," the Indian said, feeling the comfort of her gentle touch and the cool water on the wound.

"I am going to bind it," Flora said, dipping the kerchief once more in the water and thinking to bind it round the Indian's thigh, but he spoke.

"Use these. I plucked them as I came away."

He drew a bunch of leaves from his belt, and Flora bound them deftly to the injured spot with the kerchief.

"I am ever in your debt!" exclaimed Great Bird, and his face relaxed into an unwonted smile.

While the Indian made a fire deeper in the cavern, Flora gazed about her.

"Great Bird, is that the sea?" she asked, pointing to the haze in the distance.

He shook his head.

"'Tis in that direction that your people dwell, and 'tis there I mean to take you when the way is clear, but it will be only after many suns that you will see the great waters. There will be a day when we shall leave the river and travel through the forest."

Flora's heart fell. It seemed so far, and God alone knew what perils lay between her and the place where her father was brooding over her absence; but, as Master Robinson had told them once, she was in the Lord's safe-keeping wherever she might be. She called to mind, when

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her guide was sleeping, what someone had once said to her: "God draws the cloud above us, not once in a lifetime, but many times. But, lest the gloom should appal us, He braids the cloud with sunshine—nay, makes it the object which gleams to our eyes with the very fairest hues of heaven."

The words were to her like light in the darkness, and she lay back and slept peacefully.

She awoke in the gloaming, and, looking around, found herself alone. Going to the cavern ledge, she saw Great Bird moving below. She did not speak, but watched him bringing up the canoe from its hiding-place. When he returned she was prepared for what he said.

"We will go. The way is clear, and the night will be dark."

Not many minutes had gone before the canoe—which rode lightly—was floating out of the creek into the main stream. The current carried it swiftly onward, and the trees of the forest glided by rapidly. On and on for hours, never pausing, Great Bird drove the canoe forward until dawn arrived. He gazed around, and his look of satisfaction showed Flora that all was going well. Half an hour later they were in hiding.

"Here is food; eat, and then sleep," said the Indian.

It was noon when he awoke her.

"There are Indians near. I have seen them. There is a village in the heart of the forest, and those who live there are my friends. I have been there, and they were glad to see Great Bird, who is a great chief, and he has smoked the pipe of peace with them. Will you come?"

"I will go wherever you think it safe to take me," said Flora; and, rising, she went to the stream to bathe her face and hands. She found the cool water on so hot a day refreshing.

"I am ready," she exclaimed, returning, fresh and smiling. Even the red man, stolid and unimpressionable, gazed at her, and spoke when she stood before him.

"The sun has unveiled his face, and bathed his daughter with his splendour," he said. "What will they say when the Daughter of the Sun enters the wigwam of the Great Chief, yonder?"

He pointed along the aisle of pine trees while he spoke.

She smiled, and they walked side by side, until they came to a village around which were maize fields and mulberry plantations. The Chief and his warriors, with their squaws and naked little ones, came out of their wigwams to meet them; for Great Bird was one who was worthy of their attention.

An Indian girl came to Flora and laid at her feet a leaf full of maize cakes; but when, smiling, Flora bent down to take it into her hands, the girl bent also, to lift it; and, walking at the side of the Daughter of the Sun, bore the light burden for her, till she came to the tent which had been made ready for her.

"Great Bird said that you were weary," said the girl quietly, but Flora did not understand.

The Chief of the village came while she was eating, and spoke in broken French, which they had learnt from the settlers when trading at the fort.

"My people will be friends with the White Fathers who have come from out of the sea," he said. "Black Bear and his braves have great hate for Rollin, the Chief from whom Great Bird says you have fled. My braves shall see you through the forest to the place where your people dwell."

Flora lay down that night and slept as she had not done since she had been stolen away by Rollin. Three

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squaws sat within the wigwam, and without were five Indians, set on guard, so that none should enter.

Refreshed with her sleep, Flora came out into the open and gazed around, just as the sun was sinking behind the hills in the west. She was surprised to find that she had slept so many hours. She had been lying awake for a little while, wondering whether Great Bird would come to bid her go forth on the homeward way. A great hope was surging within her, for in her sleep she had dreamed that her beloved had found her. She awoke while Edward was bending to kiss her lips, and a cry of disappointment came when it proved to be a dream.

She fell asleep again, and the dream repeated itself, but now she was in her lover's arms, and he was telling her of his undying love. The glowing light of the setting sun peeped in through the door of the wigwam, and fell across her eyes, so that she awoke to find that this, too, was a dream. Yet it was so real that she lay awhile to think about it. She turned her face away, so that none of the squaws could see her, and, closing her eyes as she lay, and clasping her hands, she prayed.

"I shall see him! my beloved!" she murmured, getting up from her bed, and when she had dressed, and the women brought her food, she went out to look around, and thrilling with this hope.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE COMING OF EDWARD

GREAT BIRD came to her, and with him the Sachem of the tribe.

“Do we start soon?” she asked, regardless of the glances of the Indians, who watched the beauty of the Daughter of the Sun in the sunset light.

“We go no more by night; but Black Bear, the great Chief, will speak.”

The Sachem beckoned to one who was standing apart.

“Samoset, come hither.”

Flora started when she saw a gigantic Indian, with straight, black hair, whose only clothing was a fringed girdle, but his body painted with barbaric emblems, step forward.

“Are you Samoset?” she cried, when the red man stood by the Sachem’s side. “You are surely he who came to the settlement and spoke so kindly to my people by the sea?”

The Indian gazed at Flora; then turned to Black Bear, as if to know whether he was free to answer.

“Speak,” said the Sachem. “Tell the white maiden all.”

“I am Samoset,” came the response. “I went to your people by the sea, and spoke good words to them. Is it not so?”

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Flora put out her hand to the Indian; then waited until the Sachem spoke, and Samoset acted as interpreter.

"Maiden from the palefaces, and Daughter of the Sun, your people, who dwell down by the sea, and many suns away, and Black Bear, the great Chief, are friends. I heard of the coming of the White Fathers, and sent Samoset to speak with them. Then came one of the palefaces hither, and we smoked the pipe of peace. We are brothers. The great Sachem, Massasoiet, whose warriors are many, like the leaves of the forest, visited the White Fathers, and he, too, became their friend. They who fight your people fight Black Bear and Massasoiet, for the White Fathers by the sea are our brothers."

The Sachem paused and spoke to Samoset; but he had more to say.

"Daughter of the Sun, there will be joy in the wigwams of our white brothers by the sea, when they hear that the great Chief, Black Bear, has found the daughter of the White Father, whose name is Vincent."

Flora's heart leapt at the words.

"My father? Do you know him?" she cried, going forward in her eagerness and laying her white hand on the painted arm, while she gazed at the Sachem with eyes which were full of questioning.

"Yes. He came hither with some of his white brothers, because you were lost. He was in tears, for his daughter had gone, he knew not where. He searched for her everywhere, on the river, and in the forest, and did not find her. He came to Black Bear, whose braves are even now in the forest, for it pleased the Sachem to seek for her, and give her back to the man whom Black Bear loves."

"Is my father well?" asked Flora, her fingers closing about the Chief's sinewy wrist, and her face pale with anxiety.

“Yes, but full of grief, because he lost his daughter from his wigwam, so that there is desolation in his heart. The paleface maiden is welcome. The maidens of my wigwams shall dance for her, and make her heart glad. Her feet shall no more be weary. Swift Wolf is gone to the sea to say that you are here.”

He touched the totem of his tribe, upon his breast, and left Flora with Great Bird and Samoset.

Flora wondered whether news had come of Edward, and she asked Samoset, but he shook his head.

“I do not know.”

She wandered down the forest glade, along which Great Bird had brought her, and through which the last splendours of the sinking sun found their way, bathing the pine trees' trunks in glowing red, and casting shafts of golden light across the mossy path. She did not know that Great Bird followed, lest danger should come to her. She halted at a quiet spot by the river, where the canoe lay among the reeds, and sitting there, looking out on the waters, she let her fancy run as it would. It made her clasp her hands to thank God for His mercy, for the news of her home and father. But one thing lacked to make her gladness perfect and complete. Edward was not there. Would not God, in His compassion, bring him to her across the seas, if he were not already on the waters?

Her anxious face was irradiated by the last glow of the sunset, while she prayed. Soon the twilight would merge into night, and when she saw how thickly the shadows fell, she half rose to her feet to return to her tent.

She started when she saw a stalwart Indian standing near, with his back against a tree. He saw her face, and marked her alarm.

“’Tis Great Bird!” he exclaimed. “I followed, not to be away if danger threatened.”

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Feeling secure now, she sat down again, to watch the river, and the Indian, going among the rushes, flung himself prone on the ground, where none could see him. He had in his mind those who were probably keeping up the pursuit at the behest of Rollin. Suddenly he set his hand on the bow, and put an arrow to the string. He felt at his belt for his other weapons, and waited.

Flora was unconscious of his movements, and almost forgetful of his presence. She was thinking of her dream; but she was recalled to the things about her by hearing the sound of paddles in the water. Opening her eyes, she saw a canoe come round the bend of the river. Half a score of men were at the paddles.

"Great Bird," she whispered, "are you near?"

"Yes."

That one word, and no more; but she saw his great form, and how his eyes were fixed on the canoe. She saw that his arrow was ready for its flight. But there was more. A low cry as of an evening bird came from the Indian's lips, and out of the forest depths crept half a score of red men.

"Lie low," he whispered softly; and at his word Flora slid from the log on which she sat, but it was too late. An exultant cry came over the waters, and she knew the voice.

"I have found you at last, my beautiful one," Rollin cried; but there was something ominous in the tone. It recalled to her his threat of torture if she evaded him, or frustrated him in his purpose.

She watched him as a bird might be held in the thrall of a serpent's eyes. She forgot the Indians who were lying near, unseen by Rollin. She knew nothing of their readiness, with their arrows set in the bows at full tension. The only sound was the beating of the paddles and the

echo of Rollin's words. In his exultation Rollin sprang to his feet and drew a pistol from his belt.

"I have you at last!" he cried. "You shall never have the chance to elude me again!"

He was going to say more, and already he was moving his weapon for a deadly aim. But Flora heard the twang of a bow. An arrow sped through the air. It struck Rollin in the breast, and he flung up his hands. The pistol fell into the stream, while he, swaying, so that the canoe rocked with the movement, tumbled backwards. For a moment he lay on the canoe's side; then the body slipped over into the water, and sank.

The Indians in the canoe had gazed at him, but a flight of arrows sped out of the rushes, and few were left to turn the craft about, to take their flight.

Almost at the moment another canoe came into view. It was coming up the river, and it was too dark to distinguish faces; but the dim forms were those of red men—some, but not all. There were others, and the clothes they wore caused Flora to spring to her feet.

"They are my people!" she cried. "I know it, although I cannot see their faces. Swift Wolf must have met them, and they are coming here for me!"

Great Bird put out his hand, caught at her skirt, and held it tightly.

"You cannot tell in this light!" he exclaimed. "They may be some of Rollin's men, who went past this spot before we came hither just now, and, hearing that cry among the Indians in the canoe, turned back to join in the fight. Lie down!"

A low cry of disappointment came at the thought of such a possibility, but Flora sank to her knees, and yet lower, until her whole body lay flat on the moss.

"I pray the dear Lord you may be wrong, Great

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Bird," she whispered; "but I thought it would be my father, knowing how he loves me."

She was going to say more, but the Indian bade her be silent. In the stillness she heard the soft scrape of many arrows on the bows, and marked how each Indian who lay peering out on the darkening flood was ready to send forth his messenger of death. She marked how Great Bird's face was turned to the oncoming canoe, and how, when others were waiting for his word, he sprang to his feet, dropping the arrow to the ground, and allowing the bow to lie slack.

"Swift Wolf!"

His voice rang out on the waters, and to emphasise the call, and make the Indian know that he was a friend, he sent out the cry of a whip-poor-will, the call of Black Bear's warriors.

The paddles ceased to move, and the Indians lay over them as they dripped while across their knees. The men had been paddling up the stream with haste. They had heard the yells of the Indians in Rollin's canoe, and something told Sir Bernard and his men that the moments were precious. The Indians, responding splendidly, and eager to be in time if a fight was waging, came up against the stream in their fierce endeavour.

Flora sprang to her feet; but in the dimness she saw little but the moving blackness on the water. The twilight was gone. The night had come. A star was in the heavens, but she had not seen it; nor others that came out to look on earth's night; nor had she seen the fireflies which flickered around her. Her eyes were turned to the moving length of blackness on the stream, and that was all that she could see.

She thought she could hear a voice—or was it fancy? Was it the mere frenzy of her longing? It could not be!

She spoke in the silence of the night, when the Indians about her sprang to their feet and shook themselves.

“Father?”

A cry came out of the darkness. The paddles plunged in and churned the still waters into foam. A moment later the canoe touched the bank. Someone rose up and sprang out, close by her.

She saw him, and gazed at him, with her hands folded on her bosom. Her heart was beating fast—wildly. Her lips parted. Her eyes were searching the growing darkness to make it certain who this was. Then a cry came from her—and one from him:

“Edward!”

“Flora!”

A moment more, and they were in each other's arms.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ONCE MORE IN SALEM

THE journey back to the coast was without adventure, for the Sachem had sent a strong bodyguard of red men to accompany the Pilgrims. The river from that point no longer served them; hence they had to travel through the forest.

Bernard Vincent and Edward Fuller had found her for whom they had been searching for so many weary days; and at daydawn, with hearts that were filled with thankfulness, they said farewell to Great Bird, feeling, when they left him, that one remained behind who deserved to be spoken of as "a savage as brave and chivalrous, as courteous and truthful as a Christian knight."

The beauties of the forest, the glory of the opening summer, the joyous sounds of nature, the sparkling and gurgling of crystal streamlets, the wonders of the labyrinthine paths, and the cathedral-like and solemn forest aisles—all were as though they had never been while Flora and Edward walked on, mile after mile, with the joy of their reunion to thrill them.

The miles were all too short. The stories of their doings and dangers, and triumphant deliverances, and now this meeting, served to make time too fleet for the joy with which the hours were crowded.

"Can we ever be thankful enough to God?" asked Flora,

lifting her eyes to the man at her side. Her cheeks had on them the rosiness of her new joy, and the setting sun added to their glow.

“Enough, my darling?” cried Edward, bending to kiss her lips; “never enough; for here, to me, is joy beyond words.”

“You must be weary,” he said one morning, as they neared the coast, for they had been travelling since day-dawn, and it was close now on noon.

“Not weary,” Flora responded. “I want to be at home.”

She stopped abruptly.

“What more were you going to say, dear one?” asked Edward.

Her face went crimson.

“It was an unmaidenly word,” she exclaimed.

“Unmaidenly?” he asked, in surprise. “I could not conceive anything unmaidenly that my beloved could say or do. Say what you would, for why should anything be kept back between us?”

“Then I will,” Flora whispered. “When we get home I would fain have it that Master Brewster, our minister, should make us man and wife. I want to feel that you are altogether mine—that I am yours.”

They were walking alone, unseen by any of the others, and her hand stole into her lover’s arm.

“Was it bold and forward, Edward? Was it unmaidenly to say so much?” she asked, looking up to him half ashamed.

“How could you ask me that, beloved? I love you all the more because there is no distance, false or real, between us.”

When they reached the town the street was empty, save for a sentinel here and there to give alarm in case of a

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possible Indian raid. The silence made them anxious, and each saw the other's whitening face. Had disaster come? And yet the ship in the harbour had its flag flying, and her name, the *Sleeping Beauty*, floating in the lazy breeze. Was this a city of the dead?

"Where are the others?" Bernard asked, turning aside to speak to a sentinel, whose face displayed no anxiety.

"They are at worship, Sir Bernard. And since I see Mistress Flora is with you, I thank God more than words can say!" exclaimed the soldier.

At the door of the Common House the company halted. The Indians had gone back as soon as they saw the town; and now the men paused, with Flora in their midst. One opened the door slightly, and when they peered in they saw the company on their knees in prayer. To the ears of the waiting ones came the sound of the rich, clear voice of William Brewster, their pastor and preacher. The words fell on their ears and thrilled them. He was praying that the Heavenly Father, who had brought the Pilgrims to the New England shore, should lead the feet of those who went in search of her whom all in Salem loved so well.

The prayer ended, and the worshippers rose from their knees to come away. The faces of many were turned towards the door, and when it opened wide they stood in stillness and in wonder.

"God hears prayer!" exclaimed the Governor; "for here is Flora back again."

He came forward to meet her, his hands outstretched, and when they stood face to face he spoke aloud:

"Dear ones, this day, which we set apart for prayer, shows us that we never speak to the Heavenly Father in vain. What did Master Brewster tell us an hour ago? That when we pray we move the hand that moves the world. We asked, when he had spoken, that the great

forest into which Flora vanished might be made to give her up to us again. She is here. Now let us praise God."

He went upon his knees, and all within the Common House followed his example. For a while there was silence, for the thoughts of all were too deep for words. They rose to their feet once more, and came round Flora, to kiss her and tell her of their joy.

"Now to your homes," said Master Brewster, when he saw that Flora looked weary.

"Stay!" exclaimed Edward. "There is something more."

"What is it?" asked the Governor.

"Flora Vincent and I were pledged to be man and wife. Master Winslow, will you make us such here and now?"

Half an hour later Flora went forth from the Common House, hand in hand with the man she loved. The others stayed behind a while.

"My husband," said Flora softly, looking into Edward's face, her cheeks aglow, her eyes telling of the joy in her heart.

"My wife, for whom I have longed and prayed," came the answer, as they turned aside to the home which was set apart for them.

THE END



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