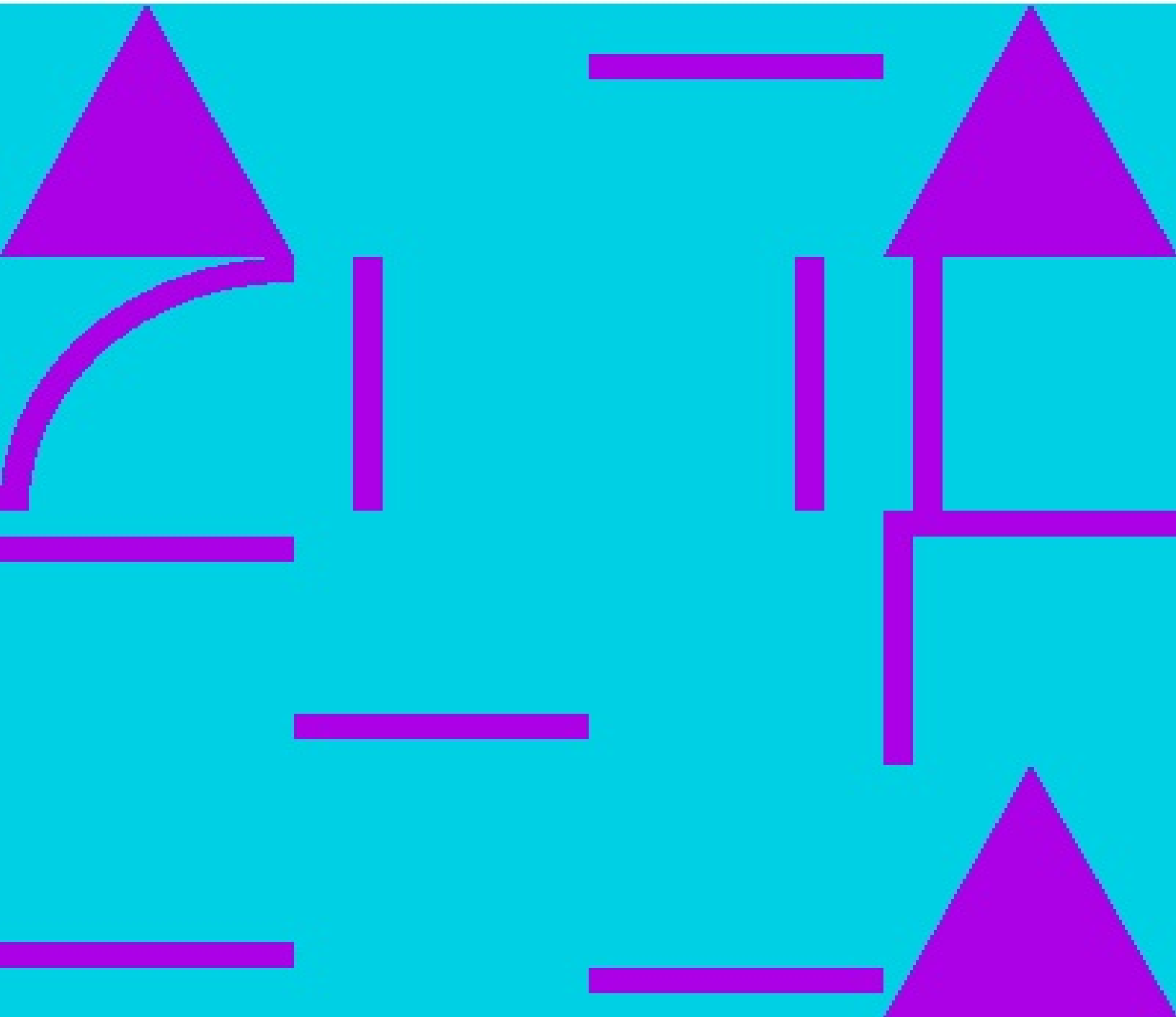


A Daughter of Raasay

A Tale of the '45

William MacLeod Raine



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A DAUGHTER
OF RAASAY
A TALE OF THE '45
By WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE
ILLUSTRATED BY STUART TRAVIS



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AILEEN

TO
MR. ELLERY SEDGWICK

Contents

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE SPORT OF CHANCE	1
II	A CRY IN THE NIGHT	19
III	DEOCH SLAINT AN RIGH!	39
IV	OF LOVE AND WAR	60
V	THE HUE AND CRY	79
VI	IN THE MATTER OF A KISS	99
VII	MY LADY RAGES	116
VIII	CHARLES EDWARD STUART	133
IX	BLUE BONNETS ARE OVER THE BORDER	151
X	CULLODEN	159
XI	THE RED HEATHER HILLS	180
XII	VOLNEY PAYS A DEBT	202
XIII	THE LITTLE GOD HAS AN INNINGS	223
XIV	THE AFTERMATH	231
XV	A REPRIEVE!	251
XVI	VOLNEY'S GUEST	266
XVII	THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW	278
XVIII	THE SHADOW FALLS	297
	THE AFTERWORD	309

The Ladies of St. James's

The ladies of St. James's
Go swinging to the play;
Their footmen run before them
With a "Stand by! Clear the way!"
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
She takes her buckled shoon.
When we go out a-courting
Beneath the harvest moon.

The ladies of St. James's!
They are so fine and fair,
You'd think a box of essences
Was broken in the air:
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!

The breath of heath and furze
When breezes blow at morning,
Is not so fresh as hers.

The ladies of St. James's!
They're painted to the eyes;
Their white it stays forever,
Their red it never dies:
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
Her colour comes and goes;
It trembles to a lily,—
It wavers like a rose.

The ladies of St. James's!
You scarce can understand
The half of all their speeches,
Their phrases are so grand:
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
Her shy and simple words
Are clear as after raindrops
The music of the birds.

The ladies of St. James's!
They have their fits and freaks;
They smile on you—for seconds;
They frown on you—for weeks:
But Phyllida, my Phyllida!
Come either storm or shine,
From shrovetide unto shrovetide
Is always true—and mine.

Austin Dobson.

FOREWORD

When this romance touches history the author believes that it is, in every respect, with one possible exception, in accord with the accepted facts. In detailing the history of “the ‘45’” and the sufferings of the misguided gentlemen who flung away the scabbard out of loyalty to a worthless cause, care has been taken to make the story agree with history. The writer does not of course indorse the view of Prince Charles' character herein set forth by Kenneth Montagu, but there is abundant evidence to show that the Young Chevalier had in a very large degree those qualities which were lacking to none of the Stuarts: a charming personality and a gallant bearing. If his later life did not fulfil the promise of his youth, the unhappy circumstances which hampered him should be kept in mind as an extenuation.

The thanks of the writer are due for pertinent criticism to Miss Chase, to Mr. Arthur Chapman and to Mr. James Rain, and especially to Mr. Ellery Sedgwick, whose friendly interest and kindly encouragement have been unfailing.

Acknowledgment must also be made of a copious use of Horace Walpole's Letters, the Chevalier Johnstone's History of the Rebellion, and other eighteenth century sources of information concerning the incidents of the times. The author has taken the liberty of using several anecdotes and *bon mots* mentioned in the "Letters"; but he has in each case put the story in the mouth of its historical originator.

W. M. R.

A Daughter of Raasay

CHAPTER I

THE SPORT OF CHANCE

“Deep play!” I heard Major Wolfe whisper to Lord Balmerino. “Can Montagu’s estate stand such a drain?”

“No. He will be dipped to the last pound before midnight. ’Tis Volney’s doing. He has angled for Montagu a se’nnight, and now he has hooked him. I have warned the lad, but——”

He shrugged his shoulders.

The Scotchman was right. I was past all caution now, past all restraint. The fever of play had gripped me, and I would listen to nothing but the rattle of that little box which makes the most seductive music ever sung by siren. My Lord Balmerino might stand behind me in silent protest till all was grey, and though he had been twenty times my father’s friend he would not move me a jot.

Volney’s smoldering eyes looked across the table at me.

“Your cast, Kenn. Shall we say doubles? You’ll nick this time for sure.”

“Done! Nine’s the main,” I cried, and threw deuces.

With that throw down crashed fifty ancestral oaks that had weathered the storms of three hundred winters. I had crabbed, not nicked.

“The fickle goddess is not with you to-day, Kenn. The jade jilts us all at times,” drawled Volney, as he raked in his winnings carelessly.

“Yet I have noted that there are those whom she forsakes not often, and I have wondered by what charmed talisman they hold her true,” flashed out Balmerino.

The steel flickered into Volney’s eyes. He understood it for no chance remark, but as an innuendo tossed forth as a challenge. Of all men Sir Robert Volney rode on the crest of fortune’s wave, and there were not lacking those who whispered that his invariable luck was due to something more than chance and honest skill. For me, I never believed the charge. With all his faults Volney had the sportsman’s love of fair play.

The son of a plain country gentleman, he had come to be by reason of his handsome face, his reckless courage, his unfailing impudence, and his gift of *savoir-vivre*, the most notorious and fortunate of the adventurers who swarmed at the court of St. James. By dint of these and kindred qualities he had become an intimate companion of the Prince of Wales. The man had a wide observation of life; indeed, he was an interested and whimsical observer rather than an actor, and a scoffer always. A libertine from the head to the heel of him, yet gossip marked him as the future husband of the beautiful young heiress Antoinette Westerleigh. For the rest, he carried an itching sword and the smoothest tongue that ever graced a villain. I had been proud that such a man had picked me for his friend, entirely won by the charm of manner that made his more evil faults sit gracefully on him.

Volney declined for the present the quarrel that Balmerino’s impulsive loyalty to me would have fixed on him. He feared no living man, but he was no hothead to be drawn from his purpose. If Lord Balmerino

wanted to measure swords with him he would accommodate the old Scotch peer with the greatest pleasure on earth, but not till the time fitted him. He answered easily:

"I know no talisman but this, my Lord; in luck and out of luck to bear a smiling front, content with the goods the gods may send."

It was a fair hit, for Balmerino was well known as an open malcontent and suspected of being a Jacobite.

"Ah! The goods sent by the gods! A pigeon for the plucking—the lad you have called friend!" retorted the other.

"Take care, my Lord," warningly.

"But there are birds it is not safe to pluck," continued Balmerino, heedless of his growing anger.

"Indeed!"

"As even Sir Robert Volney may find out. An eaglet is not wisely chosen for such purpose."

It irritated me that they should thrust and parry over my shoulder, as if I had been but a boy instead of full three months past my legal majority. Besides, I had no mind to have them letting each other's blood on my account.

"Rat it, 'tis your play, Volney. You keep us waiting," I cried.

"You're in a devilish hurry to be quit of your shekels," laughed the Irishman O'Sullivan, who sat across the table from me. "Isn't there a proverb, Mr. Montagu, about a—a careless gentleman and his money going different ways, begad? Don't keep him waiting any longer than need be, Volney."

There is this to be said for the Macaronis, that they plucked their pigeon with the most graceful negligence in the world. They might live by their wits, but they knew how to wear always the jauntiest indifference of manner. Out came the feathers with a sure hand, the while they exchanged choice *bon mots* and racy scandal. Hazard was the game we played and I, Kenneth Montagu, was cast for the rôle of the pigeon. Against these old gamesters I had no chance even if the play had been fair, and my head on it more than one of them rooked me from start to finish. I was with a vast deal of good company, half of whom were rogues and blacklegs.

"Heard George Selwyn's latest?"^[1] inquired Lord Chesterfield languidly.

"Not I. Threes, devil take it!" cried O'Sullivan in a pet.

"Tell it, Horry. It's your story," drawled the fourth Earl of Chesterfield.

"Faith, and that's soon done," answered Walpole. "George and I were taking the air down the Mall arm in arm yesterday just after the fellow Fox was hanged for cutting purses, and up comes our Fox to quiz George. Says he, knowing Selwyn's penchant for horrors, 'George, were you at the execution of my namesake?' Selwyn looks him over in his droll way from head to foot and says, 'Lard, no! I never attend rehearsals, Fox.'"

"'Tis the first he has missed for years then. Selwyn is as regular as Jack Ketch himself. Your throw, Montagu," put in O'Sullivan.

"Seven's the main, and by the glove of Helen I crab. Saw ever man such cursed luck?" I cried.

"'Tis vile. Luck's mauling you fearfully to-night," agreed Volney languidly. Then, apropos of the hanging, "Ketch turned off that fellow Dr. Dodd too. There was a shower, and the prison chaplain held an umbrella over Dodd's head. Gilly Williams said it wasn't necessary, as the Doctor was going to a place where he

might be easily dried.”

“Egad, ’tis his greatest interest in life,” chuckled Walpole, harking back to Selwyn. “When George has a tooth pulled he drops his kerchief as a signal for the dentist to begin the execution.”

Old Lord Pam’s toothless gums grinned appreciation of the jest as he tottered from the room to take a chair for a rout at which he was due.

“Faith, and it’s a wonder how that old Methuselah hangs on year after year,” said O’Sullivan bluntly, before the door had even closed on the octogenarian. “He must be a thousand if he’s a day.”

“The fact is,” explained Chesterfield confidentially, “that old Pam has been dead for several years, but he doesn’t choose to have it known. Pardon me, am I delaying the game?”

He was not, and he knew it; but my Lord Chesterfield was far too polite to more than hint to Topham Beauclerc that he had fallen asleep over his throw. Selwyn and Lord March lounged into the coffee house arm in arm. On their heels came Sir James Craven, the choicest blackleg in England.

“How d’ye do, everybody? Whom are you and O’Sully rooking to-night, Volney? Oh, I see—Montagu. Beg pardon,” said Craven coolly.

Volney looked past the man with a wooden face that did not even recognize the fellow as a blot on the landscape. There was bad blood between the two men, destined to end in a tragedy. Sir James had been in the high graces of Frederick Prince of Wales until the younger and more polished Volney had ousted him. On the part of the coarse and burly Craven, there was enduring hatred toward his easy and elegant rival, who paid back his malice with a serene contempt. Noted duellist as Craven was, Sir Robert did not give a pinch of snuff for his rage.

The talk veered to the new fashion of spangled skirts, and Walpole vowed that Lady Coventry’s new dress was covered with spangles big as a shilling.

“’Twill be convenient for Coventry. She’ll be change for a guinea,” suggested Selwyn gloomily, his solemn face unlighted by the vestige of a smile.

So they jested, even when the play was deepest and while long-inherited family manors passed out of the hands of their owners. The recent French victory at *Fontenoy* still rankled in the heart of every Englishman. Within, the country seethed with an undercurrent of unrest and dissatisfaction. It was said that there were those who boasted quietly among themselves over their wine that the sun would yet rise some day on a Stuart England, that there were desperate men still willing to risk their lives in blind loyalty or in the gambler’s spirit for the race of Kings that had been discarded for its unworthiness. But the cut of his Mechlin lace ruffles was more to the Macaroni than his country’s future. He made his jest with the same aplomb at births and weddings and deaths.

Each fresh minute of play found me parted from some heirloom treasured by Montagus long since dust. In another half hour Montagu Grange was stripped of timber bare as the Row itself. Once, between games, I strolled uneasily down the room, and passing the long looking glass scarce recognized the haggard face that looked out at me. Still I played on, dogged and wretched, not knowing how to withdraw myself from these elegant dandies who were used to win or lose a fortune at a sitting with imperturbable face.

Lord Balmerino gave me a chance. He clapped a hand on my shoulder and said in his brusque kindly way

“Enough, lad! You have dropped eight thou’ to-night. Let the old family pictures still hang on the walls.”

I looked up, flushed and excited, yet still sane enough to know his advice was good. In the strong sallow

face of Major James Wolfe I read the same word. I knew the young soldier slightly and liked him with a great respect, though I could not know that this grave brilliant-eyed young man was later to become England's greatest soldier and hero. I had even pushed back my chair to rise from the table when the cool glibbing voice of Volney cut in.

"The eighth wonder of the world; Lord Balmerino in a new rôle—adviser to young men of fashion who incline to enjoy life. Are you by any chance thinking of becoming a ranting preacher, my Lord?"

"I bid him do as I say and not as I have done. To point my case I cite myself as an evil example of too deep play."

"Indeed, my Lord! Faith, I fancied you had in mind even deeper play for the future. A vastly interesting game, this of politics. You stake your head that you can turn a king and zounds! you play the deuce instead."

Balmerino looked at him blackly out of a face cut in frowning marble, but Volney leaned back carelessly in his chair and his insolent eyes never flickered.

As I say, I sat swithering 'twixt will and will-not.

"Better come, Kenneth! The luck is against you to-night," urged Balmerino, his face relaxing as he turned to me.

Major Wolfe said nothing, but his face too invited me.

"Yes, better go back to school and be birched," sneered Volney.

And at that I flung back into my seat with a curse, resolute to show him I was as good a man as he. My grim-faced guardian angel washed his hands of me with a Scotch proverb.

"He that will to Cupar maun to Cupar. The lad will have to gang his ain gate," I heard him tell Wolfe as they strolled away.

Still the luck held against me. Before I rose from the table two hours later I wrote out notes for a total so large that I knew the Grange must be mortgaged to the roof to satisfy it.

Volney lolled in his chair and hid a yawn behind tapering pink finger-nails. "'Slife, you had a cursed run of the ivories to-night, Kenn! When are you for your revenge? Shall we say to-morrow? Egad, I'm ready to sleep round the clock. Who'll take a seat in my coach? I'm for home."

I pushed into the night with a burning fever in my blood, and the waves of damp mist which enveloped London and beat upon me, gathering great drops of moisture on my cloak, did not suffice to cool the fire that burnt me up. The black dog Care hung heavy on my shoulders. I knew now what I had done. Fool that I was, I had mortgaged not only my own heritage but also the lives of my young brother Charles and my sister Cloe. Our father had died of apoplexy without a will, and a large part of his personal property had come to me with the entailed estate. The provision for the other two had been of the slightest, and now by this one wild night of play I had put it out of my power to take care of them. I had better clap a pistol to my head and be done with it.

Even while the thought was in my mind a hand out of the night fell on my shoulder from behind. I turned with a start, and found myself face to face with the Scotchman Balmerino.

"Whither away, Kenneth?" he asked.

I laughed bitterly. "What does it matter? A broken gambler—a ruined dicer— What is there left for him?"

The Scotch Lord linked an arm through mine. I had liefer have been alone, but I could scarce tell him so. He had been a friend of my father and had done his best to save me from my folly.

“There is much left. All is not lost. I have a word to say to your father’s son.”

“What use!” I cried rudely. “You would lock the stable after the horse is stolen.”

“Say rather that I would put you in the way of getting another horse,” he answered gravely.

So gravely that I looked at him twice before I answered:

“And I would be blithe to find a way, for split me! as things look now I must either pistol myself or take to the road and pistol others,” I told him gloomily.

“There are worse things than to lose one’s wealth——”

“I hear you say it, but begad! I do not know them,” I answered with a touch of anger at his calmness.

“——When the way is open to regain all one has lost and more,” he finished, unheeding my interruption.

“Well, this way you speak of,” I cried impatiently. “Where is it?”

He looked at me searchingly, as one who would know the inmost secrets of my soul. Under a guttering street light he stopped me and read my face line by line. I dare swear he found there a recklessness to match his own and perhaps some trace of the loyalty for which he looked. Presently he said, as the paving stones echoed to our tread:—

“You have your father’s face, Kenn. I mind him a lad just like you when we went out together in the ’15 for the King. Those were great days—great days. I wonder——”

His unfinished sentence tailed out into a meditative silence. His voice and eyes told of a mind reminiscent of the past and perhaps dreamful of the future. Yet awhile, and he snatched himself back into the present.

“Six hours ago I should not have proposed this desperate remedy for your ills. You had a stake in the country then, but now you are as poor in this world’s gear as Arthur Elphinstone himself. When one has naught but life at stake he will take greater risks. I have a man’s game to play. Are you for it, lad?”

I hesitated, a prophetic divination in my mind that I stood in a mist at the parting of life’s ways.

“You have thrown all to-night—and lost. I offer you another cut at Fortune’s cards. You might even turn a king.”

He said it with a quiet steadfastness in which I seemed to detect an undercurrent of strenuous meaning. I stopped, and in my turn looked long at him. What did he mean? Volney’s words came to my mind. I began to piece together rumours I had heard but never credited. I knew that even now men dreamed of a Stuart restoration. If Arthur Elphinstone of Balmerino were one of these I knew him to be of a reckless daring mad enough to attempt it.

“My Lord, you say I might turn a king,” I repeated slowly. “’Tis more like that I would play the knave. You speak in riddles. I am no guesser of them. You must be plain.”

Still he hung back from a direct answer. “You are dull to-night, Kenn. I have known you more gleg at the uptake, but if you will call on me to-morrow night I shall make all plain to you.”

We were arrived at the door of his lodgings, a mean house in a shabby neighbourhood, for my Lord was as poor as a church mouse despite his title. I left him here, and the last words I called over my shoulder to him were,

“Remember, I promise nothing.”

It may be surmised that as I turned my steps back toward my rooms in Arlington Street I found much matter for thought. I cursed the folly that had led me to offer myself a dupe to these hawks of the gaming table. I raged in a stress of heady passion against that fair false friend Sir Robert Volney. And always in the end my mind jumped back to dally with Balmerino’s temptation to recoup my fallen fortunes with one desperate throw.

“Fraoch! Dh ’aindeoin co theireadh e!” (The Heath! Gainsay who dare!)

The slogan echoed and reechoed through the silent streets, and snatched me in an instant out of the abstraction into which I had fallen. Hard upon the cry there came to me the sound of steel ringing upon steel. I legged it through the empty road, flung myself round a corner, and came plump upon the combatants. The defendant was a lusty young fellow apparently about my own age, of extraordinary agility and no mean skill with the sword. He was giving a good account of himself against the four assailants who hemmed him against the wall, his point flashing here and there with swift irregularity to daunt their valiancy. At the moment when I appeared to create a diversion one of the four had flung himself down and forward to cling about the knees of their victim with intent to knife him at close quarters. The young man dared not shorten his sword length to meet this new danger. He tried to shake off the man, caught at his white throat and attempted to force him back, what time his sword still opposed the rest of the villains.

Then I played my small part in the entertainment. One of the rascals screamed out an oath at sight of me and turned to run. I pinked him in the shoulder, and at the same time the young swordsman fleshed another of them. The man with the knife scrambled to his feet, a ludicrous picture of ghastly terror. To make short, in another minute there was nothing to be seen of the cutpurses but flying feet scampering through the night.

The young gentleman turned to me with a bow that was never invented out of France. I saw now that he was something older than myself, tall, well-made, and with a fine stride to him that set off the easy grace of his splendid shoulders. His light steady blue eyes and his dark ruddy hair proclaimed him the Highlander. His face was not what would be called handsome: the chin was over-square and a white scar zigzagged across his cheek, but I liked the look of him none the less for that. His frank manly countenance wore the self-reliance of one who has lived among the hills and slept among the heather under countless stars. For dress he wore the English costume with the extra splash of colour that betokened the vanity of his race. “’Fore God, sir, you came none too soon,” he cried in his impetuous Gaelic way. “This riff-raff of your London town had knifed me in another gliff. I will be thinking that it would have gone ill with me but for your opportune arrival. I am much beholden to you, and if ever I can pay the debt do not fail to call on Don—er—James Brown.”

At the last words he fell to earth most precipitately, all the fervent ring dropping out of his voice. Now James Brown is a common name enough, but he happened to be the first of the name I had ever heard crying a Highland slogan in the streets of London, and I looked at him with something more than curiosity. I am a Scotchman myself on the mother’s side, so that I did not need to have a name put to his nationality.

There was the touch of a smile on my face when I asked him if he were hurt. He gave me the benefit of his full seventy three inches and told me no, that he would think shame of himself if he could not keep his head with his hands from a streetful of such scum. And might he know the name of the unknown friend who had come running out of the night to lend him an arm?

“Kenneth Montagu,” I told him, laughing at his enthusiasm.

“Well then, Mr. Kenneth Montagu, it’s the good friend you’ve been to me this night, and I’ll not be forgetting it.”

“When I find myself attacked by footpads I’ll just look up Mr. James Brown,” I told him dryly with intent to plague.

He took the name sourly, no doubt in an itching to blurt out that he was a Mac-something or other. To a Gaelic gentleman like him the Sassenach name he used for a convenience was gall and wormwood.

We walked down the street together, and where our ways parted near Arlington Street he gave me his hand.

“The lucky man am I at meeting you, Mr. Montagu, while we were having the bit splore down the street. I was just weanying for a lad handy with his blade, and the one I would be choosing out of all England came hot-foot round the corner.”

I made nothing of what I had done, but yet his Highland friendliness and flatteries were balm to a sick heart and we parted at my door with a great deal of good-will.

[\[1\]](#)

The author takes an early opportunity to express his obligations to the letters of Horace Walpole who was himself so infinitely indebted to the conversation of his cronies.

CHAPTER II

A CRY IN THE NIGHT

“Past ten o’clock, and a clear starry night!” the watch was bawling as I set out from my rooms to keep my appointment with Lord Balmerino. I had little doubt that a Stuart restoration was the cause for which he was recruiting, and all day I had balanced in my mind the pros and cons of such an attempt. I will never deny that the exiled race held for me a strong fascination. The Stuarts may have been weak, headstrong Kings in their prosperity, but they had the royal virtue of drawing men to them in their misfortune. They were never so well loved, nor so worthy of it, as when they lived in exile at St. Germain. Besides, though I had never mixed with politics, I was a Jacobite by inheritance. My father had fought for a restoration, and my uncle had died for it.

There were no fast bound ties to hold me back. Loyalty to the Hanoverians had no weight with me. I was a broken man, and save for my head could lose nothing by the venture. The danger of the enterprise was a merit in my eyes, for I was in the mood when a man will risk his all on an impulse.

And yet I hung back. After all an Englishman, be he never so desperate, does not fling away the scabbard without counting the cost. Young as I was I grued at the thought of the many lives that would be cut off ere their time, and in my heart I distrusted the Stuarts and doubted whether the game were worth the candle.

I walked slowly, for I was not yet due at the lodgings of Balmerino for an hour, and as I stood hesitating at a street corner a chaise sheered past me at a gallop. Through the coach window by the shine of the moon I caught one fleeting glimpse of a white frightened girl-face, and over the mouth was clapped a rough hand to stifle any cry she might give. I am no Don Quixote, but there never was a Montagu who waited for the cool second thought to crowd out the strong impulse of the moment. I made a dash at the step, missed my footing, and rolled over into the mud. When I got to my feet again the coach had stopped at the far end of the street. Two men were getting out of the carriage holding between them a slight struggling figure. For one instant the clear shrill cry of a woman was lifted into the night, then it was cut short abruptly by the clutch of a hand at the throat.

I scudded toward them, lugging at my sword as I ran, but while I was yet fifty yards away the door of the house opened and closed behind them. An instant, and the door reopened to let out one of the men, who slammed it behind him and entered the chaise. The postilion whipped up his horses and drove off. The door yielded nothing to my hand. Evidently it was locked and bolted. I cried out to open, and beat wildly upon the door with the hilt of my sword. Indeed, I quite lost my head, threatening, storming, and abusing. I might as well have called upon the marble busts at the Abbey to come forth, for inside there was the silence of the dead. Presently lights began to glimmer in windows along the dark street, and nightcapped heads were thrust out to learn what was ado. I called on them to join me in a rescue, but I found them not at all keen for the adventure. They took me for a drunken Mohawk or some madman escaped from custody.

“Here come the watch to take him away,” I heard one call across the street to another.

I began to realize that an attempt to force an entrance was futile. It would only end in an altercation with

the approaching watch. Staid citizens were already pointing me out to them as a cause of the disturbance. For the moment I elected discretion and fled incontinent down the street from the guard.

But I was back before ten minutes were up, lurking in the shadows of opposite doorways, examining the house from front and rear, searching for some means of ingress to this mysterious dwelling. I do not know why the thing stuck in my mind. Perhaps some appealing quality of youth in the face and voice stirred in me the instinct for the championship of dames that is to be found in every man. At any rate I was grimly resolved not to depart without an explanation of the strange affair.

What no skill of mine could accomplish chance did for me. While I was inviting a crick in my neck from staring up at the row of unlighted windows above me, a man came out of the front door and stood looking up and down the street. Presently he spied me and beckoned. I was all dishevelled and one stain of mud from head to foot.

“D’ ye want to earn a shilling, fellow?” he called.

I grumbled that I was out of work and money. Was it likely I would refuse such a chance? And what was it he would have me do?

He led the way through the big, dimly-lighted hall to an up-stairs room near the back of the house. Two heavy boxes were lying there, packed and corded, to be taken down-stairs. I tossed aside my cloak and stooped to help him. He straightened with a jerk. I had been standing in the shadow with my soiled cloak wrapped about me, but now I stood revealed in silken hose, satin breeches, and laced doublet. If that were not enough to proclaim my rank a rapier dangled by my side.

“Rot me, you’re a gentleman,” he cried.

I affected to carry off my shame with bluster.

“What if I am!” I cried fiercely. “May not a gentleman be hungry, man? I am a ruined dicer, as poor as a church mouse. Do you grudge me my shilling?”

He shrugged his shoulders. Doubtless he had seen more than one broken gentleman cover poverty with a brave front of fine lawn and gilded splendour of array.

“All one to me, your Royal ’Ighness. Take ’old ’ere,” he said facetiously.

We carried the boxes into the hall. When we had finished I stood mopping my face with a handkerchief, but my eyes were glued to the label tacked on one of the boxes.

John Armitage, The Oaks, Epsom, Surrey.

“Wot yer waitin’ for?” asked the fellow sharply.

“The shilling,” I told him.

I left when he gave it me, and as I reached the door he bawled to be sure to shut it tight. An idea jumped to my mind on the instant, and though I slammed the door I took care to have my foot an inch or two within the portal. Next moment I was walking noisily down the steps and along the pavement.

Three minutes later I tiptoed back up the steps and tried the door. I opened it slowly and without noise till I could thrust in my head. The fellow was nowhere to be seen in the hall. I whipped in, and closed the door after me. Every board seemed to creak as I trod gingerly toward the stairway. In the empty house the least noise echoed greatly. The polished stairs cried out hollowly my presence. I was half way up when I came to a full stop. Some one was coming down round the bend of the stairway. Softly I slid down the balustrade and crouched behind the post at the bottom. The man—it was my friend of the shilling—passed

within a foot of me, his hand almost brushing the hair of my head, and crossed the hall to a room opposite. Again I went up the stairs, still cautiously, but with a confidence born of the knowledge of his whereabouts.

The house was large, and I might have wandered long without guessing where lay the room I wanted had it not been for a slight sound that came to me—the low, soft sobbing of a woman. I groped my way along the dark passage, turned to the left, and presently came to the door from behind which issued the sound. The door was locked on the outside, and the key was in the lock. I knocked, and at once silence fell. To my second knock I got no answer. Then I turned the key and entered.

A girl was sitting at a table with her back to me, her averted head leaning wearily on her hand. Dejection spoke in every line of her figure. She did not even turn at my entrance, thinking me no doubt to be her guard. I stood waiting awkwardly, scarce knowing what to say.

“Madam,” I began, “may I— Is there——?” So far I got, then I came to an embarrassed pause, for I might as well have talked to the dead for all the answer I got. She did not honour me with the faintest sign of attention. I hemmed and hawed and bowed to her back with a growing confusion.

At last she asked over her shoulder in a strained, even voice,

“What is it you’re wanting now? You said I was to be left by my lane to-night.”

I murmured like a gawk that I was at her service, and presently as I shifted from one foot to the other she turned slowly. Her face was a dumb cry for help, though it was a proud face too—one not lacking in fire and courage. I have seen fairer faces, but never one more to my liking. It was her eyes that held me. The blue of her own Highland lochs, with all their changing and indescribably pathetic beauty, lurked deeply in them. Unconsciously they appealed to me, and the world was not wide enough to keep me from her when they called. Faith, my secret is out already, and I had resolved that it should keep till near the end of my story!

I had dropped my muddy cloak before I entered, and as she looked at me a change came over her. Despair gave way to a startled surprise. Her eyes dilated.

“Who are you, sir? And—what are you doing here?” she demanded.

I think some fear or presage of evil was knocking at her heart, for though she fronted me very steadily her eyes were full of alarm. What should a man of rank be doing in her room on the night she had been abducted from her lodgings unless his purpose were evil? She wore a long cloak stretching to the ground, and from under it slippered feet peeped out. The cloak was of the latest mode, very wide and open at the neck and shoulders, and beneath the mantle I caught more than a glimpse of the laced white nightrail and the fine sloping neck. ’Twas plain that her abductors had given her only time to fling the wrap about her before they snatched her from her bedchamber. Some wild instinct of defense stirred within her, and with one hand she clutched the cloak tightly to her throat. My heart went out to the child with a great rush of pity. The mad follies of my London life slipped from me like the muddy garment outside, and I swore by all I held most dear not to see her wronged.

“Madam,” I said, “for all the world I would not harm you. I have come to offer you my sword as a defense against those who would injure you. My name is Montagu, and I know none of the name that are liars,” I cried.

“Are you the gentleman that was for stopping the carriage as we came?” she asked.

“I am that same unlucky gentleman that was sent speldering in the glaur.^[2] I won an entrance to the house by a trick, and I am here at your service,” I said, throwing in my tag of Scotch to reassure her.

“You will be English, but you speak the kindly Scots,” she cried.

“My mother was from the Highlands,” I told her.

“What! You have the Highland blood in you? Oh then, it is the good heart you will have too. Will you ever have been on the braes of Raasay?”

I told her no; that I had always lived in England, though my mother was a Campbell. Her joy was the least thing in the world daunted, and in her voice there was a dash of starch.

“Oh! A Campbell!”

I smiled. 'Twas plain her clan was no friend to the sons of *Diarmaid*.

"My father was out in the '15, and when he wass a wounded fugitive with the Campbell bloodhounds on his trail Mary Campbell hid him till the chase was past. Then she guided him across the mountains and put him in the way of reaching the Macdonald country. My father married her after the amnesty," I explained.

The approving light flashed back into her eyes.

"At all events then I am not doubting she wass a good lassie, Campbell or no Campbell; and I am liking it that your father went back and married her."

"But we are wasting time," I urged. "What can I do for you? Where do you live? To whom shall I take you?"

She fell to earth at once. "My grief! I do not know. Malcolm has gone to France. He left me with Hamish Gorm in lodgings, but they will not be safe since——" She stopped, and at the memory of what had happened there the wine crept into her cheeks.

"And who is Malcolm?" I asked gently.

"My brother. He iss an agent for King James in London, and he brought me with him. But he was called away, and he left me with the gillie. To-night they broke into my room while Hamish was away, weary fa' the day! And now where shall I go?"

"My sister is a girl about your age. Cloe would be delighted to welcome you. I am sure you would like each other."

"You are the good friend to a poor lass that will never be forgetting, and I will be blithe to burden the hospitality of your sister till my brother returns."

The sharp tread of footsteps on the stairs reached us. A man was coming up, and he was singing languidly a love ditty.

"What is love? 'Tis not hereafter,
Present mirth has present laughter,
What's to come is still unsure;
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me sweet and twenty.
Youth's a stuff will not endure."

Something in the voice struck a familiar chord in my memory, but I could not put a name to its owner. The girl looked at me with eyes grown suddenly horror-stricken. I noticed that her face had taken on the hue of snow.

"We are too late," she cried softly.

We heard a key fumbling in the lock, and then the door opened—to let in Volney. His hat was sweeping to the floor in a bow when he saw me. He stopped and looked at me in surprise, his lips framing themselves for a whistle. I could see the starch run through and take a grip of him. For just a gliff he stood puzzled and angry. Then he came in wearing his ready dare-devil smile and sat down easily on the bed.

"Hope I'm not interrupting, Montagu," he said jauntily. "I dare say though that's past hoping for. You'll have to pardon my cursedly malapropos appearance. Faith, my only excuse is that I did not know the lady was entertaining other visitors this evening."

He looked at her with careless insolence out of his beautiful dark eyes, and for that moment I hated him with the hate a man will go to hell to satisfy.

“You will spare this lady your insults,” I told him in a low voice. “At least so far as you can. Your presence itself is an insult.”

“Egad, and that’s where the wind sits, eh? Well, well, ’tis the manner of the world. When the cat’s away!”

A flame of fire ran through me. I took a step toward him, hand on sword hilt. With a sweep of his jewelled hand he waved me back.

“Fie, fie, Kenn! In a lady’s presence?”

Volney smiled at the girl in mock gallantry and my eyes followed his. I never saw a greater change. She was transformed. Her lithe young figure stood out tall and strong, every line of weariness gone. Hate, loathing, scorn, one might read plainly there, but no trace of fear or despair. She might have been a lioness defending her young. Her splendour of dark auburn hair, escaped and fallen free to her waist, fascinated me with the luxuriance of its disorder. Volney’s lazy admiration quickened to a deeper interest. For an instant his breath came faster. His face lighted with the joy of the huntsman after worthy game. But almost immediately he recovered his aplomb. Turning to me, he asked with his odd light smile,

“Staying long, may I ask?”

My passion was gone. I was possessed by a slow fire as steady and as enduring as a burning peat.

“I have not quite made up my mind how long to stay,” I answered coldly. “When I leave the lady goes with me, but I haven’t decided yet what to do with you.”

He began to laugh. “You grow amusing. ’Slife, you are not all country boor after all! May it please you, what are the alternatives regarding my humble self?” he drawled, leaning back with an elbow on the pillow.

“Well, I might kill you.”

“Yes, you might. And—er— What would I be doing?” he asked negligently.

“Or, since there is a lady present, I might leave you till another time.”

His handsome, cynical face, with its curious shifting lights and shadows, looked up at me for once suffused with genuine amusement.

“Stap me, you’d make a fortune as a play actor. Garrick is a tyro beside you. Some one was telling me that your financial affairs had been going wrong. An it comes to the worst, take my advice and out-Garrick Garrick.”

“You are very good. Your interest in my affairs charms me, Sir Robert. ’Tis true they are not promising. A friend duped me. He held the Montagu estates higher than honour.”

He appeared to reflect. “Friend? Don’t think I’m acquainted with any of the kind, unless a friend is one who eats your dinners, drinks your wines, rides your horses, and”—with a swift sidelong look at the girl—“makes love to your charming adored.”

Into the girl’s face the colour flared, but she looked at him with a contempt so steady that any man but Volney must have winced.

“Friendship!” she cried with infinite disdain. “What can such as you know of it? You are false as Judas. Did you not begowk my honest brother with fine words till he and I believed you one of God’s noblemen,

and when his back was fairly turned——?”

“I had the best excuse in London for my madness, Aileen,” he said with the wistful little laugh that had gone straight to many a woman’s heart.

Her eye flashed and her bosom heaved. The pure girl-heart read him like an open book.

“And are you thinking me so mean a thing as still to care for your honeyed words? Believe me, there is no viper on the braes of Raasay more detestable to me than you.”

I looked to see him show anger, but he nursed his silk-clad ankle with the same insolent languor. He might have been a priest after the confessional for all the expression his face wore.

“I like you angry, Aileen. Faith, ’tis worth being the object of your rage to see you stamp that pretty foot and clench those little hands I love to kiss. But Ecod! Montagu, the hour grows late. The lady will lose her beauty sleep. Shall you and I go down-stairs and arrange for a conveyance?”

He bowed low and kissed his fingers to the girl. Then he led the way out of the room, fine and gallant and debonair, a villain every inch of him.

“Will you be leaving me?” the girl cried with parted lips.

“Not for long,” I told her. “Do not fear. I shall have you out of here in a jiff,” and with that I followed at his heels.

Sir Robert Volney led the way down the corridor to a small room in the west wing, where flaring, half-burnt candles guttering in their sconces drove back the darkness. He leaned against the mantel and looked long at me out of half-closed eyes.

“May I ask to what is due the honour of your presence to-night?” he drawled at last.

“Certainly.”

“Well?”

“I have said you may ask,” I fleered rudely. “But for me— Gad’s life! I am not in the witness box.”

He took his snuff mull from his waistcoat pocket and offered it me, then took a pinch and brushed from his satin coat imaginary grains with prodigious care.

“You are perhaps not aware that I have the right to ask. It chances that this is my house.”

“Indeed! And the lady we have just left——?”

“——Is, pardon me, none of your concern.”

“Ah! I’m not so sure of that.”

“Faith then, you’ll do well to make sure.”

“And——er——Miss Antoinette Westerleigh?”

“Quite another matter! You’re out of court again, Mr. Montagu.”

“Egad, I enter an exception. The lady we have just left is of another mind in the affair. She is the court of last resort, and, I believe, not complaisant to your suit.”

“She will change her mind,” he said coolly.

“I trust so renowned a gallant as Sir Robert would not use force.”

“Lard, no! She is a woman and therefore to be won. But I would advise you to dismiss the lady from your mind. ’Ware women, Mr. Montagu! You will sleep easier.”

“In faith, a curious coincidence! I was about to tender you the same advice, Sir Robert,” I told him lightly.

“You will forget the existence of such a lady if you are wise?”

“Wisdom comes with age. I am for none of it.”

“Yet you will do well to remember your business and forget mine.”

“I have no business of my own, Sir Robert. Last night you generously lifted all sordid business cares from my mind, and now I am quite free to attend those of my neighbours.”

He shrugged his shoulders in the French way. “Very well. A wilful man! You’ve had your warning, and—I am not a man to be thwarted.”

“I might answer that I am not a man to be frightened.”

“You’ll not be the first that has answered that. The others have ‘Hic Jacet’ engraved on their door plates. Well, it’s an unsatisfactory world at best, and Lard! they’re well quit of it. Still, you’re young.”

“And have yet to learn discretion.”

“That’s a pity too,” he retorted lightly. “The door is waiting for you. Better take it, Mr. Montagu.”

“With the lady?”

“I fear the lady is tired. Besides, man, think of her reputation. Zounds! Can she gad about the city at night alone with so gay a spark as you? ’Tis a censorious world, and tongues will clack. No, no! I will save you from any chance of such a scandal, Mr. Montagu.”

“Faith, one good turn deserves another. I’ll stay here to save your reputation, Sir Robert.”

“I fear that mine is fly-blown already and something the worse for wear. It can take care of itself.”

“Yet I’ll stay.”

“Gad’s life! Stay then.”

Volney had been standing just within the door, and at the word he stepped out and flung it to. I sprang forward, but before I reached it the click sounded. I was a prisoner, caught like a fly in a spider’s web, and much it helped me to beat on the iron-studded door till my hand bled, to call on him to come in and fight it out like a man, to storm up and down the room in a stress of passion.

Presently my rage abated, and I took stock of my surroundings. The windows were barred with irons set in stone sockets by masonry. I set my knee against the window frame and tugged at them till I was moist with perspiration. As well I might have pulled at the pillars of St. Paul’s. I tried my small sword as a lever, but it snapped in my hand. Again I examined the bars. There was no way but to pick them from their sockets by making a groove in the masonry. With the point of my sword I chipped industriously at the cement. At the end of ten minutes I had made perceptible progress. Yet it took me another hour of labour to accomplish my task. I undid the blind fastenings, clambered out, and lowered myself foot by foot to the ground by clinging to the ivy that grew thick along the wall. The vine gave to my hand, and the last three yards I took in a rush, but I picked myself up none the worse save for a torn face and bruised hands.

The first fall was Volney’s, and I grudged it him; but as I took my way to Balmerino’s lodgings my heart was far from heavy. The girl was safe for the present. I knew Volney well enough for that. That his plan was to take her to The Oaks and in seclusion lay a long siege to the heart of the girl, I could have sworn.

But from London to Epsom is a far cry, and between them much might happen through chance and fate and —Kenneth Montagu.

[\[2\]](#)

Speldering in the glaur—sprawling in the mud.

CHAPTER III

DEOCH SLAINT AN RIGH!

“You’re late, Kenn,” was Balmerino’s greeting to me.

“Faith, my Lord, I’m earlier than I might have been. I found it hard to part from a dear friend who was loathe to let me out of his sight,” I laughed.

The Scotchman buckled on his sword and disappeared into the next room. When he returned a pair of huge cavalry pistols peeped from under his cloak.

“Going to the wars, my Lord?” I quizzed gaily.

“Perhaps. Will you join me?”

“Maybe yes and maybe no. Is the cause good?”

“The best in the world.”

“And the chances of success?”

“Fortune beckons with both hands.”

“Hm! Has she by any chance a halter in her hands for Kenn Montagu and an axe for Balmerino since he is a peer?”

“Better the sharp edge of an axe than the dull edge of hunger for those we love,” he answered with a touch of bitterness.

His rooms supplied the sermon to his text. Gaunt poverty stared at me on every hand. The floor was bare and the two ragged chairs were rickety. I knew now why the white-haired peer was so keen to try a hazard of new fortunes for the sake of the wife in the North.

“Where may you be taking me?” I asked presently, as we hurried through Piccadilly.

“If you ask no questions——” he began dryly.

“——You’ll tell me no lies. Very good. Odd’s my life, I’m not caring! Any direction is good enough for me—unless it leads to Tyburn. But I warn you that I hold myself unpledged.”

“I shall remember.”

I was in the gayest spirits imaginable. The task I had set myself of thwarting Volney and the present uncertainty of my position had combined to lend a new zest to life. I felt the wine of youth bubble in my veins, and I was ready for whatever fortune had in store.

Shortly we arrived at one of those streets of unimpeachable respectability that may be duplicated a hundred times in London. Its characteristics are monotony and dull mediocrity; a dead sameness makes all the houses appear alike. Before one of these we stopped.

Lord Balmerino knocked, A man came to the door and thrust out a head suspiciously. There was a short whispered colloquy between him and the Scotch lord, after which he beckoned me to enter. For an instant I hung back.

“What are you afraid of, man?” asked Balmerino roughly.

I answered to the spur and pressed forward at once. He led the way along a dark passage and down a flight of stone steps into a cellar fitted up as a drinking room. There was another low-toned consultation before we were admitted. I surmised that Balmerino stood sponsor for me, and though I was a little disturbed at my equivocal position, yet I was strangely glad to be where I was. For here was a promise of adventure to stimulate a jaded appetite. I assured myself that at least I should not suffer dulness.

There were in the room a scant dozen of men, and as I ran them over with my eye the best I could say for their quality in life was that they had not troubled the tailor of late. Most of them were threadbare at elbow and would have looked the better of a good dinner. There were two or three exceptions, but for the most part these broken gentlemen bore the marks of recklessness and dissipation. Two I knew: the O’Sullivan that had assisted at the plucking of a certain pigeon on the previous night, and Mr. James Brown, alias Mac-something or other, of the supple sword and the Highland slogan.

Along with another Irishman named Anthony Creagh the fellow O’Sullivan rushed up to my Lord, eyes snapping with excitement. He gave me a nod and a “How d’ye do, Montagu? Didn’t know you were of the honest party,” then broke out with—

“Great news, Balmerino! The French fleet has sailed with transports for fifteen thousand men. I have advices direct from the Prince. Marshal Saxe commands, and the Prince himself is with them. London will be ours within the week. Sure the good day is coming at last. The King—God bless him!—will have his own again; and a certain Dutch beer tub that we know of will go scuttling back to his beloved Hanover, glory be the day!”

Balmerino’s eyes flashed.

“They have sailed then at last. I have been expecting it a week. If they once reach the Thames there is no force in England that can stop them,” he said quietly.

“Surely the small fleet of Norris will prove no barrier?” asked another dubiously.

“Poof! They weel eat heem up jus’ like one leetle mouse, my frien’,” boasted a rat-faced Frenchman with a snap of his fingers. “Haf they not two sheeps to his one?”

“Egad, I hope they don’t eat the mutton then and let Norris go,” laughed Creagh. He was a devil-may-care Irishman, brimful of the virtues and the vices of his race.

I had stumbled into a hornet’s nest with a vengeance. They were mad as March hares, most of them. For five minutes I sat amazed, listening to the wildest talk it had ever been my lot to hear. The Guelphs would be driven out. The good old days would be restored; there would be no more whiggery and Walpolism; with much more of the same kind of talk. There was drinking of wine and pledging of toasts to the King across the water, and all the while I sat by the side of Balmerino with a face like whey. For I was simmering with anger. I foresaw the moment when discovery was inevitable, and in those few minutes while I hung back in the shadow and wished myself a thousand miles away hard things were thought of Arthur Elphinstone Lord Balmerino. He had hoped to fling me out of my depths and sweep me away with the current, but I resolved to show him another ending to it.

Presently Mr. James Brown came up and offered me a frank hand of welcome. Balmerino introduced him as Captain Donald Roy Macdonald. I let my countenance express surprise.

“Surely you are mistaken, my Lord. This gentleman and I have met before, and I think his name is Brown.”

Macdonald laughed a little sheepishly. “The air of London is not just exactly healthy for Highland Jacobite gentlemen at present. I wouldna wonder but one might catch the scarlet fever gin he werena carefu’, so I just took a change of names for a bit while.”

“You did not disguise the Highland slogan you flung out last night,” I laughed.

“Did I cry it?” he asked. “It would be just from habit then. I didna ken that I opened my mouth.” Then he turned to my affairs. “And I suppose you will be for striking a blow for the cause like the rest of us. Well then, the sooner the better. I am fair wearying for a certain day that is near at hand.”

With which he began to hum “The King shall have his own again.”

I flushed, and boggled at the “No!” that stuck in my throat. Creagh, standing near, slewed round his head at the word.

“Eh, what’s that? Say that again, Montagu!”

I took the bull by the horns and answered bluntly, “There has been a mistake made. George is a good enough king for me.”

I saw Macdonald stiffen, and angry amazement leap to the eyes of the two Irishmen.

“’Sblood! What the devil! Why are you here then?” cried Creagh.

His words, and the excitement in his raised voice, rang the bell for a hush over the noisy room. Men dropped their talk and turned to us. A score of fierce suspicious eyes burnt into me. My heart thumped against my ribs like a thing alive, but I answered—steadily and quietly enough, I dare say—“You will have to ask Lord Balmerino that. I did not know where he was bringing me.”

“Damnation!” cried one Leath. “What cock and bull tale is this? Not know where he was bringing you! ’Slife, I do not like it!”

I sat on the table negligently dangling one foot in air. For that matter I didn’t like it myself, but I was not going to tell him so. Brushing a speck of mud from my coat I answered carelessly,

“Like it or mislike it, devil a bit I care!”

“Ha, ha! I theenk you will find a leetle reason for caring,” said the Frenchman ominously.

“Stab me, if I understand,” cried Creagh. “Balmerino did not kidnap you here, did he? Devil take me if it’s at all clear to me!”

O’Sullivan pushed to the front with an evil laugh.

“’T is clear enough to me,” he said bluntly. “It’s the old story of one too many trusted. He hears our plans and then the smug-faced villain peaches. Next week he sees us all scragged at Tyburn. But he’s made a little mistake this time, sink me! He won’t live to see the Chevalier O’Sullivan walk off the cart. If you’ll give me leave, I’ll put a name to the gentleman. He’s what they call a spy, and stap my vitals! he doesn’t leave this room alive.”

At his words a fierce cry leaped from tense throats. A circle of white furious faces girdled me about. Rapiers hung balanced at my throat and death looked itchingly at me from many an eye.

As for me, I lazed against the table with a strange odd contraction of the heart, a sudden standing still and then a fierce pounding of the blood. Yet I was quite master of myself. Indeed I smiled at them, carelessly, as one that deprecated so much ado about nothing. And while I smiled, the wonder was passing through

my mind whether the smile would still be there after they had carved the life out of me. I looked death in the face, and I found myself copying unconsciously the smirking manners of the Macaronis. Faith, 't was a leaf from Volney's life I was rehearsing for them.

This but while one might blink an eye, then Lord Balmerino interrupted. "God's my life! Here's a feery-farry about nothing. Put up your toasting fork, De Vallery! The lad will not bite."

"Warranted to be of gentle manners," I murmured, brushing again at the Mechlin lace of my coat.

"Gentlemen are requested not to tease the animals," laughed Creagh. He was as full of heat as a pepper-castor, but he had the redeeming humour of his race.

Macdonald beat down the swords. "Are you a' daft, gentlemen? The lad came with Balmerino. He is no spy. Put up, put up, Chevalier! Don't glower at me like that, man! Hap-weel rap-weel, the lad shall have his chance to explain. I will see no man's cattle hurried."

"Peste! Let him explain then, and not summer and winter over the story," retorted O'Sullivan sourly.

Lord Balmerino slipped an arm through mine. "If you are quite through with your play acting, gentlemen, we will back to reason and common sense again. Mr. Montagu may not be precisely a pronounced Jack, but then he doesn't give a pinch of snuff for the Whigs either. I think we shall find him open to argument."

"He'd better be—if he knows what's good for him," growled O'Sullivan.

At once I grew obstinate. "I do not take my politics under compulsion, Mr. O'Sullivan," I flung out.

"Then you shouldn't have come here. You've drawn the wine, and by God! you shall drink it."

"Shall I? We'll see."

"No, no, Kenn! I promise you there shall be no compulsion," cried the old Lord. Then to O'Sullivan in a stern whisper, "Let be, you blundering Irish man! You're setting him against us."

Balmerino was right. Every moment I grew colder and stiffer. If they wanted me for a recruit they were going about it the wrong way. I would not be frightened into joining them.

"Like the rest of us y' are a ruined man. Come, better your fortune. Duty and pleasure jump together. James Montagu's son is not afraid to take a chance," urged the Scotch Lord.

Donald Roy's eyes had fastened on me from the first like the grip-of steel. He had neither moved nor spoken, but I knew that he was weighing me in the balance.

"I suppose you will not be exactly in love with the wamey Dutchmen, Mr. Montagu?" he asked now.

I smiled. "If you put it that way I don't care one jack straw for the whole clamjamfry of them."

"I was thinking so. They are a different race from the Stuarts."

"They are indeed," I acquiesced dryly. Then the devil of mischief stirred in me to plague him. "There's all the difference of bad and a vast deal worse between them. It's a matter of comparisons," I concluded easily.

"You are pleased to be facetious," returned O'Sullivan sourly. "But I would ask you to remember that you are not yet out of the woods, Mr. Montagu. My Lord seems satisfied, but here are some more of us waiting a plain answer to this riddle."

"And what may the riddle be?" I asked.

"Just this. What are you doing here?"

“Faith, that’s easy answered,” I told him jauntily. “I’m here by invitation of Lord Balmerino, and it seems I’m not overwelcome.”

Elphinstone interrupted impatiently.

“Gentlemen, we’re at cross purposes. You’re trying to drive Mr. Montagu, and I’m all for leading him. I warn you he’s not to be driven. Let us talk it over reasonably.”

“Very well,” returned O’Sullivan sulkily. “Talk as long as you please, but he doesn’t get out of this room till I’m satisfied.”

“We are engaged on a glorious enterprise to restore to these islands their ancient line of sovereigns. You say you do not care for the Hanoverians. Why not then strike a blow for the right cause?” asked Leath.

“Right and wrong are not to be divided by so clean a cut,” I told him. “I am no believer in the divine inheritance of kings. In the last analysis the people shall be the judge.”

“Of course; and we are going to put it to the test.”

“You want to set the clock back sixty years. It will not do.”

“We think it will. We are resolved at least to try,” said Balmerino.

I shrugged my shoulders. “The times are against you. The Stuarts have dropped out of the race. The mill cannot grind with the water that is past.”

“And if the water be not past?” asked Leath fiercely.

“Mar found it so in the ’15, and many honest gentlemen paid for his mistake with their heads. My father’s brother for one.”

“Mar bungled it from start to finish. He had the game in his own hands and dribbled away his chances like a coward and a fool.”

“Perhaps, but even so, much water has passed under London Bridge since then. It is sixty years since the Stuarts were driven out. Two generations have slept on it.”

“Then the third generation of sleepers shall be wakened. The stream is coming down in spate,” said Balmerino.

“I hear you say it,” I answered dryly.

“And you shall live to see us do it, Mr. Montagu. The heather’s in a blaze already. The fiery cross will be speeding from Badenoch to the Braes of Balwhidder. The clans will all rise whatever,” cried Donald Roy.

“I’m not so sure about Mr. Montagu living to see it. My friends O’Sullivan and De Vallery seem to think not,” said Creagh, giving me his odd smile. “Now, I’ll wager a crown that——”

“Whose crown did you say?” I asked politely, handing him back his smile.

“The government cannot stand out against us,” argued Balmerino. “The Duke of Newcastle is almost an imbecile. The Dutch usurper himself is over in Hanover courting a new mistress. His troops are all engaged in foreign war. There are not ten thousand soldiers on the island. At this very moment the King of France is sending fifteen thousand across in transports. He will have no difficulty in landing them and London cannot hold out.”

“Faith, he might get his army here. I’m not denying that. But I’ll promise him trouble in getting it away

again.”

“The Highlands are ready to fling away the scabbard for King James III,” said Donald Roy simply.

“It is in my mind that you have done that more than once before and that because of it misguided heads louped from sturdy shoulders,” I answered.

“Wales too is full of loyal gentlemen. What can the Hanoverians do if they march across the border to join the Highlanders rolling down from the North and Marshal Saxe with his French army?”

“My imagination halts,” I answered dryly. “You will be telling me next that England is wearying for a change back to the race of Kings she has twice driven out.”

“I do say it,” cried Leath. “Bolingbroke is already negotiating with the royal family. Newcastle is a broken reed. Hervey will not stand out. Walpole is a dying man. In whom can the Dutchman trust? The nation is tired of them, their mistresses and their German brood.”

“When we had them we found these same Stuarts a dangerous and troublesome race. We could not in any manner get along with them. We drove them out, and then nothing would satisfy us but we must have them back again. Well, they had their second chance, and we found them worse than before. They had not learnt the lesson of the age. They——”

“Split me, y’are not here to lecture us, Mr. Montagu,” cried Leath with angry eye. “Damme, we don’t care a rap for your opinions, but you have heard too much. To be short, the question is, will you join us or won’t you?”

“To be short then, Mr. Leath, not on compulsion.”

“There’s no compulsion about it, Kenn. If you join it is of your own free will,” said Balmerino.

“I think not. Mr. Montagu has no option in the matter,” cried O’Sullivan. “He forfeited his right to decide for himself when he blundered in and heard our plans. Willy nilly, he must join us!”

“And if I don’t?”

His smile was like curdled milk. “Have you made your will, Mr. Montagu?”

“I made it at the gaming table last night, and the Chevalier O’Sullivan was one of the legatees,” I answered like a flash.

“Touché, Sully,” laughed Creagh. “Ecod, I like our young cockerel’s spirit.”

“And I don’t,” returned O’Sullivan. “He shall join us, or damme——” He stopped, but his meaning was plain to be read.

I answered dourly. “You may blow the coals, but I will not be het.”

“Faith, you’re full of epigrams to-night, Mr. Montagu,” Anthony Creagh was good enough to say. “You’ll make a fine stage exit—granting that Sully has his way. I wouldn’t miss it for a good deal.”

“If the house is crowded you may have my seat for nothing,” was my reply. Strange to say my spirits were rising. This was the first perilous adventure of my life, and my heart sang. Besides, I had confidence enough in Balmerino to know that he would never stand aside and let me suffer for his indiscretion if he could help it.

The old Lord’s troubled eyes looked into mine. I think he was beginning to regret this impulsive experiment of his. He tried a new tack with me.

“Of course there is a risk. We may not win. Perhaps you do well to think of the consequences. As you say, heads may fall because of the rising.”

The dye flooded my cheeks.

“You might have spared me that, my Lord. I am thinking of the blood of innocent people that must be spilled.”

“Your joining us will neither help nor hinder that.”

“And your not joining us will have deucedly unpleasant effects for you,” suggested O’Sullivan pleasantly.

Lord Balmerino flung round on him angrily, his hand on sword hilt. “I think you have forgotten one thing, Mr. O’Sullivan.”

“And that is——?”

“That Mr. Montagu came here as my guest. If he does not care to join us he shall be free as air to depart.” O’Sullivan laughed hardily. “Shall he? Gadzooks! The Chevalier O’Sullivan will have a word to say with him first. He did not come as any guest of mine. What the devil! If you were not sure of him, why did you bring him?”

Balmerino fumed, but he had no answer for that. He could only say,—

“I thought him sure to join, but I can answer for his silence with my life.”

“’T will be more to the point that we do not answer for his speech with our lives,” grumbled Leath.

The Frenchman leaned forward eagerly. “You thought heem to be at heart of us, and you were meestaken; you theenk heem sure to keep our secret, but how are we to know you are not again meestaken?”

“Sure, that’s easy,” broke out O’Sullivan scornfully. “We’ll know when the rope is round our gullets.”

“Oh, he won’t peach, Sully. He isn’t that kind. Stap me, you never know a gentleman when you see one,” put in Creagh carelessly.

The young Highlander Macdonald spoke up. “Gentlemen, I’m all for making an end to this collieshangie. By your leave, Lord Balmerino, Mr. Creagh and myself will step up-stairs with this gentleman and come to some composition on the matter. Mr. Montagu saved my life last night, but I give you the word of Donald Roy Macdonald that if I am not satisfied in the end I will plant six inches of steel in his wame for him to digest, and there’s gumption for you at all events.”

He said it as composedly as if he had been proposing a stroll down the Row with me, and I knew him to be just the man who would keep his word. The others knew it too, and presently we four found ourselves alone together in a room above.

“Is your mind so set against joining us, Kenn? I have got myself into a pickle, and I wish you would just get me out,” Balmerino began.

“If they had asked me civilly I dare say I should have said ‘Yes!’ an hour ago, but I’ll not be forced in.”

“Quite right, too. You’re a broth of a boy. I wouldn’t in your place, Montagu, and I take off my hat to your spirit,” said Creagh. “Now let’s begin again.”—He went to the door and threw it open.—“The way is clear for you to leave if you want to go, but I would be most happy to have you stay with us. It’s men like you we’re looking for, and— Won’t you strike a blow for the King o’er the sea, Montagu?”

“He is of the line of our ancient monarchs. He and his race have ruled us a thousand years,” urged

Balmerino. "They have had their faults perhaps——"

"Perhaps," I smiled.

"Well, and if they have," cried Donald Roy hotly in the impetuous Highland way. "Is this a time to be remembering them? For my part, I will be forgetting their past faults and minding only their present distresses."

"It appears as easy for a Highlander to forget the faults of the Stuarts as it is for them to forget his services," I told him.

"Oh, you harp on their faults. Have you none of your own?" cried Elphinstone impatiently. "I have seen and talked with the young Prince. He is one to follow to the death. I have never met the marrow of him."

"I think of the thousands who will lose their lives for him."

"Well, and that's a driech subject, too, but Donald Roy would a hantle rather die with claymore in hand and the whiddering steel about his head than be always fearing to pay the piper," said the young Highlander blithely.

"Your father was out for the King in the '15," said Balmerino gently.

Oh, Arthur Elphinstone had the guile for all his rough ways. I was moved more than I cared to own. Many a time I had sat at my father's knee and listened to the tale of "the '15." The Highland blood in me raced the quicker through my veins. All the music of the heather hills and the wimpling burns wooed me to join my kinsmen in the North. My father's example, his brother's blood, loyalty to the traditions of my family, my empty purse, the friendship of Balmerino and Captain Macdonald, all tugged at my will; but none of them were so potent as the light that shone in the eyes of a Highland lassie I had never met till one short hour before. I tossed aside all my scruples and took the leap.

"Come!" I cried. "Lend yourselves to me on a mission of some danger for one night and I will pledge myself a partner in your enterprise. I can promise you that the help I ask of you may be honourably given. A fair exchange is no robbery. What say you?"

"Gad's life, I cry agreed. You're cheap at the price, Mr. Montagu. I'm yours, Rip me, if you want me to help rum-pad a bishop's coach," exclaimed the Irishman.

"Mr. Creagh has just taken the words out of my mouth," cried Donald Roy. "If you're wanting to lift a lassie or to carry the war to a foe I'll be blithe to stand at your back. You may trust Red Donald for that whatever."

"You put your finger on my ambitions, Captain Macdonald. I'm wanting to do just those two things. You come to scratch so readily that I hope you have had some practice of your own," I laughed.

There was wine on the table and I filled the glasses.

"If no other sword leaves scabbard mine shall," I cried in a flame of new-born enthusiasm. "Gentlemen, I give you the King over the water."

"King James! God bless him," echoed Balmerino and Creagh.

"Deoch slaint an Righ! (The King's Drink). And win or lose, we shall have a beautiful time of it whatever," cried Donald gaily.

An hour later Kenneth Montagu, Jacobite, walked home arm in arm with Anthony Creagh and Donald Roy Macdonald. He was setting forth to them a tale of an imprisoned maid and a plan for the rescue of that

same lady.



CHAPTER IV

OF LOVE AND WAR

All day the rain had splashed down with an unusual persistence, but now there was a rising wind and a dash of clear sky over to the south which promised fairer weather. I was blithe to see it, for we had our night's work cut out for us and a driving storm would not add to our comfort.

From my hat, from the elbows of my riding-coat, and from my boot-heels constant rivulets ran; but I took pains to keep the pistols under my doublet dry as toast. At the courtyard of the inn I flung myself from my horse and strode to the taproom where my companions awaited me. In truth they were making the best of their circumstances. A hot water jug steamed in front of the hearth where Creagh lolled in a big armchair. At the table Captain Macdonald was compounding a brew by the aid of lemons, spices, and brandy. They looked the picture of content, and I stood streaming in the doorway a moment to admire the scene.

"What luck, Montagu?" asked Creagh.

"They're at 'The Jolly Soldier' all right *en route* for Epsom," I told him. "Arrived a half hour before I left. Hamish Gorm is hanging about there to let us know when they start. Volney has given orders for a fresh relay of horses, so they are to continue their journey to-night."

"And the lady?"

"The child looks like an angel of grief. She is quite out of hope. Faith, her despair took me by the heart."

"My certes! I dare swear it," returned Donald Roy dryly. "And did you make yourself known to her?"

"No, she went straight to her room. Volney has given it out that the lady is his wife and is demented. His man Watkins spreads the report broadcast to forestall any appeal she may make for help. I talked with the valet in the stables. He had much to say about how dearly his master and his mistress loved each other, and what a pity 'twas that the lady has lately fallen out of her mind by reason of illness. 'Twas the one thing that spoilt the life of Mr. Armitage, who fairly dotes on his sweet lady. Lud, yes! And one of her worst delusions is that he is not really her husband and that he wishes to harm her. Oh, they have contrived well their precious story to avoid outside interference."

I found more than one cause to doubt the fortunate issue of the enterprise upon which we were engaged. Volney might take the other road; or he might postpone his journey on account of the foul weather. Still other contingencies rose to my mind, but Donald Roy and Creagh made light of them.

"Havers! If he is the man you have drawn for me he will never be letting a smirr of rain interfere with his plans; and as for the other road, it will be a river in spate by this time," the Highlander reassured me.

"Sure, I'll give you four to one in ponies the thing does not miscarry," cried Creagh in his rollicking way. "After the King comes home I'll dance at your wedding, me boy; and here's to Mrs. Montagu that is to be, bedad!"

My wildest dreams had never carried me so far as this yet, and I flushed to my wig at his words; but the

wild Irishman only laughed at my remonstrance.

“Faith man, ’tis you or I! ’Twould never do for three jolly blades like us to steal the lady from her lover and not offer another in exchange. No, no! Castle Creagh is crying for a mistress, and if you don’t spunk up to the lady Tony Creagh will.”

To his humour of daffing I succumbed, and fell into an extraordinary ease with the world. Here I sat in a snug little tavern with the two most taking comrades in the world drinking a hot punch brewed to a nicety, while outside the devil of a storm roared and screamed.

As for my companions, they were old campaigners, not to be ruffled by the slings of envious fortune. Captain Donald Roy was wont to bear with composure good luck and ill, content to sit him down whistling on the sodden heath to eat his mouthful of sour brose with the same good humour he would have displayed at a gathering of his clan gentlemen where the table groaned with usquebaugh, mountain trout, and Highland venison. Creagh’s philosophy too was all for taking what the gods sent and leaving uncrossed bridges till the morrow. Was the weather foul? Sure, the sun would soon shine, and what was a cloak for but to keep out the rain? I never knew him lose his light gay spirits, and I have seen him at many an evil pass.

The clatter of a horse’s hoofs in the courtyard put a period to our festivities. Presently rug-headed Hamish Gorm entered, a splash of mud from brogues to bonnet.

“What news, Hamish? Has Volney started?” I cried.

“She would be leaving directly. Ta Sassenach iss in ta carriage with ta daughter of Macleod, and he will be a fery goot man to stick a dirk in whatefer,” fumed the gillie.

I caught him roughly by the shoulder. “There will be no dirk play this night, Hamish Gorm. Do you hear that? It will be left for your betters to settle with this man, and if you cannot remember that you will just stay here.”

He muttered sullenly that he would remember, but it was a great pity if Hamish Gorm could not avenge the wrongs of the daughter of his chief.

We rode for some miles along a cross country path where the mud was so deep that the horses sank to their fetlocks. The wind had driven away the rain and the night had cleared overhead. There were still scudding clouds scouring across the face of the moon, but the promise was for a clear night. We reached the Surrey road and followed it along the heath till we came to the shadow of three great oaks. Many a Dick Turpin of the road had lurked under the drooping boughs of these same trees and sallied out to the hilltop with his ominous cry of “Stand and deliver!” Many a jolly grazier and fat squire had yielded up his purse at this turn of the road. For a change we meant to rum-pad a baronet, and I flatter myself we made as dashing a trio of cullies as any gentlemen of the heath among them all.

It might have been a half hour after we had taken our stand that the rumbling of a coach came to our ears. The horses were splashing through the mud, plainly making no great speed. Long before we saw the chaise, the cries of the postilions urging on the horses were to be heard. After an interminable period the carriage swung round the turn of the road and began to take the rise. We caught the postilion at disadvantage as he was flogging the weary animals up the brow of the hill. He looked up and caught sight of us.

“Out of the way, fellows,” he cried testily. Next instant he slipped to the ground and disappeared in the darkness, crying “Ware highwaymen!” In the shine of the coach lamps he had seen Creagh’s mask and pistol. The valet Watkins, sitting on the box, tried to lash up the leaders, but Macdonald blocked the way

with his horse, what time the Irishman and I gave our attention to the occupants of the chaise.

At the first cry of the postilion a bewigged powdered head had been thrust from the window and immediately withdrawn. Now I dismounted and went forward to open the door. From the corner of the coach into which Aileen Macleod had withdrawn a pair of bright eager eyes looked into my face, but no Volney was to be seen. The open door opposite explained his disappearance. I raised the mask a moment from my face, and the girl gave a cry of joy.

“Did you think I had deserted you?” I asked.

“Oh, I did not know. I was thinking that perhaps he had killed you. I will be thanking God that you are alive,” she cried, with a sweet little lift and tremble to her voice that told me tears were near.

A shot rang out, and then another.

“Excuse me for a moment. I had forgot the gentleman,” I said, hastily withdrawing my head.

As I ran round the back of the coach I came plump into Volney. Though dressed to make love and not war, I’ll do him the justice to say that one was as welcome to him as the other. He was shining in silver satin and blue silk and gold lace, but in each hand he carried a great horse pistol, one of which was still smoking at the barrel. The other he pointed at me, but with my sword I thrust up the point and it went off harmlessly in the air. Then I flung him from me and covered him with my barker. Creagh also was there to emphasize the wisdom of discretion. Sir Robert Volney was as daring a man as ever lived, but he was no fool neither. He looked at my weapon shining on him in the moonlight and quietly conceded to himself that the game was against him for the moment. From his fingers he slipped the rings, and the watch from his pocket-coat. To carry out our pretension I took them and filled my pockets with his jewelry.

“A black night, my cullies,” said Volney as easy as you please.

“The colour of your business,” I retorted thoughtlessly.

He started, looking at me very sharp.

“Else you would not be travelling on such a night,” I explained lamely.

“Ah! I think we will not discuss my business. As it happens, the lady has no jewelry with her. If you are quite through with us, my good fellows, we’ll wish you a pleasant evening. Watkins, where’s that d—d postilion?”

“Softly, Sir Robert! The night’s young yet. Will you not spare us fifteen minutes while the horses rest?” proposed Creagh.

“Oh, if you put it that way,” he answered negligently, his agile mind busy with the problem before him. I think he began to put two and two together. My words might have been a chance shot, but when on the heel of them Creagh let slip his name Volney did not need to be told that we were not regular fly-by-nights. His eyes and his ears were intent to pierce our disguises.

“Faith, my bullies, you deserve success if you operate on such nights as this. An honest living were easier come by, but Lard! not so enticing by a deal. Your enterprise is worthy of commendation, and I would wager a pony against a pinch of snuff that some day you’ll be raised to a high position by reason of it. How is it the old catch runs?

““And three merry men, and three merry men,
And three merry men are we,
As ever did sing three parts in a string,

All under the gallows tree.'

"If I have to get up in the milkman hours, begad, when that day comes I'll make it a point to be at Tyburn to see your promotion over the heads of humdrum honest folks," he drawled, and at the tail of his speech yawned in our faces.

"We'll send you cards to the entertainment when that happy day arrives," laughed Creagh, delighted of course at the aplomb of the Macaroni.

Donald Roy came up to ask what should be done with Watkins. It appeared that Volney had mistaken him for one of us and let fly at him. The fellow lay groaning on the ground as if he were on the edge of expiration. I stooped and examined him. 'Twas a mere flesh scratch.

"Nothing the matter but a punctured wing. All he needs is a kerchief round his arm," I said.

Captain Macdonald looked disgusted and a little relieved.

"Fore God, he deaved (deafened) me with his yammering till I thought him about to ship for the other world. These Englishers make a geyan work about nothing."

For the moment remembrance of Volney had slipped from our minds. As I rose to my feet he stepped forward. Out flashed his sword and ripped the mask from my face.

"Egad, I thought so," he chuckled. "My young friend Montagu repairing his fallen fortunes on the road! Won't you introduce me to the other gentlemen, or would they rather remain incog? Captain Claude Duval, your most obedient! Sir Dick Turpin, yours to command! Delighted, 'pon my word, to be rum-padded by such distinguished—er—knights of the road."

"The honour is ours," answered Creagh gravely, returning his bow, but the Irishman's devil-may-care eyes were dancing.

"A strange fortuity, in faith, that our paths have crossed so often of late, Montagu. Now I would lay something good that our life lines will not cross more than once more."

"Why should we meet at all again?" I cried. "Here is a piece of good turf under the moonlight. 'Twere a pity to lose it."

He appeared to consider. "As you say, the turf is all that is to be desired and the light will suffice. Why not? We get in each other's way confoundedly, and out of doubt will some day have to settle our little difference. Well then, if 'twere done 'twere well done quickly. Faith, Mr. Montagu, y'are a man after my own heart, and it gives me a vast deal of pleasure to accept your proposal. Consider me your most obedient to command and prodigiously at your service."

Raffish and flamboyant, he lounged forward to the window of the carriage.

"I beg a thousand pardons, sweet, for leaving you a few minutes alone," he said with his most silken irony. "I am desolated at the necessity, but this gentleman has a claim that cannot be ignored. Believe me, I shall make the absence very short. Dear my life, every instant that I am from you is snatched from Paradise. Fain would I be with you alway, but stern duty"—the villain stopped to draw a plaintive and theatric sigh—"calls me to attend once for all to a matter of small moment. Anon I shall be with you, life of my life."

She looked at him as if he were the dirt beneath her feet, and still he smiled his winsome smile, carrying on the mock pretense that she was devoted to him.

"Ah, sweet my heart!" he murmured. "'Twere cheap to die for such a loving look from thee. All Heaven

lies in it. 'Tis better far to live for many more of such."

There was a rush of feet and a flash of steel. Donald Roy leaped forward just in time, and next moment Hamish Gorm lay stretched on the turf, muttering Gaelic oaths and tearing at the sod with his dirk in an impotent rage. Sir Robert looked down at the prostrate man with his inscrutable smile.

"Your friend from the Highlands is in a vast hurry, Montagu. He can't even wait till you have had your chance to carve me. Well, are you ready to begin the argument?"

"Quite at your command. There is a bit of firm turf beyond the oaks. If you will lead the way I shall be with you anon."

"Lud! I had forgot. You have your adieux to make to the lady. Pray do not let me hurry you," he said urbanely, as he picked his way daintily through the mud.

When he had gone I turned to the girl.

"You shall be quit of him," I told her. "You may rely on my friends if—if the worst happens. They will take you to Montagu Grange, and my brother Charles will push on with you to Scotland. In this country you would not be safe from him while he lives."

Her face was like the snow.

"Iss there no other way whatever?" she cried. "Must you be fighting with this man for me, and you only a boy? Oh, I could be wishing for my brother Malcolm or some of the good claymores on the braes of Raasay!"

The vanity in me was stung by her words.

"I'm not such a boy neither, and Angelo judged me a good pupil. You might find a worse champion."

"Oh, it iss the good friend you are to me, and I am loving you for it, but I think of what may happen to you."

My pulse leaped and my eyes burned, but I answered lightly,

"For a change think of what may happen to him, and maybe to pass the time you might put up a bit prayer for me."

"Believe me, I will be doing that same," she cried with shining eyes, and before I divined her intent had stooped to kiss my hand that rested on the coach door.

My heart lilted as I crossed the heath to where the others were waiting for me beyond the dip of the hillock.

"Faith, I began to think you had forgotten me and gone off with the lady yourself," laughed Volney.

I flung off my cloak and my inner coat, for though the night was chill I knew I should be warm enough when once we got to work. Then, strangely enough, an unaccountable reluctance to engage came over me, and I stood tracing figures on the heath with the point of my small sword.

"Are you ready?" asked the baronet.

I broke out impetuously. "Sir Robert, you have ruined many. Your victims are to be counted by the score. I myself am one. But this girl shall not be added to the list. I have sworn it; so have my friends. There is still time for you to leave unhurt if you desire it, but if we once cross swords one of us must die."

"And, prithee, Mr. Montagu, why came we here?"

“Yet even now if you will desist——”

His caustic insolent laugh rang out gaily as he mouthed the speech of Tybalt in actor fashion.

“‘What, drawn, and talk of peace? I hate the word,
As I hate hell, all Montagus, and thee;
Have at thee, coward.’”

I drew back from his playful lunge.

“Very well. Have it your own way. But you must have some one to act for you. Perhaps Captain Mac——er——the gentleman on your right——will second you.”

Donald Roy drew himself up haughtily. “Feint a bit of it! I’m on the other side of the dyke. Man, Montagu! I’m wondering at you, and him wronging a Hieland lassie. Gin he waits till I stand back of him he’ll go wantin’, ye may lippen (trust) to that.”

“Then it’ll have to be you, Tony,” I said, turning to Creagh. “Guard, Sir Robert!”

“’Sdeath! You’re getting in a hurry, Mr. Montagu. I see you’re keen after that ‘Hic Jacet’ I promised you. Lard! I vow you shall have it.”

Under the shifting moonlight we fell to work on the dripping heath. We were not unevenly matched considering the time and the circumstances. I had in my favour youth, an active life, and a wrist of steel. At least I was a strong swordsman, even though I could not pretend to anything like the mastery of the weapon which he possessed. To some extent his superior skill was neutralized by the dim light. He had been used to win his fights as much with his head as with his hand, to read his opponent’s intention in advance from the eyes while he concealed his own; but the darkness, combined with my wooden face, made this impossible now. Every turn and trick of the game he knew, but the shifting shine and shadow disconcerted him. More than once I heard him curse softly when at a critical moment the scudding clouds drifted across the moon in time to save me.

He had the better of me throughout, but somehow I blundered through without letting him find the chance for which he looked. I kept my head, and parried by sheer luck his brilliant lunges. I broke ground and won free—if but barely—from his incessant attack. More than once he pricked me. A high thrust which I diverted too late with the parade of tierce drew blood freely. He fleshed me again on the riposte by a one-two feint in tierce and a thrust in carte.

“‘L’art de donner et de ne pas recevoir,’” he quoted, as he parried my counter-thrust with debonair ease.

Try as I would I could not get behind that wonderful guard of his. It was easy, graceful, careless almost, but it was sure. His point was a gleaming flash of light, but it never wavered from my body line.

A darker cloud obscured the moon, and by common consent we rested.

“Three minutes for good-byes,” said Volney, suggestively.

“Oh, my friends need not order the hearse yet—at least for me. Of course, if it would be any convenience ——”

He laughed. “Faith, you improve on acquaintance, Mr. Montagu, like good wine or—to stick to the same colour—the taste of the lady’s lips.”

I looked blackly at him. “Do you pretend——?”

“Oh, I pretend nothing. Kiss and never tell, egad! Too bad they’re not for you too, Montagu.”

“I see that Sir Robert Volney has added another accomplishment to his vices.”

“And that is——?”

“He can couple a woman’s name with the hint of a slanderous lie.”

Sir Robert turned to Creagh and waved a hand at me, shaking his head sorrowfully. “The country boor in evidence again. Curious how it will crop out. Ah, Mr. Montagu! The moon shines bright again. Shall we have the pleasure of renewing our little debate?”

I nodded curtly. He stopped a moment to say:

“You have a strong wrist and a prodigious good fence, Mr. Montagu, but if you will pardon a word of criticism I think your guard too high.”

“Y’are not here to instruct me, Sir Robert, but——”

“To kill you. Quite so!” he interrupted jauntily. “Still, a friendly word of caution—and the guard is overhigh! ’Tis the same fault my third had. I ran under it, and——” He shrugged his shoulders.

“Was that the boy you killed for defending his sister?” I asked insolently.

Apparently my hit did not pierce the skin. “No. I’ve forgot the nomination of the gentleman. What matter? He has long been food for worms. Pardon me, I see blood trickling down your sword arm. Allow me to offer my kerchief.”

“Thanks! ’Twill do as it is. Art ready?”

“Lard, yes! And guard lower, an you love me. The high guard is the one fault— Well parried, Montagu—I find in Angelo’s pupils. Correcting that, you would have made a rare swordsman in time.”

His use of the subjunctive did not escape me. “I’m not dead yet,” I panted.

I parried a feint une-deux, in carte, with the parade in semicircle, and he came over my blade, thrusting low in carte. His laugh rang out clear as a boy’s, and the great eyes of the man blazed with the joy of fight.

“Gad, you’re quick to take my meaning! Ah! You nearly began the long journey that time, my friend.”

He had broken ground apparently in disorder, and by the feel of his sword I made sure he had in mind to parry; but the man was as full of tricks as the French King Louis and with incredible swiftness he sent a straight thrust in high tierce—a thrust which sharply stung my ribs only, since I had flung myself aside in time to save my vitals.

After that came the end. He caught me full and fair in the side of the neck. A moist stifling filled my throat and the turf whirled up to meet the sky. I knew nothing but a mad surge of rage that he had cut me to pieces and I had never touched him once. As I went down I flung myself forward at him wildly. It is to be supposed that he was off guard for the moment, supposing me a man already dead. My blade slipped along his, lurched farther forward, at last struck something soft and ripped down. A hundred crimson points zigzagged before my eyes, and I dropped down into unconsciousness in a heap.

V

THE HUE AND CRY

Languidly I came back to a world that faded and grew clear again most puzzlingly, that danced and jerked to and fro in oddly irresponsible fashion. At first too deadly weary to explain the situation to myself, I presently made out that I was in a coach which lurched prodigiously and filled me with sharp pains. Fronting me was the apparently lifeless body of a man propped in the corner with the head against the cushions, the white face grinning horridly at me. 'Twas the face of Volney. I stirred to get it out of my line of vision, and a soft, firm hand restrained me gently.

"You are not to be stirring," a sweet voice said. Then to herself its owner added, ever so softly and so happily, "Thaing do Dhia (Thank God.) He iss alive—he iss alive!"

I pointed feebly a leaden finger at the white face over against me with the shine of the moon on it.

"Dead?"

"No. He hass just fainted. You are not to talk!"

"And Donald Roy——?"

The imperious little hand slipped down to cover my mouth, and Kenneth Montagu kissed it where it lay. For a minute she did not lift the hand, what time I lay in a dream of warm happiness. A chuckle from the opposite seat aroused me. The eyes in the colourless face had opened, and Volney sat looking at us with an ironic smile.

"I must have fallen asleep—and before a lady. A thousand apologies! And for awaking so inopportunately, ten thousand more!"

He changed his position that he might look the easier at her, a half-humorous admiration in his eyes.

"Sweet, you beggar my vocabulary. As the goddess of healing you are divine."

The flush of alarmed maiden modesty flooded her cheek.

"You are to lie still, else the wound will break out again," she said sharply.

"Faith, it has broken out," he feebly laughed, pretending to misunderstand. Then, "Oh, you mean the sword cut. 'Twould never open after it has been dressed by so fair a leech."

The girl looked studiously out of the coach window and made no answer. Now, weak as I was—in pain and near to death, my head on her lap with her dear hand to cool my fevered brow—yet was I fool enough to grow insanely jealous that she had used her kerchief to bind his wound. His pale, handsome face was so winning and his eyes so beautiful that they thrust me through the heart as his sword had been unable to do.

He looked at me with an odd sort of friendliness, the respect one man has for another who has faced death without flinching.

“Egad, Montagu, had either of us driven but a finger’s breadth to left we had made sure work and saved the doctors a vast deal of pother. I doubt ’twill be all to do over again one day. Where did you learn that mad lunge of yours? I vow ’tis none of Angelo’s teaching. No defense would avail against such a fortuitous stroke. Methought I had you speeding to kingdom come, and Lard! you skewered me bravely. ’Slife, ’tis an uncertain world, this! Here we ride back together to the inn and no man can say which of us has more than he can carry.”

All this with his easy dare-devil smile, though his voice was faint from weakness. An odd compound of virtues and vices this man! I learnt afterwards that he had insisted on my wounds being dressed before he would let them touch him, though he was bleeding greatly.

But I had no mind for badinage, and I turned my face from him sullenly. Silence fell till we jolted into the courtyard of “The Jolly Soldier,” where Creagh, Macdonald, and Hamish Gorm, having dismounted from their horses, waited to carry us into the house. We were got to bed at once, and our wounds looked to more carefully. By an odd chance Volney and I were put in the same room, the inn being full, and the Macdonald nursed us both, Creagh being for the most part absent in London on business connected with the rising.

Lying there day after day, the baronet and I came in time to an odd liking for each other, discussing our affairs frankly with certain reservations. Once he commented on the strangeness of it.

“A singular creature is man, Montagu! Here are we two as friendly as—as brothers I had almost said, but most brothers hate each other with good cause. At all events here we lie with nothing but good-will; we are too weak to get at each other’s throats and so perforce must endure each the other’s presence, and from mere sufferance come to a mutual—shall I say esteem? A while since we were for slaying; naught but cold steel would let out our heat; and now—I swear I have for you a vast liking. Will it last, think you?”

“Till we are on our feet again. No longer,” I answered.

“I suppose you are right,” he replied, with the first touch of despondency I had ever heard in his voice. “The devil of it is that when I want a thing I never rest till I get it, and after I have won it I don’t care any more for it.”

“I’m an obstinate man myself,” I said.

“Yes, I know. And when I say I’ll do a thing and you say I sha’n’t nothing on earth can keep us from the small sword.”

“Did you never spare a victim—never draw back before the evil was done?” I asked curiously.

“Many a time, but never when the incentive to the chase was so great as now. ’Tis the overcoming of obstacles I cannot resist. In this case—to pass by the acknowledged charms of the lady—I find two powerful reasons for continuing: her proud coyness and your defense of her. Be sure I shall not fail.”

“I think you will,” I answered quietly.

Out of doubt the man had a subtle fascination for me, even though I hated his principles in the same breath. When he turned the batteries of his fine winning eyes and sparkling smile on me I was under impulse to capitulate unconditionally; ’twas at remembrance of Aileen that my jaws set like a vice again.

But as the days passed I observed a gradual change in Volney’s attitude toward the Highland lass. Macdonald had found a temporary home for her at the house of a kind-hearted widow woman who lived in the neighbourhood, and so long as we were in danger the girl and her grey-haired friend came often to

offer their services in nursing. Aileen treated the baronet with such shy gentle womanliness, her girlish pity struggling through the Highland pride, forgetting in the suffering man the dastard who had wronged her, that he was moved not a little from his cynical ironic gayety. She was in a peculiar relation toward us, one lacking the sanction of society and yet quite natural. I had fought for her, and her warm heart forbade her to go her way and leave me to live or die as chance might will. As she would move about the room ministering to our wants, wrapped in her sweet purity and grace, more than once I caught on his face a pain of wistfulness that told me of another man beneath the polished heartless Macaroni. For the moment I knew he repented him of his attempted wrong, though I could not know that a day of manly reparation would come to blot out his sin against her.

As we grew better Aileen's visits became shorter and less frequent, so that our only temptation to linger over our illness was removed. One day Sir Robert limped slowly across the floor on the arm of Creagh while I watched him enviously. From that time his improvement was rapid and within a week he came to make his adieux to me. Dressed point-de-vise, he was once more every inch a fop.

"I sha'n't say good-bye, Montagu, to either you or the lady, because I expect to see you both again soon. I have a shot in my locker that will bring you to mighty short one of these days. Tony Creagh is going to London with me in my coach. Sorry you and the lady won't take the other two seats. Well, au revoir. Hope you'll be quite fit when you come up for the next round." And waving a hand airily at me he went limping down the stairs, devoid of grace yet every motion eloquent of it, to me a living paradox.

Nor was it long before I too was able to crawl out into the sunshine with Aileen Macleod and Captain Macdonald as my crutches. Not far from the inn was a grove of trees, and in it a rustic seat or two. Hither we three repaired for many a quiet hour of talk. Long ago Donald had established his relationship with Aileen. It appeared that he was a cousin about eight degrees removed. None but a Highlander would have counted it at all, but for them it sufficed. Donald Roy had an extraordinary taking way with women, and he got on with the girl much more easily than I did. Indeed, to hear them daffing with each other one would have said they had been brought up together instead of being acquaintances of less than three weeks standing.

Yet Donald was so clever with it all that I was never the least jealous of him. He was forever taking pains to show me off well before her, making as much of my small attainments as a hen with one chick. Like many of the West country Highlanders he was something of a scholar. French he could speak like a native, and he had dabbled in the humanities; but he would drag forth my smattering of learning with so much glee that one might have thought him ignorant of the plainest A B C of the matter. More than once I have known him blunder in a Latin quotation that I might correct him. Aileen and he had a hundred topics in common from which I was excluded by reason of my ignorance of the Highlands, but the Macdonald was as sly as a fox on my behalf. He would draw out the girl about the dear Northland they both loved and then would suddenly remember that his pistols needed cleaning or that, he had promised to "crack" with some chance gentleman stopping at the inn, and away he would go, leaving us two alone. While I lay on the grass and looked at her Aileen would tell me in her eager, impulsive way about her own kindly country, of tinkling, murmuring burns, of hills burnt red with the heather, of a hundred wild flowers that blossomed on the braes of Raasay, and as she talked of them her blue eyes sparkled like the sun-kissed lochs themselves.

Ah! Those were the good days, when the wine of life was creeping back into my blood and I was falling forty fathoms deep in love. Despite myself she was for making a hero of me, and my leal-hearted friend, Macdonald, was not a whit behind, though the droll look in his eyes suggested sometimes an ulterior motive. We talked of many things, but in the end we always got back to the one subject that burned like a flame in their hearts—the rising of the clans that was to bring back the Stuarts to their own. Their pure zeal shamed my cold English caution. I found myself growing keen for the arbitrament of battle.

No earthly Paradise endures forever. Into those days of peace the serpent of my Eden projected his sting. We were all sitting in the grove one morning when a rider dashed up to the inn and flung himself from his horse. 'Twas Tony Creagh, and he carried with him a placard which offered a reward of a hundred guineas for the arrest of one Kenneth Montagu, Esquire, who had, with other parties unknown, on the night of July first, robbed Sir Robert Volney of certain jewelry therein described.

"Highwayman it says," quoth I in frowning perplexity. "But Volney knows I had no mind to rob him. Zounds! What does he mean?"

"Mean? Why, to get rid of you! I tore this down from a tavern wall in London just after 'twas pasted. It seems you forgot to return the gentleman his jewelry."

I turned mighty red and pleaded guilty.

"I thought so. Gad! You're like to keep sheep by moonlight," chuckled Creagh.

"Nonsense! They would never hang me," I cried.

"Wouldn't, eh! Deed, and I'm not so sure. The hue and cry is out for you."

"Havers, man!" interrupted Macdonald sharply. "You're frightening the lady with your fairy tales, Creagh. Don't you be believing him, my dear. The hemp is not grown that will hang Kenneth."

But for all his cheery manner we were mightily taken aback, especially when another rider came in a few minutes later with a letter to me from town. It ran:—

DEAR MONTAGU,

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends." Our pleasant little game is renewed. The first trick was, I believe, mine; the second yours. The third I trump by lodging an information against you for highway robbery. Tony I shall not implicate, of course, nor Mac-What's-His-Name. Take wings, my Fly-by-night, for the runners are on your heels, and if you don't, as I live, you'll wear hemp. Give my devoted love to the lady. I am,

Your most obed^t serv^t to command,
ROB^T VOLNEY.

In imagination I could see him seated at his table, pushing aside a score of dainty notes from Phyllis indiscreet or passionate Diana, that he might dash off his warning to me, a whimsical smile half-blown on his face, a gleam of sardonic humour in his eyes. Remorseless he was by choice, but he would play the game with an English sportsman's love of fair play. Eliminating his unscrupulous morals and his acquired insolence of manner, Sir Robert Volney would have been one to esteem; by impulse he was one of the finest gentlemen I have known.

Though Creagh had come to warn me of Volney's latest move, he was also the bearer of a budget of news which gravely affected the State at large and the cause on which we were embarked. The French fleet of transports, delayed again and again by trivial causes, had at length received orders to postpone indefinitely the invasion of England. Yet in spite of this fatal blow to the cause it was almost certain that Prince Charles Edward Stuart with only seven companions, of whom one was the ubiquitous O'Sullivan, had slipped from Belleisle on the Doutelle and escaping the British fleet had landed on the coast of Scotland. The emotions which animated us on hearing of the gallant young Prince's daring and romantic attempt to win a Kingdom with seven swords, trusting sublimely in the loyalty of his devoted Highlanders, may better be imagined than described. Donald Roy flung up his bonnet in a wild hurrah, Aileen beamed pride and happiness, and Creagh's volatile Irish heart was in the hilltops. If I had any doubts of the issue I

knew better than to express them.

But we were shortly recalled to our more immediate affairs. Before we got back to the inn one of those cursed placards offering a reward for my arrest adorned the wall, and in front of it a dozen open-mouthed yokels were spelling out its purport. Clearly there was no time to be lost in taking Volney's advice. We hired a chaise and set out for London within the hour. 'Twas arranged that Captain Macdonald and Hamish Gorm should push on at once to Montagu Grange with Aileen, while I should lie in hiding at the lodgings of Creagh until my wounds permitted of my travelling without danger. That Volney would not rest without attempting to discover the whereabouts of Miss Macleod I was well assured, and no place of greater safety for the present occurred to me than the seclusion of the Grange with my brother Charles and the family servants to watch over her. As for myself, I was not afraid of their hanging me, but I was not minded to play into the hands of Volney by letting myself get cooped up in prison for many weeks pending a trial while he renewed his cavalier wooing of the maid.

Never have I spent a more doleful time than that which followed. For one thing my wounds healed badly, causing me a good deal of trouble. Then too I was a prisoner no less than if I had been in The Tower itself. If occasionally at night I ventured forth the fear of discovery was always with me. Tony Creagh was the best companion in the world, at once tender as a mother and gay as a schoolboy, but he could not be at home all day and night, and as he was agog to be joining the Prince in the North he might leave any day. Meanwhile he brought me the news of the town from the coffee-houses: how Sir Robert Walpole was dead; how the Camerons under Lochiel, the Macdonalds under Young Clanranald, and the Macphersons under Cluny had rallied to the side of the Prince and were expected soon to be defeated by Sir John Cope, the Commander-in-Chief of the Government army in Scotland; how Balmerino and Leath had already shipped for Edinburgh to join the insurgent army; how Beauclerc had bet Lord March a hundred guineas that the stockings worn by Lady Di Faulkner at the last Assembly ball were not mates, and had won. It appeared that unconsciously I had been a source of entertainment to the club loungers.

"Sure 'tis pity you're mewed up here, Kenn, for you're the lion of the hour. None can roar like you. The betting books at White's are filled with wagers about you," Creagh told me.

"About me?" I exclaimed.

"Faith, who else? 'Lord Pam bets Mr. Conway three ponies against a hundred pounds that Mr. Kenneth Montagu of Montagu Grange falls by the hand of justice before three months from date,'" he quoted with a great deal of gusto. "Does your neck ache, Kenn?"

"Oh, the odds are in my favour yet. What else?" I asked calmly.

"'Mr. James Haddon gives ten pounds each to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and to Sir Robert Volney and is to receive from each twenty guineas if Mr. K. Montagu is alive twelve months from date.' Egad, you're a topic of interest in high quarters!"

"Honoured, I'm sure! I'll make it a point to see that his Royal Highness and my dear friend Volney lose. Anything else?"

"At the coffee-house they were talking about raising a subscription to you because they hear you're devilish hard up and because you made such a plucky fight against Volney. Some one mentioned that you had a temper and were proud as Lucifer. 'He's such a hothead. How'll he take it?' asks Beauclerc. 'Why, quarterly, to be sure!' cries Selwyn. And that reminds me: George has written an epigram that is going the rounds. Out of some queer whim—to keep them warm I suppose—Madame Bellevue took her slippers to bed with her. Some one told it at the club, so Selwyn sat down and wrote these verses:

“Well may Suspicion shake its head—
Well may Clorinda’s spouse be jealous,
When the dear wanton takes to bed
Her very shoes—because they’re fellows.’”

Creagh’s merry laugh was a source of healing in itself, and his departure to join the Prince put an edge to the zest of my desire to get back into the world. Just before leaving he fished a letter from his pocket and tossed it across the room to me.

“Egad, and you are the lucky man, Kenn,” he said. “The ladies pester us with praises of your valour. This morning one of the fair creatures gave me this to deliver, swearing I knew your whereabouts.”

’Twas a gay little note from my former playmate Antoinette Westerleigh, and inclosed was a letter to her from my sister. How eagerly I devoured Cloe’s letter for news of Aileen may be guessed.

MY DEAREST 'TOINETTE:—

Since last I saw you (so the letter ran) seems a century, and of course I am dying to come to town. No doubt the country is very healthy, but Lud! 'tis monstrous dull after a London season. I vow I am already a lifetime behind the fashions. Is't true that prodigious bustles are the rage? And while I think of it I wish you would call at Madame Ronald's and get the lylack lute-string scirt she is making for me.

Also at Duprez's for the butifull little hat I ordered. Please have them sent by carrier. I know I am a vast nuisance; 'tis the penalty, my dear, for having a country mawkin as your best friend.

Of course you know what that grate brother of mine has been at. Gaming I hear, playing ducks and drakes with his money, and fighting duels with your lover. For a time we were dreadfully anxious about him. What do you think he has sent me down to take care of for him? But you would never guess. My love, a Scotch girl, shy as one of her own mountain deer. I suppose when he is recovert of his wounds he will be down here to philander with her. Aileen Macleod is her name, and really I do not blame him. I like her purely myself. In a way quite new she is very taking; speaks the prettiest broken English, is very simple, sweet, and grateful. At a word the pink and white comes and goes in her cheeks as it never does in ours. I wish I could acquire her manner, but Alack! 'tis not to be learnt though I took lessons forever. The gracefull creature dances the Scottish flings divinely. She is not exactly butifull, but—well, I can see why the men think so and fall down in worship! By the way, she is very nearly in love—tho she does not know it—with that blundering brother of mine; says that “her heart iss always thanking him at all events.” If he knew how to play his cards—but there, the oaf will put his grate foot in it.

She came here with a shag-headed gillie of a servant, under the protection of a Captain Macdonald who is a very fine figure of a man. He was going to stay only an hour or two, but *Charles* persuaded him to stop three days. Charles teases me about him, swears the Captain is already my slave, but you may depend on't there is nothing in it. Last night we diverted ourselves with playing Hide the Thimble, and the others lost the Scotch Captain and me in the armory. He is a peck of fun. This morning he left for the North, and do you think the grate Mr. Impudence did not buss us both; Aileen because she is his cousin a hundred times removed and me because (what a reason!) “my eyes dared him.” Of course I was in a vast rage, which seemed to hily delight Captain Impudence. I don't see how he dared take so grate a preaviledge. Do you?

Aileen is almost drest, and I must go smart myself. My dear, an you love me, write to

Your own CLOE.

P. S.—Lard, I clear forgot! 'Tis a secret that the Scotch enchantress is here. You must be sure not to mention it, my dear, to your Sir Robert, But la! I have the utmost confidence in your discretion.

Conceive my dismay! Discretion and Antoinette Westerleigh were as far apart as the poles. What more likely than that the dashing little minx would undertake to rally her lover about Aileen, and that the adroit baronet would worm out of her the information he desired? The letter crystallized my desire to set out at once for Montagu Grange, and from there to take the road with Miss Macleod hotspur for Scotland. It appeared to me that the sooner we were out of England the better it would be for both of us.

I made the journey to the Grange by easy stages, following so far as I could little used roads and lanes on

account of a modest desire to avoid publicity. 'Twas early morning when I reached the Grange. I remember the birds were twittering a chorus as I rode under the great oaks to the house. Early as it was, Cloe and Aileen were already walking in the garden with their arms entwined about each other's waists in girl fashion. They made a picture taking enough to have satisfied a jaded connoisseur of beauty: the fair tall Highland lass, jimp as a willow wand, with the long-lashed blue eyes that looked out so shyly and yet so frankly on those she liked, and the merry brown-eyed English girl so ready of saucy tongue, so worldly wise and yet so innocent of heart.

Cloe came running to meet me in a flutter of excitement and Mistress Aileen followed more demurely down the path, though there was a Highland welcome in her frank face not to be denied. I slid from the horse and kissed Cloe. Miss Macleod gave me her hand.

"We are hoping you are quite well from your wounds," she said.

"Quite," I answered. "Better much for hearing your kind voices and seeing your bright faces."

I dare say I looked over-long into one of the bright faces, and for a punishment was snatched into confusion by my malapert sister.

"I didn't know you had heard my kind voice yet," mimicked Miss Madcap. "And are you thinking of holding Aileen's hand all day?"

My hand plumped to my side like a shot. Both of us flamed, I stammering apologies the while Cloe no doubt enjoyed hugely my embarrassment. 'Tis a sister's prerogative to teach her older brothers humility, and Cloe for one did not let it fall into neglect.

"To be sure I do not know the Highland custom in the matter," she was continuing complacently when Aileen hoist her with her own petard.

"I wass thinking that perhaps Captain Macdonald had taught you in the armory," she said quietly; and Cloe, to be in the fashion, ran up the red flag too.

It appeared that my plan for an immediate departure from England jumped with the inclination of Miss Macleod. She had received a letter from her brother, now in Scotland, whose plans in regard to her had been upset by the unexpected arrival of the Prince. He was extremely solicitous on her behalf, but could only suggest for her an acceptance of a long-standing invitation to visit Lady Strathmuir, a distant relative living in Surrey, until times grew more settled. To Aileen the thought of throwing herself upon the hospitality of one she had never met was extremely distasteful, and she hailed my proposal as an alternative much to be desired.

The disagreeable duty of laying before my lawyer the involved condition of my affairs had to be endured, and I sent for him at once to get it over with the sooner. He pulled a prodigious long face at my statement of the gaming debts I had managed to contract during my three months' experiment as the prodigal son in London, but though he was extraordinarily severe with me I made out in the end that affairs were not so bad as I had thought. The estate would have to be plastered with a mortgage, but some years of stiff economy and retrenchment, together with a ruthless pruning of the fine timber, would suffice to put me on my feet again. The expenditures of the household would have to be cut down, but Mr. Brief thought that a modest establishment befitting my rank might still be maintained. If I thought of marrying——

A ripple of laughter from the lawn, where Aileen and Charles were arranging fishing tackle, was wafted through the open window and cut athwart the dry speech of the lawyer. My eyes found her and lingered on the soft curves, the rose-leaf colouring, the eager face framed in a sunlit aureola of radiant hair. Already my mind had a trick of imagining her the mistress of the Grange. Did she sit for a moment in the seat that

had been my mother's my heart sang; did she pluck a posy or pour a cup of tea 'twas the same. "If I thought of marrying——" Well, 'twas a thing to be considered one day—when I came back from the wars.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE MATTER OF A KISS

It may be guessed that the music of the gray morn when we started found a ready echo in my heart. The whistle of a plover cut the breaking day, the meadow larks piped clear above us in chorus with the trilling of the thrush, the wimpling burn tinkled its song, and the joy that took me fairly by the throat was in tune with all of them. For what does a lover ask but to be one and twenty, to be astride a willing horse, and to be beside the one woman in the world for him? Sure 'tis heaven enough to watch the colour come and go in her face, to hear the lilt of her voice, and to see the changing light in her eye. What though at times we were shy as the wild rabbit, we were none the less happy for that. In our hearts there bubbled a childlike gaiety; we skipped upon the sunlit hilltops of life.

And here was the one drop of poison in the honey of my cup: that I was wearing an abominable misfit of a drab-coloured suit of homespun more adapted to some village tradesman than to a young cavalier of fashion, for on account of the hue and cry against me I had pocketed my pride and was travelling under an incognito. Nor did it comfort me one whit that Aileen also was furbished up in sombre gray to represent my sister, for she looked so taking in it that I vow 'twas more becoming than her finery. Yet I made the best of it, and many a good laugh we got from rehearsing our parts.

I can make no hand at remembering what we had to say to each other, nor does it matter; in cold type 'twould lose much of its charm. The merry prattle of her pretty broken English was set to music for me, and the very silences were eloquent of thrill. Early I discovered that I had not appreciated fully her mental powers, on account of a habit she had of falling into a shy silence when several were present. She had a nimble wit, an alert fancy, and a zest for life as earnest as it was refreshing. A score of times that day she was out of the shabby chaise to pick the wild flowers or to chat with the children by the wayside. The memory of her warm friendliness to me stands out the more clear contrasted with the frigid days that followed.

It may be thought by some that our course in travelling together bordered on the edge of the proprieties, but it must be remembered that the situation was a difficult one for us both. Besides which my sister Cloe was always inclined to be independent, of a romantical disposition, and herself young; as for Aileen, I doubt whether any thought of the conventions crossed her mind. Her people would be wearying to see her; her friend Kenneth Montagu had offered his services to conduct her home; Hamish Gorm was a jealous enough chaperone for any girl, and the maid that Cloe had supplied would serve to keep the tongues of the gossips from clacking.

We put up that first evening at The King's Arms, a great rambling inn of two stories which caught the trade of many of the fashionable world on their way to and from London. Aileen and I dined together at a table in the far end of the large dining-room. As I remember we were still uncommon merry, she showing herself very clever at odd quips and turns of expression. We found matter for jest in a large placard on the wall, with what purported to be a picture of me, the printed matter containing the usual description and offer of reward. Watching her, I was thinking that I had never known a girl more in love with life or with

so mobile a face when a large company of arrivals from London poured gaily into the room.

They were patched and powdered as if prepared for a ball rather than for the dust of the road. Dowagers, frigid and stately as marble, murmured racy gossip to each other behind their fans. Famous beauties flitted hither and thither, beckoning languid fops with their alluring eyes. Wits and beaux sauntered about elegantly even as at White's. 'Twas plain that this was a party *en route* for one of the great county houses near.

Aileen stared with wide-open eyes and parted lips at these great dames from the fashionable world about which she knew nothing. They were prominent members of the leading school for backbiting in England, and in ten minutes they had talked more scandal than the Highland lass had heard before in a lifetime. But the worst of the situation was that there was not one of them but would cry "Montagu!" when they clapped eyes on me. Here were Lord March, George Selwyn, Sir James Craven, Topham Beauclerc, and young Winton Westerleigh; Lady Di Davenport and the Countess Dowager of Rocksboro; the Hon. Isabel Stanford, Mistress Antoinette Westerleigh, and others as well known to me. They had taken us at unawares, and as Creagh would have put it in an Irish bull the only retreat possible for us was an advance through the enemy. At present they paid no more attention to us than they would to the wooden negro in front of a tobacco shop, but at any moment detection might confront me. Faith, here was a predicament! Conceive me, with a hundred guineas set upon my head, thrust into the very company in all England I would most have avoided.

And of all the people in the world they chanced on me as a topic of conversation. George Selwyn, strolling up and down the room, for want of something better to do, stopped in front of that confounded placard and began reading it aloud. Now I don't mind being described as "Tall, strong, well-built, and extremely good-looking; brown eyes and waving hair like ilk; carries himself with distinction;" but I grue at being set down as a common cutpurse, especially when I had taken the trouble to send back Sir Robert's jewelry at some risk to myself.

"Wonder what Montagu has done with himself," queried Beauclerc after Selwyn had finished.

"Or what Volney has done with him," muttered March behind his hand. "I'll lay two to one in ponies he never lives to cross another man."

"You're wrong, March, if you think Volney finished him. He's alive all right. I heard it from Denman that he got safe across to France. Pity Volney didn't pink the fellow through the heart for his d——d impudence in interfering; not that I can stand Volney either, curse the popinjay!" snarled Craven sourly.

"If Montagu reaches the continent, 'twill be a passover the Jews who hold his notes will not relish," suggested Selwyn in his sleepy way.

A pink-and-white-faced youth shimmering in cream satin was the animated heart of another group. His love for scandal and his facility for acquiring the latest tidbit made him the delight of many an old tabby cat. Now his eyes shone with the joy of imparting a delicious morsel.

"Egad, then, you're all wrong," he was saying in a shrill falsetto. "Stap me, the way of it was this! I have it on the best of authority and it comes direct, rot me if it doesn't! Sir Robert's man, Watkins, told Madame Bellevue's maid, from whom it came straight to Lord Pam's fellow and through him to old Methuselah, who mentioned it to——"

"You needn't finish tracing the lineage of the misinformation. We'll assume it began with Adam and ended with a dam—with a descendant of his," interrupted Craven with his usual insolence. "Now out with the lie!"

“Pon honour, Craven, ’tis gospel truth,” gasped Pink-and-White.

“Better send for a doctor then. If he tries to tell the truth for once he’ll strangle,” suggested Selwyn whimsically to March.

“Spit it out then!” bullied Craven coarsely.

“Oh, Lard! Your roughness gives me the flutters, Sir James. I’m all of a tremble. Split me, I can’t abide to be scolded! Er— Well, then, ’twas a Welsh widow they fought about—name of Gwynne and rich as Cræsus—old enough to be a grandmother of either of ’em, begad! Volney had first claim and Montagu cut in; swore he’d marry her if she went off the hooks next minute. They fought and Montagu fell at the first shot. Next day the old Begum ran off with her footman. That’s the story, you may depend on’t. Lud, yes!”

“You may depend on its being wrong in every particular,” agreed Lady Di coolly. “You’d better tell the story, ’Toinette. They’ll have it a hundred times worse.”

“Oh Lard! Gossip about my future husband. Not I!” giggled that lively young woman.

“Don’t be a prude, miss!” commanded the Dowager Countess sharply. “’Tis to stifle false reports you tell it.”

“Slidikins! An you put it as a duty,” simpered the young beauty. “’Twould seem that—it would appear—the story goes that— Do I blush?—that Sir Robert— Oh, let Lady Di tell it!”

Lady Di came to scratch with the best will in the world.

“To correct a false impression then; for no other reason I tell it save to kill worse rumours. Everybody knows I hate scandal.”

“’Slife, yes! Everybody knows that,” agreed Craven, leering over at March.

“Sir Robert Volney then was much taken with a Scotch girl who was visiting in London, and of course she dreamed air castles and fell in love with him. ’Twas Joan and Darby all the livelong day, but alack! the maid discovered, as maids will, that Sir Robert’s intentions were—not of the best, and straightway the blushing rose becomes a frigid icicle. Well, this Northern icicle was not to be melted, and Sir Robert was for trying the effect of a Surrey hothouse. In her brother’s absence he had the maid abducted and carried to a house of his in town.”

“’Slife! A story for a play. And what then?” cried Pink-and-White.

“Why then—enter Mr. Montagu with a ‘Stay, villain!’ It chanced that young Don Quixote was walking through the streets for the cooling of his blood mayhap, much overheated by reason of deep play. He saw, he followed, at a fitting time he broke into the apartment of the lady. Here Sir Robert discovered them _____”

“The lady all unready, alackaday!” put in the Honourable Isabel, from behind a fan to hide imaginary blushes.

“Well, something easy of attire to say the least,” admitted Lady Di placidly.

“I’ faith then, Montagu must make a better lover than Sir Robert,” cried March.

“Every lady to her taste. And later they fought on the way to Surrey. Both wounded, no graves needed. The girl nursed Montagu back to health, and they fled to France together,” concluded the narrator.

“And the lady—is she such a beauty?” queried Beauclerc.

“Slidikins! I don’t know. She must have points. No Scotch mawkin would draw Sir Robert’s eye.”

You are to imagine with what a burning face I sat listening to this devil's brew of small talk. What their eyes said to each other of innuendo, what their lifted brows implied, and what they whispered behind white elegant hands, was more maddening than the open speech. For myself, I did not value the talk of the cats at one jack straw, but for this young girl sitting so still beside me— By Heaven, I dared not look at her. Nor did I know what to do, how to stop them without making the matter worse for her, and I continued to sit in an agony grizzling on the gridiron of their calumnies. Had they been talking lies outright it might have been easily borne, but there was enough of truth mixed in the gossip to burn the girl with the fires of shame.

At the touch of a hand I turned to look into a face grown white and chill, all the joy of life struck out of it. The girl's timorous eyes implored me to spare her more of this scene.

"Oh Kenneth, get me away from here. I will be dying of shame. Let us be going at once," she asked in a low cry.

"There is no way out except through the crowd of them. Will you dare make the attempt? Should I be recognized it may be worse for you."

"I am not fearing if you go with me. And at all events anything is better than this."

There was a chance that we might pass through unobserved, and I took it; but I was white-hot with rage and I dare say my aggressive bearing bewrayed me. In threading our way to the door I brushed accidentally against Mistress Westerleigh. She drew aside haughtily, then gave a little scream of recognition.

"Kenn Montagu, of all men in the world—and turned Quaker, too. Gog's life, 'tis mine, 'tis mine! The hundred guineas are mine. I call you all to witness I have taken the desperate highwayman. 'Tall, strong, and extremely well-looking; carries himself like a gentleman.' This way, sir," she cried merrily, and laying hold of my coat-tails began to drag me toward the men.

There was a roar of laughter at this, and the pink-white youth lounged forward to offer me a hand of welcome I took pains not to see.

"Faith, the lady has the right of it, Montagu. That big body of yours is worth a hundred guineas now if it never was before," laughed Selwyn.

"Sorry to disappoint the lady, but unfortunately my business carries me in another direction," I said stiffly.

"But Lud! 'Tis not fair. You're mine. I took you, and I want the reward," cries the little lady with the sparkling eyes.

Aileen stood by my side like a queen cut out of marble, turning neither to the right nor to the left, her head poised regally on her fine shoulders as if she saw none in the room worthy a look.

"This must be the baggage about which they fought. Faith, as fine a piece as I have seen," said Craven to March in an audible aside, his bold eyes fixed insolently on the Highland girl.

Aileen heard him, and her face flamed. I set my teeth and swore to pay him for that some day, but I knew this to be no fitting time for a brawl. Despite me the fellow forced my hand. He planted himself squarely in our way and ogled my charge with impudent effrontery. Me he quite ignored, while his insulting eyes raked her fore and aft. My anger seethed, boiled over. Forward slid my foot behind his heel, my forearm under his chin. I threw my weight forward in a push. His head went back as though shot from a catapult, and next moment Sir James Craven measured his length on the ground. With the girl on my arm I pushed through the company to the door. They cackled after me like solan-geese, but I shut and locked the door in

their faces and led Aileen to her room. She marched up the stairs like a goddess, beautiful in her anger as one could desire. The Gaelic heart is a good hater, and 'twas quite plain that Miss Macleod had inherited a capacity for anger.

"How dare they? How dare they? What have I done that they should talk so? There are three hundred claymores would be leaping from the scabbard for this. My grief! That they would talk so of my father's daughter."

She was superbly beautiful in her wrath. It was the black fury of the Highland loch in storm that leaped now from her eyes. Like a caged and wounded tigress she strode up and down the room, her hands clenched and her breast heaving, an impetuous flood of Gaelic pouring from her mouth.

For most strange logic commend me to a woman's reasoning, I had been in no way responsible for the scene down-stairs, but somehow she lumped me blindly with the others in her mind, at least so far as to punish me because I had seen and heard. Apparently 'twas enough that I was of their race and class, for when during a pause I slipped in my word of soothing explanation the uncorked vials of her rage showered down on me. Faith, I began to think that old Jack Falstaff had the right of it in his rating of discretion, and the maid appearing at that moment I showed a clean pair of heels and left her alone with her mistress.

As I was descending the stairs a flunky in the livery of the Westerleighs handed me a note. It was from Antoinette, and in a line requested me to meet her at once in the summer-house of the garden. In days past I had coquetted many an hour away with her. Indeed, years before we had been lovers in half-earnest boy and girl fashion, and after that the best of friends. Grimly I resolved to keep the appointment and to tell this little worldling some things she needed much to know.

I found her waiting. Her back was turned, and though she must have heard me coming she gave no sign. I was still angry at her for her share in what had just happened and I waited coldly for her to begin. She joined me in the eloquent silence of a Quaker meeting.

"Well, I am here," I said at last.

"Oh, it's you." She turned on me, mighty cold and haughty. "Sir, I take it as a great presumption that you dare to stay at the same inn with me after attempting to murder my husband that is to be."

"Murder!" I gasped, giving ground in dismay at this unexpected charge.

"Murder was the word I used, sir. Do you not like it?"

"'Twas a fair fight," I muttered.

"Was it not you that challenged? Did you not force it on him?"

"Yes, but——"

"And then you dare to come philandering here after me. Do you think I can change lovers as often as gloves, sir? Or as often as you?"

"Madam, I protest——"

"La! You protest! Did you not come here to see me? Answer me that, sir!" With an angry stamp of her foot.

"Yes, Mistress Westerleigh, your note——"

"And to philander? Do you deny it?"

“Deny it. Odzooks, yes! ’Tis the last thing I have in my mind,” I rapped out mighty short. “I have done with women and their follies. I begin to see why men of sense prefer to keep their freedom.”

“Do you, Kenn? And was the other lady so hard on you? Did she make you pay for our follies? Poor Kenn!” laughed my mocking tormentor with so sudden a change of front that I was quite nonplussed. “And did you think I did not know my rakehelly lover Sir Robert better than to blame you for his quarrels?”

I breathed freer. She had taken the wind out of my sails, for I had come purposing to give her a large piece of my mind. Divining my intention, womanlike she had created a diversion by carrying the war into the country of the enemy.

She looked winsome in the extreme. Little dimples ran in and out her peach-bloom cheeks. In her eyes danced a kind of innocent devilry, and the alluring mouth was the sweetest Cupid’s bow imaginable. Laughter rippled over her face like the wind in golden grain. Mayhap my eyes told what I was thinking, for she asked in a pretty, audacious imitation of the Scotch dialect Aileen was supposed to speak,

“Am I no’ bonny, Kenneth?”

“You are that, ’Toinette.”

“But you love her better?” she said softly.

I told her yes.

“And yet——” She turned and began to pull a honeysuckle to pieces, pouting in the prettiest fashion conceivable.

The graceful curves of the lithe figure provoked me. There was a challenge in her manner, and my blood beat with a surge. I made a step or two toward her.

“And yet?” I repeated, over her shoulder.

One by one the petals floated away.

“There was a time——” She spoke so softly I had to bend over to hear.

I sighed. “A thousand years ago, ’Toinette.”

“But love is eternal, and in eternity a thousand years are but as a day.”

The long curving lashes were lifted for a moment, and the dancing brown eyes flashed into mine. While mine held them they began to dim. On my soul the little witch contrived to let the dew of tears glisten there. Now a woman’s tears are just the one thing Kenneth Montagu cannot resist. After all I am not the first man that has come to make war and stayed to make love.

“’Toinette! ’Toinette!” I chided, resolution melting fast.

“And y’are commanded to love your neighbours, Kenn.”

I vow she was the takingest madcap in all England, and not the worst heart neither. I am no Puritan, and youth has its day in which it will be served. My scruples took wing.

“Faith, one might travel far and not do better,” I told her. “When the gods send their best to a man he were a sorry knave to complain.”

Yet I stood helpless, in longing desire and yet afraid to dare. No nicety of conscience held me now, rather apprehension. I had not lived my one and twenty years without learning that a young woman may be free of speech and yet discreet of action, that alluring eyes are oft mismated with prim maiden conscience. ’Tis

in the blood of some of them to throw down the gauntlet to a man's courage and then to trample on him for daring to accept the challenge.

Her eyes derided me. A scoffing smile crept into that mocking face of hers. No longer I shilly-shallied. She had brought me to dance, and she must pay the piper.

"Modesty is a sweet virtue, but it doesn't butter any bread," I cried gaily. "Egad, I embrace my temptation."

Which same I did, and the temptress too.

"Am I your temptation, Adam?" quoth the lady presently.

"I vow y'are the fairest enticement, Eve, that ever trod the earth since the days of the first Garden. For this heaven of your lips I'll pay any price in reason. A year in purgatory were cheap——"

I stopped, my florid eloquence nipped in bud, for the lady had suddenly begun to disengage herself. Her glance shot straight over my shoulder to the entrance of the summer-house. Divining the presence of an intruder, I turned.

Aileen was standing in the doorway looking at us with an acrid, scornful smile that went to my heart like a knife.

CHAPTER VII

MY LADY RAGES

I was shaken quite out of my exultation. I stood raging at myself in a defiant scorn, struck dumb at the folly that will let a man who loves one woman go sweethearting with another. Her eyes stabbed me, the while I stood there dogged yet grovelling, no word coming to my dry lips. What was there to be said? The tie that bound me to Aileen was indefinable, tenuous, not to be phrased; yet none the less it existed. I stood convicted, for I had tacitly given her to understand that no woman found place in my mind save her, and at the first chance she found another in my arms. Like a detected schoolboy in presence of the rod I awaited my sentence, my heart a trip-hammer, my face a picture of chagrin and dread.

For just a moment she held me in the balance with that dreadful smile on her face, my day of judgment come to earth, then turned and away without a word. I flung wildly after her, intent on explaining what could not be explained. In the night I lost her and went up and down through the shrubbery calling her to come forth, beating the currant and gooseberry bushes in search of her. A shadow flitted past me toward the house, and at the gate I intercepted the girl. Better I had let her alone. My heart misgave me at sight of her face; indeed the whole sweep of her lithesome reedy figure was pregnant with Highland scorn and pride.

“Oh, Aileen, in the arbour——” I was beginning, when she cut me short.

“And I am thinking I owe you an apology for my intrusion. In troth, Mr. Montagu, my interruption of your love-makings was not intentional.”

Her voice gave me the feel of being drenched with ice-water.

“If you will let me explain, Aileen——”

“Indeed, and there iss nothing to explain, sir. It will be none of my business who you are loving, and—— Will you open the gate, Mr. Montagu?”

“But I must explain; ’twas a madness of the blood. You do not understand——”

“And gin I never understand, Mr. Montagu, the lift (sky) will not fall. Here iss a great to-do about nothing,” she flung back with a kind of bitter jauntiness.

“Aileen,” I cried, a little wildly, “you will not cast me off without a hearing. Somehow I must make it clear, and you must try——”

“My name it iss Miss Macleod, and I would think it clear enough already at all events. I will be thanking you to let me pass, sir.”

Her words bit, not less the scorch of her eyes. My heart was like running water.

“And is this an end to all— Will you let so small a thing put a period to our good comradeship?” I cried.

“Since you mention it I would never deny that I am under obligations to you, sir, which my brother will be

blithe to repay——”

“By Heaven, I never mentioned obligations; I never thought of them. Is there no friendship in your heart for me?”

“Your regard iss a thing I have valued, but”—there was a little break in the voice which she rode over roughshod—“I can very well be getting along without the friendships of that girl’s lover.”

She snatched open the gate and flung past me to the house, this superb young creature, tall, slim, supple, a very Diana in her rage, a woman too if one might judge by the breasts billowing with rising sobs. More slow I followed, quite dashed to earth. All that I had gained by months of service in one moment had been lost. She would think me another of the Volney stamp, and her liking for me would turn to hate as with him.

A low voice from the harbour called “Kenn!” But I had had enough of gallivanting for one night and I held my way sullenly to the house. Swift feet pattered down the path after me, and presently a little hand fell on my arm. I turned, sulky as a baited bear.

“I am so sorry, Kenn,” said Mistress Antoinette demurely.

My sardonic laughter echoed cheerlessly. “That there is no more mischief to your hand. Oh never fear! You’ll find some other poor breeched gull shortly.”

The brown dovelike eyes of the little rip reproached me.

“’Twill all come right, Kenn. She’ll never think the worse of you for this.”

“I’ll be no more to her than a glove outworn. I have lost the only woman I could ever love, and through my own folly, too.”

“Alackaday, Kenn! Y’ ’ave much to learn about women yet. She will think the more of you for it when her anger is past.”

“Not she. One of your fashionables might, but not Aileen.”

“Pooh! I think better of her than you. She’s not all milk and water. There’s red blood in her veins, man. Spunk up and brazen it out. Cock your chin and whistle it off bravely. Faith, I know better men than you who would not look so doleful over one of ’Toinette Westerleigh’s kisses. If I were a man I would never kiss and be sorry for all the maids in Christendom.”

The saucy piquant tilt to her chin was a sight for the gods to admire.

“You forget I love her.”

“Oh, you play on one string. She’s not the only maid i’ the world,” pouted the London beauty.

“She’s the only one for me,” I said stubbornly, and then added dejectedly, “and she’s not for me neither.”

The little rogue began to laugh. “I give you up, Kenn. Y’are as moonstruck a lover as ever I saw. Here’s for a word of comfort, which you don’t deserve at all. For a week she will be a thunder-cloud, then the sun will beam more brightly than ever. But don’t you be too submissive. La! Women cannot endure a wheedling lover.”

After that bit of advice my sage little monitor fell sober and explained to me her reason for sending me the note. It appeared that Sir Robert Volney was due to meet the party at the inn that very evening, and Miss Westerleigh was of opinion that I and my charge would do well to take the road at once. I was of that mind myself. I lost no time in reaching the house and ordering a relay of horses for our immediate travel.

Then I took the stairs three at a time and came knocking at Aileen's door.

"Who iss there?" asked a small voice, full of tears and muffled in a pillow.

Her distress went to my heart, none the less because I who had been the cause of it could not heal it.

"Tis I—Kenneth Montagu. Open the door, please."

There was a moment's silence, then—

"I am not wishing to see Mr. Montagu to-night."

"Not for the world would I trouble you, Miss Macleod, but there is a matter I have to disclose that touches us nearly."

"I think you will not have heard aright. I am desiring to be alone, sir," she answered, the frost in her voice.

It may be guessed that this dismissal chafed me. My eagerness was daunted, but yet I would not be fubbed off.

"Miss Macleod, you may punish me as much as you like some other time," I cried desperately, "but 'fore God! if you do not open the door you will regret it till the last day of your life."

"Are you threatening me, sir?" she asks, mighty haughty.

"Threatening—no! I do not threaten, but warn. This matter is of life and death, not to be played with;" and to emphasize my words I mentioned the name of Volney.

She came raging to the door and whipped it open very sudden. Her affronted eyes might have belonged to a queen, but the stains on her cheeks betrayed her.

"Well, and what iss this important matter that cannot be waiting? Perhaps Mr. Montagu mistakes this for the room of Mistress Westerleigh."

I told her that Sir Robert was expected shortly to arrive at the inn, and that we must be on the road at once. She thanked me very primly for the information, but declared she would not trouble me further, that she meant to abide at the inn all night no matter who came; moreover, that when she did leave Hamish Gorm would be sufficient guard. I argued, cajoled, warned, threatened, but she was not to be moved. The girl took a perverse pleasure in thwarting me, and the keener I grew the more dour grew she. We might have disputed the point an hour had I not come to my senses and appeared to give way.

Suspecting that the girl's fears of Sir Robert would reassert themselves when she was left to herself, I sought her maid and easily induced the girl to propose to her mistress a departure without my knowledge. The suggestion worked like a charm, and fifteen minutes later I had the pleasure of seeing the chaise roll out of the lighted yard into the night. Need it be said that Kenneth Montagu was ahorse and after the coach within a few minutes.

All night I jogged behind them, and in the morning rode up to the inn where they stopped for breakfast. From Mistress Aileen I got the slightest bow in the world as I passed to my solitary breakfast at a neighbouring table. Within the hour they were away again, and I after to cover the rear. Late in the day the near wheeler fell very lame. The rest of the animals were dead beat, and I rode to the nearest hamlet to get another horse. The night was falling foul, very mirk, with a rising wind, and methought the lady's eyes lightened when she saw me return with help to get them out of their difficulty. She thanked me stiffly with a very straight lip.

“At all events there will be no end to the obligations I am under, Mr. Montagu. They will be piling high as Ben Nevis,” she said, but ’twould have taken a penetrating man to have discovered any friendliness in the voice.

Yet henceforth I made myself one of the party, admitted on sufferance with a very bad grace. More than once I tried to break through the chill conventionals that made the staple of our conversation, but the girl was ice to me. In the end I grew stiff as she. I would ride beside the coach all day with scarce a word, wearying for a reconciliation and yet nourishing angry pride. When speech appeared to be demanded between us ’twas of the most formal. Faith, I think we were liker a pair of spoilt children than sensible grown folks.

While we were still in the northern counties rumours began to reach us that General Cope’s army had been cut to pieces by the Highlanders. The stories ran that not a single man had escaped, that the clans, twenty thousand strong, were headed for England, that they were burning and destroying as they advanced. Incredible reports of all kinds sprang out of the air, and the utmost alarm prevailed. The report of Cope’s defeat was soon verified. We met more than one redcoat speeding south on a foam-flecked weary steed, and it did not need the second sight to divine that the dispatches they carried spoke loudly of disaster fallen and of reinforcements needed.

After we had crossed the border parties of foraging Highlanders began to appear occasionally, but a word in the Gaelic from Hamish Gorm always served as a password for us. To make short, early in October we reached the Scottish capital, the formal relations which had been established between Miss Macleod and me continuing to the end of the journey.

There lived in Edinburgh an unmarried aunt of Aileen, a Miss Flora MacBean by name, and at her house I left the girl while I went to notify her brother of our arrival. I found him lodged in High Street near the old Flesh-market Close. Malcolm Macleod was a fine manly fellow of about three and thirty, lusty and well-proportioned, very tanned and ruddy. He had a quick lively eye and a firm good-humoured mouth. In brief, he was the very picture of a frank open-hearted Highland gentleman, and in the gay Macleod tartan looked as gallant a figure of a soldier as one would wish to see. He greeted me with charming friendliness and expressed himself as deeply gratified for my care of his sister, offering again and again to put himself at my service in any way I might desire.

We walked down the street together, and more than once a shot plumped at our feet, for the city was under fire from the Hanoverian garrison at the castle. Everywhere the clansmen were in evidence. Barefooted and barelegged Celts strutted about the city with their bonnets scrugged low on their heads, the hair hanging wild over their eyes and the matted beards covering their faces. For the most part they were very ragged, and tanned exceedingly wherever the flesh took a peep through their outworn plaids. They ran about the streets in groups, looking in shop windows like children and talking their outlandish gibberish; then presently their Highland pride would assert itself at the smile of some chance passer and would send them swinging proudly off as though they had better things at home.

Out of a tobacco shop came Captain Donald Roy singing blithely,

“‘Will ye play me fair,
Highland laddie, Highland laddie?’”

He was of course in the full Macdonald tartan regimentals—checkered kilt, sporran, plaid, a brace of pistols, a dirk in his stocking, and claymore. At sight of me his face lighted and he came running forward with both hands outstretched.

“And is it you at last, Kenn? Man, but I’ve been wearying for a sight of your honest face. I was whiles

thinking you must have given us the go-by. Fegs, but it's a braw day and a sight guid for sair een to see you, lad. You will have heard how we gave Johnnie Cope his kail through his reek." He broke off to hum:—

“Now Johnnie, troth, ye werena blate, to come wi' the news o' your ain,
And leave your men in sic a strait, so early in the morning.’

“And did you bring my kinswoman back safe with you? I'se wad ye found the journey no' ower lang;” and he cocked a merry eye at me.

I flushed, and introduced him to Major Macleod, who took occasion to thank him for his services to his sister. They fell into a liking for each other at once. When the major was called aside by one of his gillies a moment later, Macdonald expressed his trust of the other in the old Scotch saying,

“Yon's a man to ride the water wi', Kenneth.”

A curious sight illustrative of the Highland way of “lifting” what took their fancy occurred as we were all three walking toward the house of Macleod's aunt. Three shag-headed gillies in the tattered Cameron tartan dragged an innkeeper from his taproom and set him down squat on the causeway. Without even a by-your-leave they took from his feet a pair of new shoes with silver buckles. He protested that he was a loyal Jacobite.

“Sae muckle ta better. She'll no' grumble to shange a progue for the Prince's guid,” one of the caterans answered cheerfully by way of comfort.

To my surprise the two Highland gentlemen watched this high-handed proceeding with much amusement, enjoying not a little the ridiculous figure cut by the frightened, sputtering host. I asked them if they were not going to interfere.

“What for would we do that at all events?” asked the Macdonald. “Man, Montagu, but you whiles have unco queer notions for so wise a lad. It's as natural for a Hielander to despoil a Southron as for a goose to gang barefit. What would Lochiel think gin we fashed wi' his clansmen at their ploy? Na, na! I wad be sweir to be sae upsitten (impertinent). It wadna be tellin' a Macdonald, I'm thinkin'.”

Aileen was so prettily glad to see her brother and so friendly with Donald Roy, so full of gay chatter and eager reminiscence, that I felt myself quite dashed by the note of reserve which crept into her voice and her manner whenever she found it incumbent to speak to me. Her laugh would be ringing clear as the echo of steel in frost, and when Donald lugged me into the talk she would fall mim as a schoolgirl under the eye of her governess. Faith, you would have thought me her dearest enemy, instead of the man that had risked life for her more than once. Here is a pretty gratitude, I would say to myself in a rage, hugging my anger with the baby thought that she would some day scourge herself for this after I were killed in battle. Here is a fine return for loyal service rendered, and the front of my offending is nothing more than the saluting an old playmate.

“Man, Kenneth, but you hae played the cuddie brawly,” was Donald's comforting remark to me after we had left. “You maun hae made an awfu' bauchle of it. When last I saw the lady she hoisted a fine colour when I daffed about you, and now she glowers at you in a no' just friendly way.”

I admitted sadly that 'twas so and told him the reason, for Donald Roy had a wide observation of life and a varied experience with the sex that made him a valuable counsellor. The situation amused him hugely, but what he could find of humour in it was more than I could see.

“Deil hae't, but yon quean Antoinette will be a geyan ettercap (madcap). Tony Creagh has been telling me

about her; he's just a wee thingie touched there himsel'."

"Pardon me," I interrupted a little stiffly, "but I think I did not give the name of the lady."

The Highlander looked at me dryly with a pawky smile.

"Hoots, man! I ken that fine, but I'm no a fule. You named over the party and I picked the lady that suited the specefications." Then he began to chuckle: "I wad hae liked dooms weel to hae seen you stravaiging (wandering) through the grosset (gooseberry) bushes after the lass."

I told him huffily that if that was all he could say I had better have kept the story to myself. I had come for advice, not to be laughed at. Donald flashed his winsome smile and linked an arm in mine.

"Well then, and here's advice for you, man. Jouk (duck) and let the jaw (wave) go by. Gin it were me the colder she were the better I wad like it. Dinna you see that the lass rages because she likes you fine; and since she's a Hieland maid brought up under the blue lift she hasna learnt to hate and smile in the same breath."

"I make neither head nor tail of your riddles," I told him impatiently. "By your way of it so far as I can make out she both likes and hates me. Now how can that be?"

Captain Macdonald's droll eye appeared to pity me. "Kenneth, bairn, but you're an awfu' ignoramus. You ken naething ava about the lassies. I'm wondering what they learnt you at Oxford. Gin it's the same to you we'll talk of something mair within your comprehension." And thereupon he diverted the conversation to the impending invasion of England by the Highland army. Presently I asked him what he thought of the Prince now that he had been given a chance to study the Young Chevalier at closer range, and I shall never forget the eager Highlander's enthusiastic answer.

"From the head to the heel of him he is a son of Kings, kind-hearted, gallant, modest. He takes all hearts by storm. Our Highland laddie is the bravest man I ever saw, not to be rash, and the most cautious, not to be a coward. But you will be judging for yourself when you are presented at the ball on Tuesday."

I told him that as yet I had no invitation to the ball.

"That's easy seen to. The Chevalier O'Sullivan makes out the list. I'll drop a flea in his lug (ear)."

Next day was Sunday, and I arrayed myself with great care to attend the church at which one Macvicar preached; to be frank I didn't care a flip of my fingers what the doctrine was he preached; but I had adroitly wormed out of Miss MacBean that he was the pastor under whom she sat. Creagh called on me before I had set out, and I dragged him with me, he protesting much at my unwonted devotion.

I dare say he understood it better when he saw my eyes glued to the pew where Miss Aileen sat with her aunt in devout attention. What the sermon was to have been about we never knew, on account of an interruption which prevented us from hearing it. During the long prayer I was comfortably watching the back of Aileen's head and the quarter profile of her face when Creagh nudged me. I turned to find him looking at me out of a very comical face, and this was the reason for it. The hardy Macvicar was praying for the Hanoverians and their cause.

"Bless the King," he was saying boldly. "Thou knows what King I mean— May the crown sit easy on his head for lang. And for the young man that is come among us to seek an earthly crown, we beseech Thee in mercy to take him to Thyself, and give him a crown of glory."

One could have heard a pin fall in the hush, and then the tense rustle that swept over the church and drowned the steady low voice that never faltered in the prayer.

“Egad, there’s a hit for the Prince straight from the shoulder,” chuckled the Irishman by my side. “Faith, the Jacks are leaving the church to the Whigs. There goes the Major, Miss Macleod, and her aunt.”

He was right. The prayer had ended and the Macleod party were sailing down the aisle. Others followed suit, and presently we joined the stream that poured out of the building to show their disapproval. ’Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good. Miss MacBean invited Creagh and me to join them in dinner, and methought that my goddess of disdain was the least thing warmer to me than she had been in weeks. For the rest of the day I trod on air.

CHAPTER VIII

CHARLES EDWARD STUART

A beautifully engrossed invitation to the Prince's ball having duly arrived from his Secretary the Chevalier O'Sullivan, I ask you to believe that my toilet Tuesday evening was even more a work of art than that of Sunday. In huge disorder scarfs, lace cravats, muffs, and other necessary equipment were littered about the room. I much missed the neat touch of my valet Simpkins, and the gillie Hamish Gorm, whom Major Macleod had put at my service, did not supply his place by a deal, since he knew no more of patching the face or powdering a periwig than he had arrived at by the light of nature. But despite this handicap I made shift to do myself justice before I set off for the lodgings of Lord Balmerino, by whom I was to be presented.

'Twas long since the Scottish capital had been so gay as now, for a part of the policy of the Young Chevalier was to wear a brave front before the world. He and his few thousand Highlanders were pledged to a desperate undertaking, but it was essential that the waverers must not be allowed to suspect how slender were the chances of success. One might have thought from the splendour of his court and from the serene confidence exhibited by the Prince and his chiefs that the Stuarts were already in peaceable possession of the entire dominions of their ancestors. A vast concourse of well-dressed people thronged to Holyrood House from morning till night to present their respects to Prince Charles Edward. His politeness and affability, as well as the charms of his conversation and the graces of his person, swept the ladies especially from their lukewarm allegiance to the Hanoverians. They would own no lover who did not don the white cockade of Jacobitism. They would hesitate at no sacrifice to advance the cause of this romantic young gambler who used swords for dice. All this my three days residence in the city had taught me. I was now to learn whether a personal meeting with him would inspire me too with the ardent devotion that animated my friends.

A mixed assembly we found gathered in the picture gallery of Holyrood House. Here were French and Irish adventurers, Highland chiefs and Lowland gentlemen, all emulating each other in loyalty to the ladies who had gathered from all over Scotland to dance beneath the banner of the white rose. The Hall was a great blaze of moving colour, but above the tartans and the plaids, the mixed reds, greens, blues, and yellows, everywhere fluttered rampant the white streamers and cockades of the Stuarts.

No doubt there were here sober hearts, full of anxious portent for the future, but on the surface at least was naught but merriment. The gayest abandon prevailed. Strathspey and reel and Highland fling alternated with the graceful dances of France and the rollicking jigs of Ireland. Plainly this was no state ceremonial, rather an international frolic to tune all hearts to a common glee. We were on the top of fortune's wave. Had we not won for the Young Chevalier by the sword the ancient capital of his family, and did not the road to London invite us southward? The pipers of each clan in turn dirled out triumphant marches, and my heart began to beat in faster time. Water must have filled the veins of a man who could stand unmoved such contagious enthusiasm. For me, I confess it, a climax came a moment later that made my eyes swim.

Balmerino was talking with Malcolm Macleod and James Hepburn of Keith, a model of manly simplicity and honour who had been “out” in the ’15; and as usual their talk fell on our enterprise and its gallant young leader. Keith narrated a story of how the Young Chevalier, after a long day’s march on foot, had led the army three miles out of its way in order to avoid disturbing the wife of a cottar who had fallen asleep at the critical stage of a severe illness. Balmerino capped it with another anecdote of his dismounting from his horse after the battle of Gladsmuir to give water and attendance to a wounded English soldier of Cope’s army.

Macleod smiled, eyes sparkling. “He iss every inch the true prince. He can tramp the hills with a Highlander all day and never weary, he can sleep on pease-straw as well as on a bed of down, can sup on brose in five minutes, and win a battle in four. Oh, yes, he will be the King for Malcolm Macleod.”

While he was still speaking there fell over the assembly a sudden stillness. The word was passed from lips to lips, “The Prince comes.” Every eye swept to the doorway. Men bowed deep and women curtsied low. A young man was entering slowly on the arm of Lord George Murray.

“The Prince!” whispered Balmerino to me.

The pipes crashed out a measure of “Wha’ll be King but Charlie?” then fell into quiet sudden as they had begun. “Dhia theasing an Righ!” (God save the King) cried a splendid young Highland chief in a voice that echoed through the hall.

Clanranald’s cry was lifted to the rafters by a hundred throats. A hundred claymores leaped to air, and while the skirling bagpipes pealed forth, “The King shall enjoy his own again,” Charles Stuart beneath an arch of shining steel trod slowly down the hall to a dais where his fathers had sat before him.

If the hearts of the ladies had surrendered at discretion, faith! we of the other sex were not much tardier. The lad was every inch a prince. His after life did not fulfil the promise of his youth, but at this time he was one to see, and once having seen, to love. All the great charm of his race found expression in him. Gallant, gracious, generous, tender-hearted in victory and cheerful in defeat (as we had soon to learn, alas!), even his enemies confessed this young Stuart a worthy leader of men. Usually suffused with a gentle pensiveness not unbecoming, the ardour of his welcome had given him on this occasion the martial bearing of a heroic young Achilles. With flushed cheek and sparkling eye he ascended the dais.

“Ladies, gentlemen, my loyal Highlanders, friends all, the tongue of Charles Stuart has no words to tell the warm message of his heart. Unfriended and alone he came among you, resolved with the help of good swords to win back that throne on which a usurper sits, or failing in that to perish in the attempt. How nobly you our people have rallied to our side in this undertaking to restore the ancient liberties of the kingdom needs not be told. To the arbitrament of battle and to the will of God we confidently appeal, and on our part we pledge our sacred honour neither to falter nor to withdraw till this our purpose is accomplished. To this great task we stand plighted, so help us God and the right.”

’Tis impossible to conceive the effect of these few simple sentences. Again the pipes voiced our dumb emotion in that stirring song,

“We’ll owre the water and owre the sea,
We’ll owre the water to Charlie;
Come weal, come woe, we’ll gather and go,
And live and die wi’ Charlie.”

The mighty cheer broke forth again and seemed to rock the palace, but deeper than all cheering was the feeling that found expression in long-drawn breath and broken sob and glimmering tear. The gallant lad

had trusted us, had put his life in our keeping; we highly resolved to prove worthy of that trust.

At a signal from the Prince the musicians struck up again the dance, and bright eyes bedimmed with tears began to smile once more. With a whispered word Balmerino left me and made his way to the side of the Prince, about whom were grouped the Duke of Perth, Lord Lewis Gordon, Lord Elcho, the ill-fated Kilmarlock, as well as Lochiel, Cluny, Macleod, Clanranald, and other Highland gentlemen who had taken their fortune in their hands at the call of this young adventurer with the enchanting smile. To see him was to understand the madness of devotion that had carried away these wise gray-haired gentlemen, but to those who never saw him I despair of conveying in cold type the subtle quality of charm that radiated from him. In the very bloom of youth, tall, slender, and handsome, he had a grace of manner not to be resisted. To condescend to the particulars of his person: a face of perfect oval very regular in feature; large light blue eyes shaded by beautifully arched brows; nose good and of the Roman type; complexion fair, mouth something small and effeminate, forehead high and full. He was possessed of the inimitable reserve and bearing that mark the royal-born, and that despite his genial frankness. On this occasion he wore his usual light-coloured peruke with the natural hair combed over the front, a tartan short coat on the breast of which shone the star of the order of St. Andrews, red velvet small-clothes, and a silver-hilted rapier. The plaid he ordinarily carried had been doffed for a blue sash wrought with gold.

All this I had time to note before Lord Balmerino rejoined me and led me forward to the presentation. The Prince separated himself from the group about him and came lightly down the steps to meet me. I fell on my knee and kissed his hand, but the Prince, drawing me to my feet, embraced me.

“My gallant Montagu,” he cried warmly. “Like father, like son. God knows I welcome you, both on your own account and because you are one of the first English gentlemen to offer his sword to the cause of his King.”

I murmured that my sword would be at his service till death. To put me at my ease he began to question me about the state of public feeling in England concerning the enterprise. What information I had was put at his disposal, and I observed that his grasp of the situation appeared to be clear and incisive. He introduced me to the noblemen and chiefs about him, and I was wise enough to know that if they made much of me it was rather for the class I was supposed to represent than for my own poor merits. Presently I fell back to make way for another gentleman about to be presented. Captain Macdonald made his way to me and offered a frank hand in congratulation.

“Fore God, Montagu, you have leaped gey sudden into favour. Deil hae’t, Red Donald brought with him a hundred claymores and he wasna half so kenspeckle (conspicuous). I’ll wad your fortune’s made, for you hae leaped in heels ower hurdies,” he told me warmly.

From affairs of state to those of the heart may be a long cast, but the mind of one-and-twenty takes it at a bound. My eye went questing, fell on many a blushing maid and beaming matron, at last singled out my heart’s desire. She was teaching a Highland dance to a graceful cavalier in white silk breeches, flowered satin waistcoat, and most choicely powdered periwig, fresh from the friseur. His dainty muff and exquisite clouded cane depended from a silken loop to proclaim him the man of fashion. Something characteristic in his easy manner, though I saw but his back, chilled me to an indefinable premonition of his identity. Yet an instant, and a turn in the dance figure flung into view the face of Sir Robert Volney, negligent and unperturbed, heedless apparently of the fact that any moment a hand might fall on his shoulder to lead him to his death. Aileen, to the contrary, clearly showed fear, anxiety, a troubled mind—to be detected in the hurried little glances of fearfulness directed toward her brother Malcolm, and in her plain eagerness to have done with the measure. She seemed to implore the baronet to depart, and Volney smilingly negatived her appeal. The girl’s affronted eyes dared him to believe that she danced with him

for any other reason than because he had staked his life to see her again and she would not have his death at her door. Disdain of her own weakness and contempt of him were eloquent in every movement of the lissom figure. 'Twas easy to be seen that the man was working on her fears for him, in order to obtain another foothold with her. I resolved to baulk his scheme.

While I was still making my way toward them through the throng they disappeared from the assembly hall. A still hunt of five minutes, and I had run down my prey in a snug little reception-room of a size to fit two comfortably. The girl fronted him scornfully, eyes flaming.

"Coward, you play on a girl's fears, you take advantage of her soft heart to force yourself on her," she was telling him in a low, bitter voice.

"I risk my life to see the woman that I love," he answered.

"My grief! Love! What will such a thing as you be knowing of love?"

The man winced. On my soul I believe that at last he was an honest lover. His beautiful, speaking eyes looked straight into hers. His mannerisms had for the moment been sponged out. Straight from the heart he spoke.

"I have learnt, Aileen. My hunger for a sight of you has starved my folly and fed my love. Believe me, I am a changed man."

The play and curve of her lips stung him. He flung himself desperately into his mad love-making. "'Belle Marquise, vos beaux yeux me font mourir d'amour,'" he quoted from Moliere. "'Tis true, Aileen; I die of love; it burns me up," he added passionately, hungry eyes devouring the flying colours of her cheek, the mass of rippling hair, the fresh, sweet, subtle fragrance of her presence.

"You'll have to hurry about it then, for on my soul you're due to die of tightened hemp to-morrow," I told him, lounging forward from the door.

The girl cried out, eyes dilating, hand pressing to the heart. For the man, after the first start he did not turn a hair. The face that looked over his shoulder at me was unmoved and bereft of emotion.

"My malapropos friend Montagu again. Devil take it, you have an awkward way of playing harlequin when you're not wanted! Now to come blundering in upon a lady and her friend is— Well, not the best of form. Better drop it before it becomes a habit," he advised.

"'Slife, 'tis tit for tat! I learnt it from you," was my answer.

Long we looked at each other, preparing for the battle that was to come. Save for the quick breathing of the girl no sound fell.

"Sir Robert, your audacity confounds all precedent," I said at last.

"You flatter me, Mr. Montagu."

"Believe me, had Major Macleod discovered you instead of me your soul had by this time been speeding hellward."

"Exit Flattery," he laughed. "The lady phrased it less vilely. Heavenward, she put it! 'Twould be interesting to know which of you is right."

"As you say, an interesting topic of speculation, and one you're like to find the answer of shortly, presupposing that you suffer the usual fate of captured spies."

His brows lifted in polite inquiry. "Indeed! A spy?" he asked, indifferently.

“Why not? The favourite of the Hanoverian usurpers discovered in our midst—what other explanation will it bear?”

He smiled. “Perhaps I have a mind to join your barelegged rebellion.”

“Afraid your services are not available, Sir Robert. Three hundred Macleod claymores bar the way, all eager to wipe out an insult to the daughter of Raasay. Faith, when they have settled their little account against you there won’t be much left for the Prince.”

“Ah! Then for the sake of argument suppose we put it that I’m visiting this delightful city for my health.”

“You will find the climate not agree with you, I fear.”

“Then say for pleasure.”

“’Twill prove more exciting than amusing.”

“On my life, dear Kenn, ’tis both.”

“I have but to raise my voice and you are undone.”

“His voice was ever soft, gentle, and low, an excellent thing in Kenneth,” he parodied, laughing at me.

The girl said never a word, but her level eyes watched me steadily. No need of words to tell me that I was on trial! But I would not desist.

“You appear not to realize the situation,” I told him coldly. “Your life is in hazard.”

The man yawned in my face. “Not at all, I sit here as safe as if I were at White’s, and a devilish deal better satisfied. Situation piquant! Company of the best! Gad’s life, I cry content.”

“I think we talk at cross purposes. I am trying to have you understand that your position is critical, Sir Robert.”

Nonchalant yet watchful, indolent and yet alert, gracefully graceless, he watched me smilingly out of half-closed eyes; and then quietly fired the shot that brought me to.

“If you were not a gentleman, Montagu, the situation would be vastly different.”

“I do not see the point,” I told him; but I did, and raged at it.

“I think you do. Your lips are sealed. I am your rival”—he bowed to Aileen—“for the favour of a lady. If you put me out of the way by playing informer what appearance will it bear? You may talk of duty till the world ends, but you will be a marked man, despised by all—and most of all by Kenneth Montagu.”

The man was right. At one sweep he had spiked my guns, demolished my defenses. The triumph was sponged from my face. I fumed in a stress of impotence.

“I don’t know about that. I shall have to think of it. There is a duty to perform,” I said at last, lamely.

He waved a hand airily. “My dear fellow, think as long as you please. You can’t think away facts. Egad, they’re immutable. You know me to be no spy. Conceded that I am in a false position. What can you do about it? You can’t in honour give me up. I’faith, you’re handcuffed to inaction.”

I was, but my temper was not improved at hearing him tell it me so suavely and so blandly. He sat smiling and triumphant, chuckling no doubt at the dilemma into which he had thrust me. The worst of it was that while I was ostensibly master of the situation he had me at his mercy. I was a helpless victor without any of the fruits of victory.

“You took advantage of a girl’s soft heart to put her in a position that was indefensible,” I told him with bitter bluntness. “Save this of throwing yourself on her mercy there was no other way of approaching her. Of the wisdom of the serpent you have no lack. I congratulate you, Sir Robert. But one may be permitted to doubt the manliness of such a course.”

The pipers struck up a song that was the vogue among our party, and a young man passed the entrance of the room singing it.

“Oh, it’s owre the border awa’, awa’,
It’s owre the border awa’, awa’,
We’ll on an’ we’ll march to Carlisle Ha’,
Wi’ its yetts, its castles, an’ a’, an’ a’.”

The audacious villain parodied it on the spot, substituting two lines of his own for the last ones.

“You’ll on an’ you’ll march to Carlisle Ha’,
To be hanged and quartered an’ a’, an’ a’,”

he hummed softly in his clipped English tongue.

“Pity you won’t live to see it,” I retorted tartly.

“You’re still nursing that maggot, are you? Debating with yourself about giving me up, eh? Well that’s a matter you must settle with your conscience, if you indulge in the luxury of one.”

“You would never give him up, Kenneth,” said Aileen in a low voice. “Surely you would not be doing that.”

“I shall not let him stay here. You may be sure of that,” I said doggedly.

The girl ventured a suggestion timidly. “Perhaps Sir Robert will be leaving to-morrow—for London mayhap.”

Volney shook his head decisively. “Not I. Why, I have but just arrived. Besides, here is a problem in ethics for Mr. Montagu to solve. Strength comes through conflict, so the schools teach. Far be it from me to remove the cause of doubt. Let him solve his problem for himself, egad!”

He seemed to find a feline pleasure in seeing how far he could taunt me to go. He held me on the knife-edge of irritation, and perillous as was the experiment he enjoyed seeing whether he could not drive me to give him up.

“Miss Macleod’s solution falls pat. Better leave to-morrow, Sir Robert. To stay is dangerous.”

“’Tis dangerous to take a cold, to sleep, to drink; but I tell you, my lord fool, ‘out of this nettle danger, we pluck this flower safety,’” he quoted.

“I see you always have your tag of Shakespeare ready; then let me remind you what he has to say about the better part of valour,” I flung back, for once alert in riposte.

“A hit, and from the same play,” he laughed. “But a retreat— ’Tis not to be thought of. No, no, Montagu! And it must be you’ll just have to give me up.”

“Oh, you harp on that! You may say it once too often. I shall find a way to get rid of you,” I answered blackly.

“Let me find it for you, lad,” said a voice from the doorway.

We turned, to find that Donald Roy had joined the party. He must have been standing there unobserved long enough to understand my dilemma, for he shot straight to the mark.

“Sir Robert, I’ll never be denying that you’re a bold villain, and that is the one thing that will be saving your life this night. I’m no’ here to argie-bargie with you. The plain fact is just this; that I dinna care a rap for you the tane gate or the tither (the one way or the other). I’d like fine to see you dancing frae the widdie (gallows), but gin the lady wants you spared I’ll no’ say her no. Mr. Englisher, you’ll just gie me your word to tak the road for the border this night, or I’ll give a bit call to Major Macleod. I wouldna wonder but he wad be blithe to see you. Is it to be the road or the Macleod?”

I could have kissed the honest trusty face of the man, for he had lifted me out of a bog of unease. I might be bound by honour, but Captain Macdonald was free as air to dictate terms. Volney looked long at him, weighed the man, and in the end flung up the sponge. He rose to his feet and sauntered over to Aileen.

“I am desolated to find that urgent business takes me south at once, Miss Macleod. ’Tis a matter of the gravest calls me; nothing of less importance than the life of my nearest friend would take me from you. But I’m afraid it must be ‘Au revoir’ for the present,” he said.

She looked past the man as if he had not existed.

He bowed low, the flattery of deference in his fine eyes, which knew so well how to be at once both bold and timid.

“Forgiven my madness?” he murmured.

Having nothing to say, she still said it eloquently. Volney bowed himself out of the room, nodded carelessly to me as he passed, touched Macdonald on the arm with a pleasant promise to attend the obsequies when the Highlander should be brought to London for his hanging, lounged elegantly through the crowded assembly hall, and disappeared into the night.

CHAPTER IX

BLUE BONNETS ARE OVER THE BORDER

Next day I enrolled myself as a gentleman volunteer in Lord Balmerino's troop of horse-guards, and was at once appointed to a lieutenancy. In waiting for reinforcements and in making preparations for the invasion three weeks were lost, but at last, on the 31st of October, came the order for the march. We had that day been joined by Cluny Macpherson at the head of his clan Pherson, by Menzies of Shien, and by several other small bodies of Highlanders. All told our force amounted to less than five thousand men, but the rapidity of our movements and the impetuous gallantry of the clansmen made the enterprise less mad than it appeared upon the face of it. Moreover we expected to be largely reinforced by recruits who were to declare themselves as we marched south.

It may be guessed that the last hour of leisure I had in the city was spent with Aileen. Of that hour the greater part of it was worse than lost, for a thickheaded, long-legged oaf of an Ayrshire laird shared the room with us and hung to his chair with dogged persistency the while my imagination rioted in diverse forms of sudden death for him. Nor did it lessen my impatience to know that the girl was laughing in her sleeve at my restlessness. She took a malicious pleasure in drawing out her hobnailed admirer on the interesting subject of sheep-rot. At last, having tormented me to the limit of prudence, she got rid of him. To say truth, Miss Aileen had for weeks held me on the tenter-hooks of doubt, now in high hope, far more often in black despair. She had become very popular with the young men who had declared in favour of the exiled family, and I never called without finding some colour-splashed Gael or broad-tongued Lowland laird in dalliance. 'Twas impossible to get a word with her alone. Her admirers were forever shutting off the sunlight from me.

Aileen was sewing on a white satin cockade, which the man from Ayrshire, in the intervals between the paragraphs of his lecture on the sheep industry, had been extremely solicitous of obtaining for a favour. 'Twas a satisfaction to me that my rustic friend departed without it. He was no sooner gone than I came near and perched myself on the arm of a chair beside the girl. For a minute I sat watching in silence the deft movements of the firm brown hands in which were both delicacy and power.

Then, "For Malcolm?" I asked.

"No-o."

"For whom then?"

"For a brave gentleman who iss marching south with the Prince—a kind friend of mine."

"You seem to have many of them. For which one is the favour?" I queried, a little bitterly.

She looked at me askance, demure yet whimsical.

"You will can tell when you see him wearing it."

I fell sulky, at the which mirth bubbled up in her.

“Is he as good a friend as I am, this fine lover of yours?” I asked.

“Every whit.” Mockery of my sullenness danced in her blue eyes.

“And do you—like him as well?” I blurted out, face flaming.

She nodded yes, gaily, without the least sentiment in the world.

I flung away in a pet. “You’re always laughing at me. By Heaven, I won’t be made a fool of by any girl!”

The corners of her eyes puckered to fresh laughter. “Troth, and you needna fear, Kenneth. No girl will can do that for you.”

“Well then,” I was beginning, half placated at the apparent flattery, but stopped with a sudden divination of her meaning. “You think me a fool already. Is that it?”

“I wass thinking that maybe you werena showing the good gumption this day, Mr. Kenneth Montagu.”

My pride and my misery shook hands. I came back to blurt out in boyish fashion,

“Let us not quarrel again to-day, Aileen, and—do not laugh at me these last few minutes. We march this afternoon. The order has been given out.”

Her hands dropped to her lap. Save where a spot of faint red burned in either cheek the colour ran out of her face. I drove my news home, playing for a sign of her love, desiring to reach the spring of her tears.

“Some of us will never cross the border twice,” I said.

My news had flung a shadow across the bright track of her gayety. ’Tis one thing for a high-spirited woman to buckle on the sword of her friend; ’tis another to see him go out to the fight.

“Let us not be thinking of that at all, Kenneth,” she cried.

“Why not? ’Tis a fact to face,” I insisted cruelly. “There’ll be many a merry lusty gentleman lying quiet under the sod, Aileen, before we reach London town. From the ownership of broad moorland and large steading they will come down to own no more of earth than six foot by two.”

“They will be dying as brave gentlemen should,” she said, softly, her voice full of tears.

“And if I am one of them?” I asked, making a more home thrust.

The girl stood there tall, slim, pallid, head thrown back, the pulse in the white curved throat beating fast.

“Oh Kenneth, you will not be,” she cried piteously.

“But if I am?”

“Please, Kenneth?” Her low voice implored me to desist; so too the deep billowing breasts and melting eyes.

“The fighting will be sharp and our losses heavy. It’s his death many a man is going to, Aileen.”

“Yes, and if you will be believing me, Kenneth, the harder part iss for those of us who cannot fight but must wear away the long days and mirk nights at home. At the least I am thinking so whatever. The long live day we sit, and can do nothing but wait and wait. After every fight will not some mother be crooning the coronach for her dear son? Every glen will have its wailing wife and its fatherless bairns. And there will be the lovers too for whom there iss the driech wait, forby (besides) that maybe their dearest will be lying under the rowans with their een steekit (eyes fixed) in death.”

“There are some of us who have neither mother, wife, nor lover. Will there be none to spare a tear for us

if we fall?"

"Indeed, and there will, but"—a wan little smile broke through the film of gathering tears—"we will be waiting till they are needed, and we will be praying that the evil day may never come."

"I'm hoping that myself," I told her, smiling, "but hope never turns aside the leaden bullet."

"Prayers may," she answered quickly, the shy lids lifting from the blue eyes bravely to meet my look, "and you will never be wanting (lacking) mine, my friend." Then with the quick change of mood that was so characteristic of her, she added: "But I will be the poor friend, to fash (bother) you with all these clavers (idle talk) when I should be heartening you. You are glad to be going, are you not?"

All the romance and uplift of our cause thrilled through me.

"By God, yes! When my King calls I go."

Her eyes shone on me, tender, wistful, proud.

"And that's the true word, Kenneth. It goes to the heart of your friend."

"To hear you say that rewards me a hundred times, dear."

I rose to go. She asked, "Must you be leaving already?"

When I told her "Yes!" she came forward and shyly pinned the cockade on the lapel of my coat. I drew a deep breath and spoke from a husky throat.

"God bless you for that, Aileen girl."

I was in two minds then about taking her in my arms and crying out that I loved her, but I remembered that I had made compact with myself not to speak till the campaign was ended and the Prince seated as regent on his father's throne. With a full heart I wrung her hand in silence and turned away.

Prince Charles and his life-guards, at the head of the army, moved from Holyrood to Pinkie-house that afternoon. A vast concourse of people were gathered to cheer us on our way, as we passed through the streets to the sound of the pipes and fife and beating drum. More than one twisted cripple flung himself before the horse of the Prince, begging for "the King's touch." In each case the Young Chevalier disclaimed any power of healing, but his kindly heart forbade his denying the piteous appeal. With a slight smile of sympathy he would comply with the request, saying, "I touch, but God heal." At the head of each clan-regiment rode its chief, and in front of every company the captains, lieutenants, and ensigns, all of whom were gentlemen of the clan related by blood ties to the chief. Though I say it who was one of them, never a more devoted little army went out on a madder or more daring enterprise.

Just one more glimpse of Aileen I got to carry with me through weary months of desire. From the window of her aunt's house she was waving a tartan scarf, and many a rugged kerne's face lighted at the girl's eager loyalty. Flushed with shy daring, the soft pliant curves of her figure all youth and grace, my love's picture framed in the casement was an unconscious magnet for all eyes. The Prince smiled and bowed to her, then said something which I did not catch to Creagh who was riding beside him. The Irishman laughed and looked over at me, as did also the Prince. His Highness asked another question or two, and presently Tony fell into narration. From the young Stuart Prince's curious looks at me 'twas plain to be seen that Creagh was recounting the tale of my adventures. Once I heard the Prince exclaim, "What! That boy?" More than once he laughed heartily, for Creagh was an inimitable story-teller and every point to be scored in the telling gained sparkle from his Irish wit. When he had finished Prince Charles sent for me and congratulated me warmly on the boldness and the aplomb (so he was kind enough to phrase it) which had carried me through devious dangers.

CHAPTER X

CULLODEN

I have neither space nor heart to attempt a history of our brilliant but ill-starred campaign. Surely no more romantic attempt to win a throne was ever made. With some few thousand ill-armed Highlanders and a handful of lowland recruits the Prince cut his way through the heart of England, defeated two armies and repulsed a third, each of them larger than his own and far better supplied with the munitions of war, captured Carlisle, Manchester, and other towns, even pushed his army beyond Derby to a point little more than a hundred miles from London. Had the gentlemen of England who believed in our cause been possessed of the same spirit of devotion that animated these wild Highlanders we had unseated the Hanoverians out of doubt, but their loyalty was not strong enough to outweigh the prudential considerations that held them back. Their doubts held them inactive until too late.

There are some who maintain that had we pushed on from Derby, defeated the army of the Duke of Cumberland, of which the chance at this time was good, and swept on to London, that George II would have been sent flying to his beloved Hanover. We know now in what a state of wild excitement the capital city was awaiting news of our approach, how the household treasures of the Guelphs were all packed, how there was a run on the Bank of England, how even the Duke of Newcastle, prime minister of Great Britain, locked himself in his chamber all day denying admittance to all in an agony of doubt as to whether he had better declare at once for the Stuarts. We know too that the Wynns and other loyal Welsh gentlemen had already set out to rally their country for the honest cause, that cautious France was about to send an army to our assistance.

But all this was knowledge too late acquired. The great fact that confronted us was that without a French army to assist, our English friends would not redeem their contingent pledges. We were numerically of no greater force than when we had set out from Scotland, and the hazard of an advance was too great. General Wade and the Duke of Cumberland were closing in on us from different sides, each with an army that outnumbered ours, and a third army was waiting for us before London. 'Tis just possible that we might have taken the desperate chance and won, as the Prince was so eager that we should do, but it was to be considered that as a defeated army in a hostile country, had the fortune of war declared against us, we would surely have been cut to pieces in our retreat. By Lord George Murray and the chiefs it was judged wiser to fall back and join Lord John Drummond's army in Scotland. They declared that they would follow wherever the Prince chose to lead, but that they felt strongly that a further advance was to doom their clansmen to destruction. Reluctantly the Prince gave way.

On the 6th of December, before daybreak, the army began its retreat, which was conducted with great skill by Lord George Murray. Never were men more disappointed than the rank and file of the army when they found that a retreat had been resolved upon. Expressions of chagrin and disappointment were to be heard on every hand. But the necessity of the retreat was soon apparent to all, for the regulars were now closing in on us from every hand. By out-marching and out-maneuvering General Wade, we beat him to Lancaster, but his horse were entering the town before we had left the suburbs. At Clifton the Duke of Cumberland, having joined forces with Wade, came in touch with us, and his van was soundly drubbed by our rear-

guard under Lord George, who had with him at the time the Stewarts of Appin, the Macphersons, Colonel Stuart's regiment, and Donald Roy's Macdonalds. By great good chance I arrived with a message to Lord George from the Prince in time to take part in this brilliant little affair. With his usual wisdom Lord George had posted his men in the enclosures and park of Lowther Hall, the Macdonalds on the right of the highway, Colonel Stuart in close proximity, and the Macphersons and the Appin regiment to the left of the road. I dismounted, tied my horse, and joined the Red Macdonald's company where they were lying in the shrubbery. We lay there a devil of a while, Donald Roy smoking as contented as you please, I in a stew of impatience and excitement; presently we could hear firing over to the left where Cluny Macpherson and Stewart of Ardsziel were feeling the enemy and driving them back. At last the order came to advance. Donald Roy leaped to his feet, waved his sword and shouted "Claymore!" Next moment we were rushing pell-mell down the hillside through the thick gorse, over hedges, and across ditches. We met the dragoons in full retreat across the moor at right angles toward us, raked them with a cross fire, and coming to close quarters cut them to pieces with the sword. In this little skirmish, which lasted less than a quarter of an hour, our loss was insignificant, while that of the enemy reached well into the three figures. The result of this engagement was that our army was extricated from a precarious position and that Cumberland allowed us henceforth to retreat at leisure without fear of molestation.

Of the good fortune which almost invariably attended our various detachments in the North, of our retreat to Scotland and easy victory over General Hawley at the battle of Falkirk, and of the jealousies and machinations of Secretary Murray and the Irish Prince's advisers, particularly O'Sullivan and Sir Thomas Sheridan, against Lord George Murray and the chiefs, I can here make no mention, but come at once to the disastrous battle of Culloden which put a period to our hopes. A number of unfortunate circumstances had conspired to weaken us. According to the Highland custom, many of the troops, seeing no need of their immediate presence, had retired temporarily to their homes. Several of the clan regiments were absent on forays and other military expeditions. The Chevalier O'Sullivan, who had charge of the commissariat department, had from gross negligence managed to let the army get into a state bordering on starvation, and that though there was a quantity of meal in Inverness sufficient for a fortnight's consumption. The man had allowed the army to march from the town without provisions, and the result was that at the time of the battle most of the troops had tasted but a single biscuit in two days. To cap all, the men were deadly wearied by the long night march to surprise the Duke of Cumberland's army and their dejected return to Drummossie Moor after the failure of the attempt. Many of the men and officers slipped away to Inverness in search of refreshments, being on the verge of starvation; others flung themselves down on the heath, sullen, dejected, and exhausted, to forget their hunger for the moment in sleep.

Without dubiety our plain course was to have fallen back across the Nairn among the hills and let the Duke weary his troops trying to drag his artillery up the mountainsides. The battle might easily have been postponed for several days until our troops were again rested, fed, and in good spirits. Lord George pointed out at the counsel that a further reason for delay lay in the fact that the Mackenzies under Lord Cromarty, the second battalion of the Frasers under the Master of Lovat, the Macphersons under Cluny, the Macgregors under Glengyle, Mackinnon's followers, and the Glengary Macdonald's under Barisdale were all on the march to join us and would arrive in the course of a day or two. That with these reinforcements, and in the hill country, so eminently suited to our method of warfare, we might make sure of a complete victory, was urged by him and others. But O'Sullivan and his friends had again obtained the ear of the Prince and urged him to immediate battle. This advice jumped with his own high spirit, for he could not brook to fall back in the face of the enemy awaiting the conflict. The order went forth to gather the clans for the fight.

To make full the tale of his misdeeds came O'Sullivan's fatal slight to the pride of the Macdonalds. Since the days of Robert the Bruce and Bannockburn it had been their clan privilege to hold the post of honour

on the right. The blundering Irishman assigned this position to the Athole men in forming the line of battle, and stubbornly refused to reform his line. The Duke of Perth, who commanded on the left wing, endeavoured to placate the clan by vowing that they would that day make a right of the left and promising to change his name to Macdonald after the victory. Riding to the Duke with a message from the Prince I chanced on a man lying face down among the whin bushes. For the moment I supposed him dead, till he lifted himself to an elbow. The man turned to me a gash face the colour of whey, and I saw that it was Donald Roy.

“Ohon! Ohon! The evil day hass fallen on us, Kenneth. Five hundred years the Macdonalds have held the post of honour. They will never fight on the left,” he told me in bitter despair and grief. “Wae’s me! The red death grips us. Old MacEuan who hass the second sight saw a vision in the night of Cumberland’s ridens driving over a field lost to the North. Death on the field and on the scaffold.”

I have never known a man of saner common sense than Donald Roy, but when it comes to their superstitions all Highlanders are alike. As well I might have reasoned with a wooden post. MacEuan of the seeing eyes had predicted disaster, and calamity was to be our portion.

He joined me and walked beside my horse toward his command. The firing was by this time very heavy, our cannon being quite ineffective and the artillery of the English well served and deadly. Their guns, charged with cartouch, flung death wholesale across the ravine at us and decimated our ranks. The grape-shot swept through us like a hail-storm. Galled beyond endurance by the fire of the enemy, the clans clamoured to be led forward in the charge. Presently through the lifting smoke we saw the devoted Mackintoshes rushing forward against the cannon. After them came the Maclaughlans and the Macleans to their left, and a moment later the whole Highland line was in motion with the exception of the Macdonalds, who hewed the turf with their swords in a despairing rage but would neither fight nor fly. Their chief, brave Keppoch, stung to the quick, advanced almost alone, courting death rather than to survive the day’s disgrace. Captain Donald Roy followed at his heels, imploring his chieftain not to sacrifice himself, but Keppoch bade him save himself. For him, he would never see the sunrise again. Next moment he fell to the ground from a musket-shot, never to speak more. My last glimpse of Captain Roy was to see him carrying back the body of his chief.

I rode back at a gallop along the ridge to my troop. The valley below was a shambles. The English cannon tore great gaps in the ranks of the advancing Highlanders. The incessant fire of the infantry raked them. From the left wing Major Wolfe’s regiment poured an unceasing flank fire of musketry. The Highlanders fell in platoons. Still they swept forward headlong. They reached the first line of the enemy. ’Twas claymore against bayonet. Another minute, and the Highlanders had trampled down the regulars and were pushing on in impetuous gallantry. The thin tartan line clambering up the opposite side of the ravine grew thinner as the grape-shot carried havoc to their ranks. Cobham’s and Kerr’s dragoons flanked them *en potence*. To stand that hell of fire was more than mortal men could endure. Scarce a dozen clansmen reached the second line of regulars. The rest turned and cut their way, sword in hand, through the flanking regiments which had formed on the ground over which they had just passed with the intention of barring the retreat.

Our life-guards and the French pickets, together with Ogilvy’s regiment, checked in some measure the pursuit, but nothing could be done to save the day. All was irretrievably lost, though the Prince galloped over the field attempting a rally. The retreat became a rout, and the rout a panic. As far as Inverness the ground was strewn with the dead slain in that ghastly pursuit.

The atrocities committed after the battle would have been worthy of savages rather than of civilized troops. Many of the inhabitants of Inverness had come out to see the battle from curiosity and were cut

down by the infuriated cavalry. The carnage of the battle appeared not to satiate their horrid thirst for blood, and the troopers, bearing in mind their disgrace at Gladsmuir and Falkirk, rushed to and fro over the field massacring the wounded. I could ask any fair-minded judge to set up against this barbarity the gentle consideration and tenderness of Prince Charles and his wild Highlanders in their hours of victory. We never slew a man except in the heat of fight, and the wounded of the enemy were always cared for with the greatest solicitude. From this one may conclude that the bravest troops are the most humane. These followers of the Duke had disgraced themselves, and they ran to an excess of cruelty in an attempt to wipe out their cowardice.

Nor was it the soldiery alone that committed excesses. I regret to have to record that many of the officers also engaged in them. A party was dispatched from Inverness the day after the battle to put to death all the wounded they might find in the inclosures of Culloden Park near the field of the contest. A young Highlander serving with the English army was afterwards heard to declare that he saw seventy-two unfortunate victims dragged from their hiding in the heather to hillocks and shot down by volleys of musketry. Into a small sheep hut on the moor some of our wounded had dragged themselves. The dragoons secured the door and fired the hut. One instance of singular atrocity is vouched for. Nineteen wounded Highland officers, too badly injured to join the retreat, secreted themselves in a small plantation near Culloden-house, to which mansion they were afterward taken. After being allowed to lie without care twenty-four hours they were tossed into carts, carried to the wall of the park, ranged against it in a row, and instantly shot. I myself was a witness of one incident which touches the butcher of Cumberland nearly. If I relate the affair, 'tis because it falls pat with the narrative of my escape.

In the streets of Inverness I ran across Major Macleod gathering together the remnant of his command to check the pursuit until the Prince should have escaped. The man had just come from seeing his brave clansmen mowed down, and his face looked like death.

“The Prince— Did he escape?” I asked. “I saw him last trying to stem the tide, with Sheridan and O’Sullivan tugging at his reins to induce a flight.”

The Macleod nodded. “They passed through the town not five minutes ago.”

I asked him whether he had seen anything of Captain Roy Macdonald, and he told me that he had last seen him lying wounded on the field. I had him describe to me accurately the position, and rode back by a wide circuit toward Drum Mossie Moor. I had of course torn off the white cockade and put it in my breast so as to minimize the danger of being recognized as a follower of the Prince. My heart goes to my throat whenever I think of that ride, for behind every clump of whins one might look to find a wounded clansman hiding from the riders of Cumberland. By good providence I came on Captain Macdonald just as three hussars were about to make an end of him. He had his back to a great stone, and was waiting grimly for them to shoot him down. Supposing me to be an officer of their party the troopers desisted at my remonstrance and left him to me. Donald Roy was wounded in the foot, but he managed to mount behind me. We got as far as the wall of the park when I saw a party of officers approaching. Hastily dismounting, we led the horse behind a nest of birches till they should pass. A few yards from us a sorely wounded Highland officer was lying. Macdonald recognized him as Charles Fraser, younger of Inverallachie, the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Fraser regiment and in the absence of the Master of Lovat commander. We found no time to drag him to safety before the English officers were upon us.

The approaching party turned out to be the Duke of Cumberland himself, Major Wolfe, Lord Boyd, Sir Robert Volney, and a boy officer of Wolfe’s regiment. Young Fraser raised himself on his elbow to look at the Duke. The Butcher reined in his horse, frowning blackly down at him.

“To which side do you belong?” he asked.

“To the Prince,” was the undaunted answer.

Cumberland, turning to Major Wolfe, said,

“Major, are your pistols loaded?”

Wolfe said that they were.

“Then shoot me that Highland scoundrel who dares look on me so insolently.”

Major Wolfe looked at his commander very steadily and said quietly: “Sir, my commission is at the disposal of your Royal Highness, but my honour is my own. I can never consent to become a common executioner.”

The Duke purpled, and burst out with, “Bah! Pistol him, Boyd.”

“Your Highness asks what is not fitting for you to require nor for me to perform,” answered that young nobleman.

The Duke, in a fury, turned to a passing dragoon and bade him shoot the young man. Charles Fraser dragged himself to his feet by a great effort and looked at the butcher with a face of infinite scorn while the soldier was loading his piece.

“Your Highness,” began Wolfe, about to remonstrate.

“Sir, I command you to be silent,” screamed the Duke.

The trooper presented his piece at the Fraser, whose steady eyes never left the face of Cumberland.

“God save King James!” cried Inverallachie in English, and next moment fell dead from the discharge of the musket.

The faces of the four Englishmen who rode with the Duke were stern and drawn. Wolfe dismounted from his horse and reverently covered the face of the dead Jacobite with a kerchief.

“God grant that when our time comes we may die as valiantly and as loyally as this young gentleman,” he said solemnly, raising his hat.

Volney, Boyd, and Wolfe’s subaltern uncovered, and echoed an “Amen.” Cumberland glared from one to another of them, ran the gamut of all tints from pink to deepest purple, gulped out an apoplectic Dutch oath, and dug the rowels deep into his bay. With shame, sorrow, and contempt in their hearts his retinue followed the butcher across the field.

My face was like the melting winter snows. I could not look at the Macdonald, nor he at me. We mounted in silence and rode away. Only once he referred to what we had seen.

“Many’s the time that Charlie Fraser and I have hunted the dun deer across the heather hills, and now ——” He broke into Gaelic lamentation and imprecation, then fell as suddenly to quiet.

We bore up a ravine away from the roads toward where a great gash in the hills invited us, for we did not need to be told that the chances of safety increased with our distance from the beaten tracks of travel. A man on horseback came riding behind and overhauled us rapidly. Presently we saw that he was a red-coated officer, and behind a huge rock we waited to pistol him as he came up. The man leaped from his horse and came straight toward us. I laid a hand on Captain Roy’s arm, for I had recognized Major Wolfe. But I was too late. A pistol ball went slapping through the Major’s hat and knocked it from his head. He stooped, replaced it with the utmost composure, and continued to advance, at the same time calling out that he was a friend.

“I recognized you behind the birches, Montagu, and thought that you and your friend could use another horse. Take my Galloway. You will find him a good traveller.”

I ask you to believe that we stared long at him. A wistful smile touched his fallow face.

“We’re not all ruffians in the English army, lad. If I aid your escape it is because prisoners have no rights this day. My advice would be for you to strike for the hills.”

“In troth and I would think your advisings good, sir,” answered Donald. “No glen will be too far, no ben too high, for a hiding-place from these bloody Sassenach dogs.” Then he stopped, the bitterness fading from his voice, and added: “But I am forgetting myself. God, sir, the sights I have seen this day drive me mad. At all events there iss one English officer Captain Macdonald will remember whatever.” And the Highlander bowed with dignity.

I thanked Wolfe warmly, and lost no time in taking his advice. Captain Roy’s foot had by this time so swollen that he could not put it in the stirrup. He was suffering a good deal, but at least the pain served to distract him from the gloom that lay heavy on his spirits. From the hillside far above the town we could see the lights of Inverness beginning to glimmer as we passed. A score of times we had to dismount on account of the roughness of the ground to lead our horses along the steep incline of the mountainsides, and each time Donald set his teeth and dragged his shattered ankle through bracken and over boulder by sheer dour pluck. Hunger gnawed at our vitals, for in forty-eight hours we had but tasted food. Deadly weariness hung on our stumbling footsteps, and in our gloomy hearts lurked the coldness of despair. Yet hour after hour we held our silent course, clambering like heather-cats over cleugh and boggy moorland, till at last we reached Bun Chraobg, where we unsaddled for a snatch of sleep.

We flung ourselves down on the soft heather wrapped in our plaids, but for long slumber was not to be wooed. Our alert minds fell to a review of all the horrors of the day: to friends struck down, to the ghastly carnage, to fugitives hunted and shot in their hiding-places like wild beasts, to the mistakes that had ruined our already lost cause. The past and the present were bitter as we could bear; thank Heaven, the black shadow of the future hung as yet but dimly on our souls. If we had had the second sight and could have known what was to follow—the countryside laid waste with fire and sword, women and children turned out of their blazing homes to perish on the bleak moors, the wearing of the tartan proscribed and made a crime punishable with death, a hundred brave Highlanders the victim of the scaffold—we should have quite despaired.

Except the gentle souging of the wind there was no sound to stir the silent night. A million of night’s candles looked coldly down on an army of hunted stragglers. I thought of the Prince, Cluny, Lord Murray, Creagh, and a score of others, wondering if they had been taken, and fell at last to troubled sleep, from which ever and anon I started to hear the wild wail of the pibroch or the ringing Highland slogans, to see the flaming cannon mouths vomiting death or the fell galloping of the relentless Hanoverian dragoons.

In the chill dawn I awoke to a ravening hunger that was insistent to be noted, and though my eyes would scarce believe there was Donald Roy cocked tailor fashion on the heath arranging most temptingly on a rock scone sandwiches of braxy mutton and a flask of usquebaugh (Highland whiskey). I shut my eyes, rubbed them with my forefingers, and again let in the light. The viands were still there.

The Macdonald smiled whimsically over at me. “Gin ye hae your appetite wi’ you we’ll eat, Mr. Montagu, for I’m a wee thingie hungry my nainsell (myself). ’Deed, to mak plain, I’m toom (empty) as a drum, and I’m thinkin’ that a drappie o’ the usquebaugh wad no’ come amiss neither.”

“But where in the world did you get the food, Donald?”

“And where wad you think, but doon at the bit clachan yonder? A very guid freend of mine named Farquhar Dhu lives there. He and Donald Roy are far ben (intimate), and when I came knocking at his window at cock-crow he was no’ very laithe to gie me a bit chack (lunch).”

“Did you climb down the mountain and back with your sore ankle?”

He coloured. “Hoots, man! Haud your whitter (tongue)! Aiblins (perhaps) I wass just wearying for a bit exercise to test it. And gin I were you I wadna sit cocking on that stane speiring at me upsitten (impertinent) questions like a professor of pheelosophy, you muckle sumph!”

I fell to with a will. He was not a man to be thanked in words. Long since I had found out that Captain Roy was one to spend himself for his friends and make nothing of it. This was one of his many shining qualities that drew me so strongly to him. If he had a few of the Highland faults he did not lack any of the virtues of his race.

Shortly we were on our way once more, and were fortunate enough before night to fall in with Cluny and his clan, who having heard of our reverse had turned about and were falling back to Badenoch. At Trotternich we found a temporary refuge at the home of a surgeon who was distantly related to the Macdonald, but at the end of a fortnight were driven away by the approach of a troop of Wolfe’s regiment.

The course of our wanderings I think it not needful to detail at length. For months we were forever on the move. From one hiding-place to another the redcoats and their clan allies drove us. No sooner were we fairly concealed than out we were routed. Many a weary hundred miles we tramped over the bleak mountains white with snow. Weariness walked with us by day, and cold and hunger lay down with us at night. Occasionally we slept in sheilings (sheep-huts), but usually in caves or under the open sky. Were we in great luck, venison and usquebaugh fell to our portion, but more often our diet was brose (boiling water poured over oatmeal) washed down by a draught from the mountain burn. Now we would be lurking on the mainland, now skulking on one of the islands or crossing rough firths in crazy boats that leaked like a sieve. Many a time it was touch and go with us, for the dragoons and the Campbells followed the trail like sleuths. We fugitives had a system of signals by which we warned each other of the enemy’s approach and conveyed to each other the news. That Balmerino, Kilmarnock, and many another pretty man had been taken we knew, and scores of us could have guessed shrewdly where the Prince was hiding in the heather hills.

CHAPTER XI

THE RED HEATHER HILLS

A sullen day, full of chill gusts and drizzle, sinking into a wet misty night! Three hunted Jacobites, dragging themselves forward drearily, found the situation one of utter cheerlessness. For myself, misery spoke in every motion, and to say the same of Creagh and Macdonald is to speak by the card. Fatigue is not the name for our condition. Fagged out, dispirited, with legs moving automatically, we still slithered down cleughs, laboured through dingles and corries, clambered up craggy mountainsides all slippery with the wet heather, weariness tugging at our leaden feet like a convict's chain and ball. Our bones ached, our throats were limekilns, composts of sores were our ragged feet.

On every side the redcoats had hemmed us in, and we knew not whether we tramped to a precarious safety or to death. Indeed, 'twas little we cared, for at last exhaustion had touched the limit of endurance. Not a word had passed the lips of any of us for hours, lest the irritation of our worn nerves should flame into open rupture.

At length we stood on the summit of the ridge. Scarce a half mile from us a shieling was to be seen on the shoulder of the mount.

"That looks like the cot where O'Sullivan and the Prince put up a month ago," said Creagh.

Macdonald ruffled at the name like a turkeycock. Since Culloden the word had been to him as a red rag to a bull.

"The devil take O'Sullivan and his race," burst out the Scotch Captain. "Gin it had not been for him the cause had not been lost."

The Irishman's hot temper flared.

"You forget the Macdonalds, sir," he retorted, tartly.

"What ails you at the Macdonalds?" demanded the gentleman of that ilk, looking him over haughtily from head to foot.

Creagh flung out his answer with an insolent laugh. "Culloden."

The Macdonald's colour ebbed. "It will be a great peety that you hafe insulted me, for there will presently be a dead Irishman to stain the snow with hiss blood," he said deliberately, falling into more broken English as he always did when excited.

Creagh shrugged. "That's on the knees of the gods. At the worst it leaves one less for the butcher to hang, Scotch or Irish."

"It sticks in my mind that I hafe heard you are a pretty man with the steel—at the least I am thinking so," said Captain Roy, standing straight as an arrow, his blue eyes fixed steadily on his opponent.

"Gadso! Betwixt and between, but I dare say my sword will serve to keep my head at all events

whatefer,” cried Creagh, mimicking scornfully the other’s accent.

Donald whipped his sword from its scabbard.

“Fery well. That will make easy proving, sir.”

The quarrel had cropped out so quickly that hitherto I had found no time to interfere, but now I came between them and beat down the swords.

“Are you mad, gentlemen? Put up your sword, Tony. Back, Macdonald, or on my soul I’ll run you through,” I cried.

“Come on, the pair of ye. Captain Roy can fend for (look out for) himself,” shouted the excited Highlander, thrusting at me.

“Fall back, Tony, and let me have a word,” I implored.

The Irishman disengaged, his anger nearly gone, a whimsical smile already twitching at his mouth.

“Creagh, you don’t mean to impeach the courage of Captain Macdonald, do you?” I asked.

“Not at all—not at all. Faith, I never saw a man more keen to fight,” he admitted, smiling.

“He was wounded at Culloden. You know that?”

“So I have heard.” Then he added dryly, some imp of mischief stirring him: “In the heel, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, in the foot,” I told him hastily. “I suppose you do not doubt the valour of the Captain’s clan any more than his own.”

“Devil a bit!” he answered carelessly. “I’ve seen them fight too often to admit of any question as to their courage at all, at all. For sheer daring I never saw the beat of the Highland troops—especially if there chanced to be any plunder on the other side of the enemy, Egad!”

I turned to Donald Roy, who was sullenly waiting for me to have done. “Are you satisfied, Captain, that Tony meant to impute nothing against you or your men?”

“Oich! Oich!” he grumbled. “I wass thinking I heard some other dirty sneers.”

“If the sneers were unjust I retract them with the best will in the world. Come, Captain Macdonald, sure ’tis not worth our while doing the work of the redcoats for them. ’Slife, ’tis not fair to Jack Ketch!” exclaimed the Irishman.

“Right, Donald! Why, you fire-eating Hotspur, you began it yourself with a fling at the Irish. Make up, man! Shake hands with Tony, and be done with your bile.”

Creagh offered his hand, smiling, and his smile was a handsome letter of recommendation. Donald’s face cleared, and he gripped heartily the hand of the other.

“With great pleasure, and gin I said anything offensive I eat my words at all events,” he said.

“You may say what you please about O’Sullivan, Captain Macdonald. Ecod, he may go to the devil for me,” Creagh told him.

“Well, and for me too; ’fore God, the sooner the better.”

“If there is to be no throat-cutting to warm the blood maybe we had better push on to the bothy, gentlemen. I’m fain niddered [perishing] with the cold. This Highland mist goes to the marrow,” I suggested merrily, and linking arms with them I moved forward.

In ten minutes we had a roaring fire ablaze, and were washing down with usquebaugh the last trace of unkindness. After we had eaten our bannocks and brose we lay in the shine of the flame and revelled in the blessed heat, listening to the splash of the rain outside. We were still encompassed by a cordon of the enemy, but for the present we were content to make the most of our unusual comfort.

“Here’s a drammoche left in the flask. I give you the restoration, gentlemen,” cried Donald.

“I wonder where the Prince is this night,” I said after we had drunk the toast.

We fell to a meditative sombre silence, and presently Captain Roy began to sing softly one of those touching Jacobite melodies that go to the source of tears like rain to the roots of flowers. Donald had one of the rare voices that carry the heart to laughter and to sobs. The singer’s song, all pathos and tenderness, played on the chords of our emotion like a harp. My eyes began to smart. Creagh muttered something about the peat-smoke affecting his, and I’m fain to admit that I rolled over with my face from the fire to hide the tell-tale tears. The haunting pathetic wistfulness of the third stanza shook me with sobs.

“On hills that are by right his ain,
He roams a lanely stranger;
On ilka hand he’s pressed by want,
On ilka hand by danger.”

“Ohon! Ohon!” groaned Donald. “The evil day! The evil day! Wae’s me for our bonnie Hieland laddie!”

“May the Blessed Mother keep him safe from all enemies and dangers!” said Creagh softly.

“And God grant that he be warm and well fed this bitter night wherever he may be,” I murmured.

Something heavy like the butt of a musket fell against the door, and we started to our feet in an instant. Out flashed our swords.

“Who goes?” cried the Macdonald.

We threw open the door, and in came a party of four, rain dripping from their soaked plaids. I recognized at once Young Clanranald and Major Macleod. The other two were a tattered gillie in the Macdonald tartan and a young woman of most engaging appearance, who was supported in the arms of Clanranald and his henchman. The exhausted lady proved to be no other than the celebrated Miss Flora Macdonald, whose gallant and generous devotion, for a protracted period, as we afterwards learned, had undoubtedly saved the life of the Prince from his enemies.

Donald no sooner beheld his kinswoman than he dropped on his knee and with the wildest demonstrations of joy kissed the hand of the ragged kerne who supported her. I stared at Captain Roy in amazement, and while I was yet wondering at his strange behaviour Tony Creagh plumped down beside him. My eyes went to the face of the gillie and encountered the winsome smile of the Young Chevalier. Desperately white and weary as he was, and dressed in an outcast’s rags, he still looked every inch the son of kings. To me he was always a more princely figure in his days of adversity, when he roamed a hunted wanderer among Highland heughs and corries with only those about him over whose hearts he still was king, than when he ruled at Holyrood undisputed master of Scotland.

It appeared that the party of the Prince, with the exception of Clanranald, were destined for Raasay, could they but run the cordon of troopers who guarded the island of Skye. Through Malcolm, arrangements had been made by which Murdoch Macleod, a younger brother wounded at Culloden, was to be in waiting with a boat to convey the party of the Prince across the sound. It will be believed that we discussed with much care and anxiety the best disposition to be made of ourselves in running the lines of the enemy. The

final decision was that the Prince, Malcolm, and I should make the attempt that night while Creagh, Captain Roy, and Miss Flora followed at their leisure on the morrow. Since the young lady was provided with a passport for herself and her attendant this promised to be a matter of small danger on their part.

Never have I known a woman treated with truer chivalry and deference than this heroic Highland girl was by these hardy mountaineers. Her chief, Clanranald, insisted on building with his own hands a fire in her sleeping room “ben” the house, and in every way the highest marks of respect were shown her for her devotion to the cause. Though he expected to join her again shortly, the Prince made her his warmest acknowledgments of thanks in a spirit of pleasantry which covered much tender feeling. They had been under fire together and had shared perils by land and by sea during which time his conduct to her had been perfect, a gentle consideration for her comfort combined with the reserve that became a gentleman under such circumstances. On this occasion he elected to escort her in person to the door of her chamber.

After a snatch of sleep we set out on our perillous journey. Sheets of rain were now falling in a very black night. Donald Roy parted from us at the door of the hut with much anxiety. He had pleaded hard to be allowed to join the party of the Prince, but had been overruled on the ground that he was the only one of us with the exception of Malcolm that could act as a guide. Moreover he was the kinsman of Miss Flora, and therefore her natural protector. Over and over he urged us to be careful and to do nothing rash. The Prince smilingly answered him with a shred of the Gaelic.

“Bithidh gach ni mar is aill Dhiu.” (All things must be as God will have them.)

The blackness of the night was a thing to be felt. Not the faithful Achates followed Æneas more closely than did we the Macleod. No sound came to us but the sloshing of the rain out of a sodden sky and the noise of falling waters from mountain burns in spate (flood). Hour after hour while we played blindly follow-my-leader the clouds were a sieve over our devoted heads. Braes we breasted and precipitous heathery heights we sliddered down, but there was always rain and ever more rain, turning at last into a sharp thin sleet that chilled the blood.

Then in the gray breaking of the day Malcolm turned to confess what I had already suspected, that he had lost the way in the darkness. We were at present shut in a sea of fog, a smirr of mist and rain, but when that lifted he could not promise that we would not be close on the campfires of the dragoons. His fine face was a picture of misery, and bitterly he reproached himself for the danger into which he had led the Prince. The Young Chevalier told him gently that no blame was attaching to him; rather to us all for having made the attempt in such a night.

For another hour we sat on the dripping heather opposite the corp-white face of the Macleod waiting for the mist to lift. The wanderer exerted himself to keep us in spirits, now whistling a spring of Clanranald’s march, now retailing to us the story of how he had walked through the redcoats as Miss Macdonald’s Betty Burke. It may be conceived with what anxiety we waited while the cloud of moisture settled from the mountain tops into the valleys.

“By Heaven, sir, we have a chance,” cried Malcolm suddenly, and began to lead the way at a great pace up the steep slope. For a half hour we scudded along, higher and higher, always bearing to the right and at such a burst of speed that I judged we must be in desperate danger. The Prince hung close to the heels of Malcolm, but I was a sorry laggard ready to die of exhaustion. When the mist sank we began to go more cautiously, for the valley whence we had just emerged was dotted at intervals with the campfires of the soldiers. Cautiously we now edged our way along the slippery incline, keeping in the shadow of great rocks and broom wherever it was possible. ’Tis not in nature to walk unmoved across an open where every bush may hide a sentinel who will let fly at one as gladly as at a fat buck—yes, and be sure of thirty thousand pounds if he hit the right mark. I longed for eyes in the back of my head, and every moment could

feel the lead pinging its way between my shoulder blades.

Major Macleod had from his youth stalked the wary stag, and every saugh and birch and alder in our course was made to yield us its cover. Once a muircock whirred from my very feet and brought my heart to my mouth. Presently we topped the bluff and disappeared over its crest. Another hour of steady tramping down hill and the blue waters of the sound stretched before us. 'Twas time. My teeth chattered and my bones ached. I was sick—sick—sick.

“And here we are at the last,” cried the Major with a deep breath of relief. “I played the gomeral brawly, but in the darkness we blundered ram-stam through the Sassenach lines.”

“‘Fortuna favet fatuis,’” quoted the Young Chevalier. “Luck for fools! The usurper’s dragoons will have to wait another day for their thirty thousand pounds. Eh, Montagu?” he asked me blithely; then stopped to stare at me staggering down the beach. “What ails you, man?”

I was reeling blindly like a drunkard, and our Prince put an arm around my waist. I resisted feebly, but he would have none of it; the arm of a king’s son (de jure) supported me to the boat.

We found as boatmen not only Murdoch Macleod but his older brother Young Raasay, the only one of the family that had not been “out” with our army. He had been kept away from the rebellion to save the family estates, but his heart was none the less with us.

“And what folly is this, Ronald?” cried Malcolm when he saw the head of the house on the links. “Murdoch and I are already as black as we can be, but you were to keep clean of the Prince’s affairs. It wad be a geyan ill outcome gin we lost the estates after all. The red cock will aiblins crawl at Raasay for this.”

“I wass threepin’ so already, but he wass dooms thrang to come. He’ll maybe get his craig raxed (neck twisted) for his ploy,” said Murdoch composedly.

“By Heaven, Malcolm, I’ll play the trimmer no longer. Raasay serves his Prince though it cost both the estate and his head,” cried the young chieftain hotly.

“In God’s name then let us get away before the militia or the sidier roy (red soldiers) fall in with us. In the woody cleughs yonder they are thick as blackcocks in August,” cried the Major impatiently.

We pushed into the swirling waters and were presently running free, sending the spurling spray flying on both sides of the boat. The wind came on to blow pretty hard and the leaky boat began to fill, so that we were hard put to it to keep from sinking. The three brothers were quite used to making the trip in foul weather, but on the Prince’s account were now much distressed. To show his contempt for danger, the royal wanderer sang a lively Erse song. The Macleods landed us at Glam, and led the way to a wretched hovel recently erected by some shepherds. Here we dined on broiled kid, butter, cream, and oaten bread.

I slept round the clock, and awoke once more a sound man to see the Prince roasting the heart of the kid on an iron spit. Throughout the day we played with a greasy pack of cards to pass the time. About sundown Creagh joined us, Macdonald having stayed on Skye to keep watch on any suspicious activity of the clan militia or the dragoons. Raasay’s clansmen, ostensibly engaged in fishing, dotted the shore of the little island to give warning of the approach of any boats. To make our leader’s safety more certain, the two proscribed brothers took turns with Creagh and me in doing sentinel duty at the end of the path leading to the sheep hut.

At the desire of the Prince—and how much more at mine!—we ventured up to the great house that night to meet the ladies, extraordinary precautions having been taken by Raasay to prevent the possibility of any surprise. Indeed, so long as the Prince was in their care, Raasay and his brothers were as anxious as the

proverbial hen with the one chick. Doubtless they felt that should he be captured while on the island the reputation of the house would be forever blasted. And this is the most remarkable fact of Charles Edward Stuart's romantic history; that in all the months of his wandering, reposing confidence as he was forced to do in hundreds of different persons, many of them mere gillies and some of them little better than freebooters, it never seems to have occurred to one of these shag-headed Gaels to earn an immense fortune by giving him up.

My heart beat a tattoo against my ribs as I followed the Prince and Raasay to the drawing-room where his sister and Miss Macdonald awaited us. Eight months had passed since last I had seen my love; eight months of battle, of hairbreadth escapes, and of hardships scarce to be conceived. She too had endured much in that time. Scarce a house in Raasay but had been razed by the enemy because her brothers and their following had been "out" with us. I was to discover whether her liking for me had outlived the turmoils of "the '45," or had been but a girlish fancy.

My glance flashed past Miss Flora Macdonald and found Aileen on the instant. For a hundredth part of a second our eyes met before she fell to making her devoirs to the Young Chevalier, and after that I did not need to be told that my little friend was still staunch and leal. I could afford to wait my turn with composure, content to watch with long-starved eyes the delicacy and beauty of this sweet wild rose I coveted. Sure, hers was a charm that custom staled not nor longer acquaintance made less alluring. Every mood had its own characteristic fascination, and are not the humours of a woman numberless? She had always a charming note of unconventional freshness, a childlike *naiveté* of immaturity and unsophistication at times, even a certain girlish shy austerity that had for me a touch of saintliness. But there— Why expatiate? A lover's midsummer madness, you will say!

My turn at last! The little brown hand pressed mine firmly for an instant, the warm blue eyes met mine full and true, the pulse in the soft-throated neck beat to a recognition of my presence. I found time to again admire the light poise of the little head carried with such fine spirit, the music of the broken English speech in this vibrant Highland voice.

"Welcome— Welcome to Raasay, my friend!" Then her eyes falling on the satin cockade so faded and so torn, there came a tremulous little catch to her voice, a fine light to her eyes. "It iss the good tale that my brothers have been telling me of Kenneth Montagu's brave devotion to hiss friends, but I wass not needing to hear the story from them. I will be thinking that I knew it all already," she said, a little timidly.

I bowed low over her hand and kissed it. "My friends make much of nothing. Their fine courage reads their own spirit reflected in the eyes of others."

"Oh, then I will have heard the story wrong. It would be Donald who went back to Drum Mossie Moor after you when you were wounded?"

"Could a friend do less?"

"Or more?"

"He would have done as much for me. My plain duty!" I said, shrugging, anxious to be done with the subject.

She looked at me with sparkling eyes, laughing at my discomposure, in a half impatience of my stolid English phlegm.

"Oh, you men! You go to your death for a friend, and if by a miracle you escape: 'Pooh! 'Twas nothing whatever. Gin it rain to-morrow, I think 'twill be foul,' you say, and expect to turn it off so."

I took the opening like a fox.

“Faith, I hope it will not rain to-morrow,” I said. “I have to keep watch outside. Does the sun never shine in Raasay, Aileen?”

“Whiles,” she answered, laughing. “And are all Englishmen so shy of their virtues?”

Tony Creagh coming up at that moment, she referred the question to him.

“Sure, I can’t say,” he answered unsmilingly. “’Fraid I’m out of court. Never knew an Englishman to have any.”

“Can’t you spare them one at the least?” Aileen implored, gaily.

He looked at her, then at me, a twinkle in his merry Irish eyes.

“Ecod then, I concede them one! They’re good sportsmen. They follow the game until they’ve bagged it.”

We two flushed in concert, but the point of her wit touched Creagh on the *riposte*.

“The men of the nation being disposed of in such cavalier fashion, what shall we say of the ladies, sir?” she asked demurely.

“That they are second only to the incomparable maidens of the North,” he answered, kissing her hand in his extravagant Celtic way.

“But I will not be fubbed off with your Irish blarney. The English ladies, Mr. Creagh?” she merrily demanded.

“Come, Tony, you renegade! Have I not heard you toast a score of times the beauties of London?” said I, coming up with the heavy artillery.

“Never, I vow. Sure I always thought Edinburgh a finer city—not so dirty and, pink me, a vast deal more interesting. Now London is built——”

“On the Thames. So it is,” I interrupted dryly. “And—to get back to the subject under discussion—the pink and white beauties of London are built to take the eye and ensnare the heart of roving Irishmen. Confess!”

“Or be forever shamed as recreant knight,” cried Aileen, her blue eyes bubbling with laughter.

Tony unbuckled his sword and offered it her. “If I yield ’tis not to numbers but to beauty. Is my confession to be in the general or the particular, Miss Macleod?”

“Oh, in the particular! ’Twill be the mair interesting.”

“Faith then, though it be high treason to say so of one lady before another, Tony Creagh’s scalp dangles at the belt of the most bewitching little charmer in Christendom.”

“Her name?”

“Mistress Antoinette Westerleigh, London’s reigning toast.”

Aileen clapped her hands in approving glee.

“And did you ever tell her?”

“A score of times. Faith, ’twas my rule to propose every second time I saw her and once in between.”

“And she——?”

“Laughed at me; played shill-I-shall-I with my devotion; vowed she would not marry me till I had been

killed in the wars to prove I was a hero; smiled on me one minute and scorned me the next.”

“And you love her still?”

“The sun rises in ’Toinette’s eyes; when she frowns the day is vile.”

“Despite her whims and arrogances?”

“Sure for me my queen can do no wrong. ’Tis her right to laugh and mock at me so only she enjoy it.”

Aileen stole one shy, quick, furtive look at me. It seemed to question whether her lover was such a pattern of meek obedience.

“And you never falter? There iss no other woman for you?”

“Saving your presence, there is no other woman in the world?”

Her eyes glistened.

“Kneel down, sir,” she commanded.

Tony dropped to a knee. She touched him lightly on the shoulder with his sword.

“In love’s name I dub you worthy knight. Be bold, be loyal, be fortunate. Arise, Sir Anthony Creagh, knight of the order of Cupid!”

We three had wandered away together into an alcove, else, ’tis almost needless to say, our daffing had not been so free. Now Malcolm joined us with a paper in his hand. He spoke to me, smiling yet troubled too.

“More labours, O my Theseus! More Minotaurs to slay! More labyrinths to thread!”

“And what may be these labours now?” I asked.

“Captain Donald Roy sends for you. He reports unusual activity among the clan militia and the redcoats on Skye. A brig landed men and officers there yesterday. And what for will they be coming?”

“I think the reason is very plain, Major Macleod,” said Tony blithely.

“I’m jalousing (suspecting) so mysel’. They will be for the taking of a wheen puir callants (lads) that are jinking (hiding) in the hill birken (scrub). But here iss the point that must be learned: do they ken that the Prince iss on the islands?”

Creagh sprang to his feet from the chair in which he had been lazying. “The devil’s in it! Why should Montagu go? Why not I?”

“Because you can’t talk the Gaelic, Creagh. You’re barred,” I told him triumphantly.

“Would you be sending our guest on such an errand of danger, Malcolm?” asked Aileen in a low voice.

“Not I, but Fegs! I will never say the word to hinder if he volunteers. ’Tis in the service of the Prince. The rest of us are kent (known) men and canna gang.”

Grouped behind Malcolm were now gathered the Prince, Raasay, and Miss Flora. To me as a focus came all eyes. I got to my feet in merry humour.

“Ma foi! Ulysses as a wanderer is not to be compared with me. When do I set out, Major?”

“At skreigh-o’-day (daybreak). And the sooner you seek your sleep the better. Best say good-night to the lassies, for you’ll need be wide awake the morn twa-three hours ere sun-up. Don’t let the redcoats wile (lure) you into any of their traps, lad. You maunna lose your head or——”

“——Or I’ll lose my head,” I answered, drolling. “I take you, Major; but, my word for it, I have not, played hide-and-go-seek six months among your Highland lochs and bens to dance on air at the last.”

The Prince drew me aside. “This will not be forgotten when our day of power comes, Montagu. I expected no less of your father’s son.” Then he added with a smile: “And when Ulysses rests safe from his wanderings at last I trust he will find his Penelope waiting for him with a true heart.”

Without more ado I bade Miss Macdonald and Aileen good-bye, but as I left the room I cast a last look back over my shoulder and methought that the lissome figure of my love yearned forward toward me tenderly and graciously.

CHAPTER XII

VOLNEY PAYS A DEBT

There are some to whom strange changes never come. They pursue the even tenor of their way in humdrum monotony, content to tread the broad safe path of routine. For them the fascination of the mountain peaks of giddy chance has no allurements, the swift turbulent waters of intrigue no charm. There are others with whom Dame Fortune plays many an exciting game, and to these adventure becomes as the very breath of life. To such every hazard of new fortune is a diversion to be eagerly sought.

Something of this elation seized me—for I am of this latter class—as Murdoch and his gillies rowed me across the sound to Skye in the darkness of the early morning. It was a drab dawn as ever I have seen, and every tug at the oars shot me nearer to the red bloodhounds who were debouched over the island. What then? Was I not two years and twenty, and did I not venture for the life of a king's son? To-day I staked my head on luck and skill; to-morrow—but let the future care for her own.

In a grove of beeches about half a mile from Portree we landed, and Murdoch gave the call of the whaup to signal Donald Roy. From a clump of whins in the gorse the whistle echoed back to us, and presently Captain Macdonald came swinging down to the shore. It appeared that another boatload of soldiers had been landed during the night, a squad of clan militia under the command of a Lieutenant Campbell. We could but guess that this portended some knowledge as to the general whereabouts of the Prince, and 'twas my mission to learn the extent and reliability of that knowledge if I could. That there was some danger in the attempt I knew, but it had been minimized by the philibeg and hose, the Glengarry bonnet and Macleod plaid which I had donned at the instance of Malcolm.

I have spoken of chance. The first stroke of it fell as I strode along the highway to Portree. At a crossroad intersection I chanced on a fellow trudging the same way as myself. He was one of your furtive-faced fellows, with narrow slits of eyes and an acquired habit of skellying sidewise at one out of them. Cunning he was beyond doubt, and from the dour look of him one to bear malice. His trews were like Joseph's coat for the colour of the many patches, but I made them out to have been originally of the Campbell plaid.

"A fine day, my man," says I with vast irony.

"Wha's finding faut wi' the day?" he answers glumly.

"You'll be from across the mountains on the mainland by the tongue of you," I ventured.

"Gin you ken that there'll be nae use telling you."

"A Campbell, I take it."

He turned his black-a-vised face on me, scowling.

"Or perhaps you're on the other side of the hedge—implicated in this barelegged rebellion, I dare say."

Under my smiling, watchful eye he began to grow restless. His hand crept to his breast, and I heard the crackle of papers.

“Deil hae’t, what’s it to you?” he growled.

“To me? Oh, nothing at all. Merely a friendly interest. On the whole I think my first guess right. I wouldn’t wonder but you’re carrying dispatches from Lieutenant Campbell.”

The fellow went all colours and was as easy as a worm on a hook.

“I make no doubt you’ll be geyan tired from long travel, and the responsibility of carrying such important documents must weigh down your spirits,” I drolled, “and so I will trouble you”—with a pistol clapped to his head and a sudden ring of command in my voice—“to hand them over to me at once.”

The fellow’s jaw dropped lankly. He looked hither and thither for a way of escape and found none. He was confronting an argument that had a great deal of weight with him, and out of the lining of his bonnet he ripped a letter.

“Thanks, but I’ll take the one in your breast pocket,” I told him dryly.

Out it came with a deal of pother. The letter was addressed to the Duke of Cumberland, Portree, Skye. My lips framed themselves to a long whistle. Here was the devil to pay. If the butcher was on the island I knew he had come after bigger game than muircocks. No less a quarry than the Prince himself would tempt him to this remote region. I marched my prisoner back to Captain Roy and Murdoch. To Donald I handed the letter, and he ripped it open without ceremony. ’Twas merely a note from the Campbell Lieutenant of militia, to say that the orders of his Highness regarding the watching of the coast would be fulfilled to the least detail.

“Well, and here’s a pirn to unravel. What’s to be done now?” asked the Macdonald.

“By Heaven, I have it,” cried I. “Let Murdoch carry the news to Raasay that the Prince may get away at once. Do you guard our prisoner here, while I, dressed in his trews and bonnet, carry the letter to the Duke. His answer may throw more light on the matter.”

Not to make long, so it was decided. We made fashion to plaster up the envelope so as not to show a casual looker that it had been tampered with, and I footed it to Portree in the patched trews of the messenger, not with the lightest heart in the world. The first redcoat I met directed me to the inn where the Duke had his headquarters, and I was presently admitted to a hearing.

The Duke was a ton of a little man with the phlegmatic Dutch face. He read the letter stolidly and began to ask questions as to the disposition of our squad. I lied generously, magnificently, my face every whit as wooden as his; and while I was still at it the door behind me opened and a man came in leisurely. He waited for the Duke to have done with me, softly humming a tune the while, his shadow flung in front across my track; and while he lilted there came to me a dreadful certainty that on occasion I had heard the singer and his song before.

“‘Then come kiss me sweet and twenty.
Youth’s a stuff will not endure,’”

carolled the melodious voice lazily. Need I say that it belonged to my umquhile friend Sir Robert Völney.

Cumberland brushed me aside with a wave of his hand.

“Donner! If the Pretender is on Skye—and he must be—we’ve got him trapped, Völney. Our cordon stretches clear across the isle, and every outlet is guarded,” he cried.

“Immensely glad to hear it, sir. Let’s see! Is this the twelfth time you’ve had him sure? ’Pon honour, he must have more lives than the proverbial cat,” drawled Sir Robert insolently.

There was one thing about Volney I could never enough admire. He was no respecter of persons. Come high, come low, the bite of his ironic tongue struck home. For a courtier he had the laziest scorn of those he courted that ever adventurer was hampered with; and strangely enough from him his friends in high place tolerated anything. The Prince of Wales and his brother Cumberland would not speak to each other, yet each of them fought to retain Volney as his follower. Time-servers wondered that his uncurbed speech never brought him to grief. Perhaps the secret of his security lay in his splendid careless daring; in that, and in his winning personality.

“By God, Volney, sometimes I think you’re half a Jacobite,” said Cumberland, frowning.

“Your Grace does me injustice. My bread is buttered on the Brunswick side,” answered the baronet, carelessly.

“But otherwise—at heart——”

Volney’s sardonic smile came into play. “Otherwise my well-known caution, and my approved loyalty,—Egad, I had almost forgotten that!—refute such an aspersion.”

“Himmel! If your loyalty is no greater than your caution it may be counted out. At the least you take delight in tormenting me. Never deny it, man! I believe you want the Pretender to get away.”

“One may wish the Prince——”

“The Prince?” echoed Cumberland, blackly.

“The Young Chevalier then, if you like that better. ’Slife, what’s in a name? One may wish him to escape and be guilty of no crime. He and his brave Highlanders deserve a better fate than death. I dare swear that half your redcoats have the sneaking desire to see the young man win free out of the country. Come, my good fellow”—turning to me—“What do they call you—Campbell? Well then, Campbell, speak truth and shame the devil. Are you as keen to have the Young Chevalier taken as you pretend?”

Doggedly I turned my averted head toward him, saw the recognition leap to his eyes, and waited for the word to fall from his lips that would condemn me. Amusement chased amazement across his face.

A moment passed, still another moment. The word was not spoken. Instead he began to smile, presently to hum,

“‘You’ll on an’ you’ll march to Carlisle ha’
To be hanged and quartered, an’ a’, an’ a’.’”

“Come, Mont-Campbell, you haven’t answered my question yet. If you knew where Charles Edward Stuart was in hiding would you give him up?” He looked at me from under lowered lids, vastly entertained, playing with me as a cat does with a mouse.

“I am a fery good servant of the King, God bless him whatefer, and I would just do my duty,” answered I, still keeping the rôle I had assumed.

“Of course he would. Ach, liebe himmel! Any loyal man would be bound to do so,” broke in Cumberland.

Volney’s eyes shone. “I’m not so sure,” said he. “Now supposing, sir, that one had a very dear friend among the rebels; given the chance, ought he to turn him over to justice?”

“No doubt about it. Friendship ends when rebellion begins,” said the Duke, sententiously.

Sir Robert continued blandly to argue the case, looking at me out of the tail of his eye. Faith, he enjoyed himself prodigiously, which was more than I did, for I was tasting a bad quarter of an hour. “Put it this

way, sir: I have a friend who has done me many good turns. Now assume that I have but to speak the word to send him to his death. Should the word be spoken?"

The Duke said dogmatically that a soldier's first duty was to work for the success of his cause regardless of private feelings.

"Or turn it this way," continued Volney, "that the man is not a friend. Suppose him a rival claimant to an estate I mean to possess. Can I in honour give him up? What would you think, Mont—er—Campbell?"

"Not Mont-Campbell, but Campbell," I corrected. "I will be thinking, sir, that it would be a matter for your conscience, and at all events it is very lucky that you do not have to decide it."

"Still the case might arise. It's always well to be prepared," he answered, laughing.

"Nonsense, Robert! What the deuce do you mean by discussing such a matter with a Highland kerner? I never saw your match for oddity," said the Duke.

While he was still speaking there was a commotion in the outer room of the inn. There sounded a rap at the door, and on the echo of the knock an officer came into the room to announce the capture of a suspect. He was followed by the last man in the world I wanted to see at that moment, no other than the Campbell soldier whose place I was usurping. The fat was in the fire with a vengeance now, and though I fell back to the rear I knew it was but a question of time till his eye lit on me.

The fellow began to tell his story, got nearly through before his ferret eyes circled round to me, then broke off to burst into a screed of the Gaelic as he pointed a long finger at me.

The Duke flung round on me in a cold fury. "Is this true, fellow?"

I came forward shrugging.

"To deny were folly when the evidence is writ so plain," I said.

"And who the devil are you?"

"Kenneth Montagu, at your service."

Cumberland ordered the room cleared, then turned on Volney a very grim face. "I'll remember this, Sir Robert. You knew him all the time. It has a bad look, I make plain to say."

"'Twas none of my business. Your troopers can find enough victims for you without my pointing out any. I take the liberty of reminding your Highness that I'm not a hangman by profession," returned Volney stiffly.

"You go too far, sir," answered the Duke haughtily. "I know my duty too well to allow me to be deterred from performing it by you or by anybody else. Mr. Montagu, have you any reason to give why I should not hang you for a spy?"

"No reason that would have any weight with your Grace," I answered.

He looked long at me, frowning blackly out of the grimmest face I had ever fronted; and yet that countenance, inexorable as fate, belonged to a young man not four years past his majority.

"Without dubiety you deserve death," he said at the last, "but because of your youth I give you one chance. Disclose to me the hiding-place of the Pretender and you shall come alive out of the valley of the shadow."

A foretaste of the end clutched icily at my heart, but the price of the proffered safety was too great. Since I must die, I resolved that it should be with a good grace.

“I do not know whom your Grace can mean by the Pretender.”

His heavy jaw set and his face grew cold and hard as steel.

“You fool, do you think to bandy words with me? You will speak or by heaven you will die the death of a traitor.”

“I need not fear to follow where so many of my brave comrades have shown the way,” I answered steadily.

“Bah! You deal in heroics. Believe me, this is no time for theatricals. Out with it. When did you last see Charles Stuart?”

“I can find no honourable answer to that question, sir.”

“Then your blood be on your own head, fool. You die to-morrow morning by the cord.”

“As God wills; perhaps to-morrow, perhaps not for fifty years.”

While I was being led out another prisoner passed in on his way to judgment. The man was Captain Roy Macdonald.

“I’m wae to see you here, lad, and me the cause of it by sending you,” he said, smiling sadly.

“How came they to take you?” I asked.

“I was surprised on the beach just after Murdoch left,” he told me in the Gaelic so that the English troopers might not understand. “All should be well with the yellow haired laddie now that the warning has been given. Are you for Carlisle, Kenneth?”

I shook my head. “No, my time is set for to-morrow. If they give you longer you’ll find a way to send word to Aileen how it went with me, Donald?”

He nodded, and we gripped hands in silence, our eyes meeting steadily. From his serene courage I gathered strength.

They took me to a bothy in the village which had been set apart as a prison for me, and here, a picket of soldiers with loaded muskets surrounding the hut, they left me to myself. I had asked for paper and ink, but my request had been refused.

In books I have read how men under such circumstance came quietly to philosophic and religious contemplation, looking at the issue with the far-seeing eyes of those who count death but an incident. But for me, I am neither philosopher nor saint. Connected thought I found impossible. My mind was alive with fleeting and chaotic fragmentary impulses. Memories connected with Cloe, Charles, Balmerino, and a hundred others occupied me. Trivial forgotten happenings flashed through my brain. All the different Aileens that I knew trooped past in procession. Gay and sad, wistful and merry, eager and reflective, in passion and in tender guise, I saw my love in all her moods; and melted always at the vision of her.

I descended to self-pity, conceiving myself a hero and a martyr, revelling in an agony of mawkish sentiment concerning the post-mortem grief of my friends. From this at length I snatched myself by calling to mind the many simple Highlanders who had preceded me in the past months without any morbid craving for applause. Back harked my mind to Aileen, imagination spanning the future as well as the past. Tender pity and love suffused me. Mingled with all my broken reflections was many a cry of the heart for mercy to a sinner about to render his last account and for healing balm to that dear friend who would be left to mourn the memory of me painted in radiant colours.

Paradoxical though it may seem, the leaden hours flew on feathered foot. Dusk fell, then shortly darkness. Night deepened, and the stars came out. From the window I watched the moon rise till it flooded the room with its pale light, my mind at last fallen into the sombre quiet of deep abstraction.

A mocking voice brought me to earth with a start.

“Romantic spectacle! A world bathed in moonlight. Do you compose verses to your love’s bright eyes, Mr. Montagu? Or perhaps an epitaph for some close friend?”

An elegant figure in dark cloak, riding boots, and three-cornered hat confronted me, when I slowly turned.

“Hope I don’t intrude,” he said jauntily.

I gave him a plain hint. “Sir Robert, like Lord Chesterfield, when he was so ill last year, if I do not press you to remain it is because I must rehearse my funeral obsequies.”

His laugh rang merrily. Coming forward a step or two, he flung a leg across the back of a chair.

“Egad, you’re not very hospitable, my friend. Or isn’t this your evening at home?” he fleered.

I watched him narrowly, answering nothing.

“Cozy quarters,” he said, looking round with polite interest. “May I ask whether you have taken them for long?”

“The object of your visit, sir,” I demanded coldly.

“There you gravel me,” he laughed. “I wish I knew the motives for my visit. They are perhaps a blend—some pique, some spite, some curiosity, and faith! a little admiration, Mr. Montagu.”

“All of which being presumably now satisfied——”

“But they’re not, man! Far from it. And so I accept the courteous invitation you were about to extend me to prolong my call and join you in a glass of wine.”

Seeing that he was determined to remain willy-nilly, I made the best of it.

“You have interpreted my sentiments exactly, Sir Robert,” I told him. “But I fear the wine will have to be postponed till another meeting. My cellar is not well stocked.”

He drew a flask from his pocket, found glasses on the table, and filled them.

“Then let me thus far play host, Mr. Montagu. Come, I give you a toast!” He held the glass to the light and viewed the wine critically. “’T is a devilish good vintage, though I say it myself. Montagu, may you always find a safe port in time of storm!” he said with jesting face, but with a certain undercurrent of meaning that began to set my blood pounding.

But though I took a glimmer of the man’s purpose I would not meet him half-way. If he had any proposal to make the advances must come from him. Nor would I allow myself to hope too much.

“’T faith, ’tis a good port,” I said, and eyed the wine no less judicially than he.

Volney’s gaze loitered deliberately over the cottage furnishings. “Cozy enough, but after all not quite to my liking, if I may make so bold as to criticise your apartments. I wonder now you don’t make a change.”

“I’m thinking of moving to-morrow,” I told him composedly. “To a less roomy apartment, but one just as snug.”

“Shall you live there permanently?” he asked with innocent face.

“I shall stay there permanently,” I corrected.

Despite my apparent unconcern I was playing desperately for my life. That Volney was dallying with some plan of escape for me I became more confident, and I knew from experience that nothing would touch the man on his weak side so surely as an imperturbable manner.

“I mentioned pique and spite, Mr. Montagu, and you did not take my meaning. Believe me, not against you, but against that oaf Cumberland,” he said.

“And what may your presence here have to do with your pique against the Duke? I confess that the connection is not plain to me,” I said in careless fashion.

“After you left to-day, Mr. Montagu, I humbled myself to ask a favour of the Dutchman—the first I ever asked, and I have done him many. He refused it and turned his back on me.”

“The favour was——?”

“That you might be taken to London for trial and executed there.”

I looked up as if surprised. “And why this interest on my behalf, Sir Robert?”

He shrugged. “I do not know—a fancy—a whim. George Selwyn would never forgive me if I let you be hanged and he not there to see.”

“Had you succeeded Selwyn would have had you to thank for a pleasant diversion, but I think you remarked that the Dutchman was obstinate. ’Tis a pity—for Selwyn’s sake.”

“Besides, I had another reason. You and I had set ourselves to play out a certain game in which I took an interest. Now I do not allow any blundering foreigners to interfere with my amusements.”

“I suppose you mean you do not like the foreigner to anticipate you.”

“By God, I do not allow him to when I can prevent it.”

“But as in this instance you cannot prevent it——” My sentence tailed into a yawn.

“That remains to be seen,” he retorted, and whipped off first one boot and then the other. The unfastened cloak fell to the floor, and he began to unloose his doublet.

I stared calmly, though my heart stood still.

“Really, Sir Robert! Are you going to stay all night? I fear my accommodations are more limited than those to which you have been accustomed.”

“Don’t stand gaping there, Montagu. Get off those uncivilized rags of yours and slip on these. You’re going out as Sir Robert Volney.”

“I am desolated to interfere with your revenge, but—the guards?”

“Fuddled with drink,” he said. “I took care of that. Don’t waste time asking questions.”

“The Duke will be in a fearful rage with you.”

His eyes grew hard. “Am I a child that I should tremble when Cumberland frowns?”

“He’ll make you pay for this.”

“A fig for the payment!”

“You’ll lose favour.”

“I’ll teach the sullen beast to refuse me one. The boots next.”

He put on the wig and hat for me, arranged the muffler over the lower part of my face, and fastened the cloak.

“The watchword for the night is ‘Culloden.’ You should have no trouble in passing. I needn’t tell you to be bold,” he finished dryly.

“I’ll not forget this,” I told him.

“That’s as you please,” he answered carelessly. “I ask no gratitude. I’m settling a debt, or rather two—one due Cumberland and the other you.”

“Still, I’ll remember.”

“Oh, all right. Hope we’ll have the pleasure of renewing our little game some day. Better take to the hills or the water. You’ll find the roads strictly guarded. Don’t let yourself get killed, my friend. The pleasure of running you through I reserve for myself.”

I passed out of the hut into the night. The troopers who guarded the bothy were in either the stupid or the uproarious stage of their drink. Two of them sang a catch of a song, and I wondered that they had not already brought down on them the officer of the day. I passed them carelessly with a nod. One of them bawled out, “The watchword!” and I gave them “Culloden.” Toward the skirts of the village I sauntered, fear dogging my footsteps; and when I was once clear of the houses, cut across a meadow toward the shore, wary as a panther, eyes and ears alert for signals of danger. Without mishap I reached the sound, beat my way up the sand links for a mile or more, and saw a boat cruising in the moonlight off shore. I gave the whaup’s cry, and across the water came an answer.

Five minutes later I was helping the gillie in the boat pull across to Raasay. When half way over we rested on our oars for a breathing space and I asked the news, the rug-headed kerne shot me with the dismal tidings that Malcolm Macleod and Creagh, rowing to Skyes for a conference with Captain Roy, had fallen into the hands of the troopers waiting for them among the sand dunes. He had but one bit of comfort in his budget, and that was “ta yellow-haired Sassenach body wass leaving this morning with Raasay hersel’ and Murdoch.” At least I had some assurance that my undertaking had secured the safety of the Prince, even though three staunch men were on their way to their death by reason of it.

Once landed on Raasay, I made up the brae to the great house. Lights were still burning, and when I got close ’twas easy to be seen that terror and confusion filled it. Whimpering, white-faced women and wailing bairns ran hither and thither blindly. Somewhere in the back part of the house the bagpipes were sougning a dismal kind of dirge. Fierce-eyed men with mops of shock hair were gathered into groups of cursing clansmen. Through them all I pushed my way in to Aileen.

CHAPTER XIII

THE LITTLE GOD HAS AN INNINGS

By the great fireplace she stood, hands clasped, head upturned as in prayer. The lips moved silently in the petition of her heart. I saw in profile a girl's troubled face charged with mystery, a slim, tall, weary figure all in white against the flame, a cheek's pure oval, the tense curve of a proud neck, a mass of severely snodded russet hair. So I recalled her afterward, picture of desolation seeking comfort, but at the moment when I blundered on her my presence seemed profanity and no time was found for appraisal. Abashed I came to a halt, and was for tiptoeing back to the door; but hearing me she turned.

"Kenneth!" she cried, and stood with parted lips. Then, "They told me——"

"That I was taken. True, but I escaped. How, I will tell you later. The Prince— Is he safe?"

"For the present, yes. A lugger put in this morning belonging to some smugglers. In it he sailed for the mainland with Ronald and Murdoch. You will have heard the bad news," she cried.

"That Malcolm, Creagh, and Donald are taken?"

"And Flora, too. She iss to be sent to London for assisting in the escape of the Prince. And so are the others."

I fell silent, deep in thought, and shortly came to a resolution.

"Aileen, the Highlands are no place for me. I am a stranger here. Every clachan in which I am seen is full of danger for me. To-morrow I am for London."

"To save Malcolm," she cried.

"If I can. Raasay cannot go. He must stay to protect his clansmen. Murdoch is a fugitive and his speech would betray him in an hour. Remains only I."

"And I."

"You?"

"Why not? After 'the '15' women's tears saved many a life. And I too have friends. Sir Robert Volney, evil man as he iss, would move heaven and earth to save my brother."

There was much truth in what she said. In these days of many executions a pardon was to be secured less by merit than by the massing of influence, and I knew of no more potent influence than a beautiful woman in tears. Together we might be able to do something for our friends. But there was the long journey through a hostile country to be thought of, and the probability that we might never reach our destination in freedom. I could not tell the blessed child that her presence would increase threefold my chances of being taken, nor indeed was that a thing that held weight with me. Sure, there was her reputation to be considered, but the company of a maid would obviate that difficulty.

Ronald returned next day, and I laid the matter before him. He was extraordinarily loath to let Aileen peril

herself, but on the other hand he could not let Malcolm suffer the penalty of the law without making an effort on his behalf. Raasay was tied hand and foot by the suspicions of the government and was forced to consent to leave the matter in our hands. He made only the one stipulation, that we should go by way of Edinburgh and take his Aunt Miss MacBean with us as chaperone.

We embarked on the smuggler next day for the Long Island and were landed at Stornoway. After a dreary wait of over a week at this place we took shipping on a brig bound for Edinburgh. Along the north coast of Scotland, through the Pentland Firth, and down the east shore *The Lewis* scudded. It seemed that we were destined to have an uneventful voyage till one day we sighted a revenue cutter which gave chase. As we had on board *The Lewis* a cargo of illicit rum, the brig being in the contraband trade, there was nothing for it but an incontinent flight. For some hours our fate hung in the balance, but night coming on we slipped away in the darkness. The Captain, however, being an exceedingly timid man for one in his position, refused absolutely to put into the Leith Road lest his retreat should be cut off. Instead he landed us near Wemyss Castle, some distance up the coast, and what was worse hours before the dawn had cleared and in a pelting rain.

I wrapped Volney's cloak around Aileen and we took the southward road, hoping to come on some village where we might find shelter. The situation might be thought one of extreme discomfort. There were we three—Aileen, her maid, and I—sloshing along the running road in black darkness with the dreary splashing of the rain to emphasize our forlorn condition. Over unknown paths we travelled on precarious errand. Yet I for one never took a journey that pleased me more. The mirk night shut out all others, and a fair face framed in a tartan shawl made my whole world for me. A note of tenderness not to be defined crept into our relationship. There was a sweet disorder in her hair and more than once the wind whaffed it into my face. In walking our fingers touched once and again; greatly daring, mine slipped over hers, and so like children we went hand in hand. An old romancer tells quaintly in one of his tales how Love made himself of the party, and so it was with us that night. I found my answer at last without words. While the heavens wept our hearts sang. The wine of love ran through me in exquisite thrills. Every simple word she spoke went to my heart like sweetest music, and every unconscious touch of her hand was a caress.

"Tired, Aileen?" I asked. "There is my arm to lean on."

"No," she said, but presently her ringers rested on my sleeve.

"'T will be daylight soon, and see! the scudding clouds are driving away the rain."

"Yes, Kenneth," she answered, and sighed softly.

"You will think I am a sad blunderer to bring you tramping through the night."

"I will be thinking you are the good friend."

Too soon the grey dawn broke, for at the first glimmer my love disengaged herself from my arm. I looked shyly at her, and the glory of her young beauty filled me. Into her cheeks the raw morning wind had whipped the red, had flushed her like a radiant Diana. The fresh breeze had outlined her figure clear as she struggled against it, and the billowing sail was not more graceful than her harmonious lines.

Out of the sea the sun rose a great ball of flaming fire.

"A good omen for the success of our journey," I cried. "Look!

"‘Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day
Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.’"

"The good God grant it prove so, Kenneth, for Malcolm and for all our friends."

After all youth has its day and will not be denied. We were on an anxious undertaking of more than doubtful outcome, but save when we remembered to be sober we trod the primrose path.

We presently came to a small village where we had breakfast at the inn. For long we had eaten nothing but the musty fare of the brig, and I shall never forget with what merry daffing we enjoyed the crisp oaten cake, the buttered scones, the marmalade, and the ham and eggs. After we had eaten Aileen went to her room to snatch some hours sleep while I made arrangements for a cart to convey us on our way.

A wimpling burn ran past the end of the inn garden, and here on a rustic bench I found my comrade when I sought her some hours later. The sun was shining on her russet-hair. Her chin was in her hands, her eyes on the gurgling brook. The memories of the night must still have been thrilling her, for she was singing softly that most exquisite of love songs “Annie Laurie.”

““Maxwelton’s braes are bonnie,
Where early fa’s the dew,
Where me and Annie Laurie
Made up the promise true.’”

Her voice trembled a little, and I took up the song.

““Made up the promise true,
And ne’er forget will I;
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I’d lay me down and dee.’”

At my first words she gave a little start, her lips parted, her head came up prettily to attention, and though I could not see them I was ready to vow that she listened with shining eyes. Softly her breath came and went. I trod nearer as I sang.

““Her brow is like the snaw-drift,
Her throat is like the swan,
She’s jimp about the middle,
Her waist ye weel nicht span.’

“Oh, Aileen, if I might—if I only had the right! Won’t you give it me, dear heart?”

In the long silence my pulse stopped, then throbbed like an aching tooth.

“I’m waiting, Aileen. It is to be yes or no?”

The shy blue eyes met mine for an instant before they fluttered groundward. I could scarce make out the low sweet music of her voice.

“Oh, Kenneth, not now! You forget—my brother Malcolm——”

“I forget everything but this, that I love you.”

In her cheeks was being fought the war of the roses, with Lancaster victorious. The long-lashed eyes came up to meet mine bravely, love lucent in them. Our glances married; in those clear Highland lochs of hers I was sunk fathoms deep.

“Truly, Kenneth?”

“From the head to the heel of you, Aileen, lass. For you I would die, and that is all there is about it,” I cried, wildly.

“Well then, take me, Kenneth! I am all yours. Of telling love there will be many ways in the Gaelic, and I am thinking them all at once.”

And this is the plain story of how the great happiness came into Kenneth Montagu’s life, and how, though all unworthy, he won for his own the daughter of Raasay.

CHAPTER XIV

THE AFTERMATH

At Edinburgh we received check one. Aileen's aunt had left for the Highlands the week before in a fine rage because the Duke of Cumberland, who had foisted himself upon her unwilling hospitality, had eaten her out of house and home, then departing had borne away with him her cherished household *penates* to the value of some hundred pounds. Years later Major Wolfe told me with twinkling eyes the story of how the fiery little lady came to him with her tale of woe. If she did not go straight to the dour Duke it was because he was already out of the city and beyond her reach. Into Wolfe's quarters she bounced, rage and suspicion speaking eloquent in her manner.

"Hech, sir! Where have ye that Dutch Prince of yours?" she demanded of Wolfe, her keen eyes ranging over him.

"Pon honour, madam, I have not him secreted on my person," returned the Major, gravely turning inside out his pockets for her.

The spirited old lady glowered at him.

"It's ill setting ye to be sae humoursome," she told him frankly. "It wad be better telling ye to answer ceevilly a ceevil question, my birkie."

"If I can be of any service, madam——"

"Humph, service! And that's just it, my mannie. The ill-faured tykes hae rampaigned through the house and taen awa' my bonnie silver tea service that I hae scoured every Monday morning for thirty-seven years come Michelmas, forby the fine Holland linen that my father, guid carefu' man, brought frae the continent his nainsel."

"I am sorry——"

"Sorry! Hear till him," she snorted. "Muckle guid your sorrow will do me unless——" her voice fell to a wheedling cajolery—"you just be a guid laddie and get me back my linen and the silver."

"The Duke has a partiality for fine bed linen, and quaint silver devices are almost a mania with him. Perhaps some of your other possessions"—

"His Dutch officers ate me out of house and home. They took awa' eight sacks of the best lump sugar."

"The army is in need of sugar. I fear it is not recoverable."

Miss MacBean had a way of affecting deafness when the occasion suited her.

"Eih, sir! Were you saying you wad see it was recovered? And my silver set wi' twenty solid teaspoons, forby the linen?" she asked anxiously, her hand to her ear.

Wolfe smiled.

“I fear the Duke——”

“Ou ay, I ken fine you fear him. He’s gurly enough, Guid kens.”

“I was about to say, madam, that I fear the Duke will regard them as spoils from the enemy not to be given up.”

The Major was right. Miss MacBean might as well have saved her breath to cool her porridge, for the Duke carried her possessions to London despite her remonstrances. Five years later as I was passing by a pawnbroker’s shop on a mean street in London Miss MacBean’s teapot with its curious device of a winged dragon for a spout caught my eye in the window. The shopkeeper told me that it had been sold him by a woman of the demi-monde who had formerly been a mistress of the Duke of Cumberland. She said that it was a present from his Royal Highness, who had taken the silver service from the house of a fiery rebel lady in the north.

Our stay in the Scottish capital was of the shortest. In the early morning we went knocking at the door of Miss MacBean’s house. All day I kept under cover and in the darkness of night we slipped out of the city southwest bound. Of that journey, its sweet comradeship, its shy confidences, its perpetual surprises for each of us in discovering the other, I have no time nor mind to tell. The very danger which was never absent from our travel drew us into a closer friendliness. Was there an option between two roads, or the question of the desirability of putting up at a certain inn, our heads came together to discuss it. Her pretty confidence in me was touching in the extreme. To have her hold me a Captain Greatheart made my soul glad, even though I knew my measure did not fit the specifications by a mile. Her trust in me was less an incense to my vanity than a spur to my manhood.

The mere joy of living flooded my blood with happiness in those days. I vow it made me a better man to breathe the same air as she, to hear the lilt of her merry laugh and the low music of her sweet voice. Not a curve in that dimpled cheek I did not love; not a ripple in the russet hair my hungry eyes had not approved. When her shy glance fell on me I rode in the sunshine of bluest sky. If by chance her hand touched mine, my veins leaped with the wine of it. Of such does the happiness of youth consist.

’Tis strange how greedy love is in its early days of the past from which it has been excluded, how jealous sometimes of the point of contact with other lives in the unknown years which have gone to make up the rungs of the ladder of life. I was never tired of hearing of her childhood on the braes of Raasay: how she guddled for mountain trout in the burn with her brother Murdoch or hung around his neck chains of daisies in childish glee. And she—Faith, she drew me out with shy questions till that part of my life which would bear telling must have been to her a book learned by rote.

Yet there were times when we came near to misunderstanding of each other. The dear child had been brought up in a houseful of men, her mother having died while she was yet an infant, and she was in some ways still innocent as a babe. The circumstances of our journey put her so much in my power that I, not to take advantage of the situation, sometimes held myself with undue stiffness toward her when my every impulse was to tenderness. Perhaps it might be that we rode through woodland in the falling dusk while the nesting birds sang madrigals of love. Longing with all my heart to touch but the hem of her gown, I would yet ride with a wooden face set to the front immovably, deaf to her indirect little appeals for friendliness. Presently, ashamed of my gruffness, I would yield to the sweetness of her charm, good resolutions windwood scattered, and woo her with a lover’s ardour till the wild-rose deepened in her cheek.

“Were you ever in love before, Kennie?” she asked me once, twisting at a button of my coat. We were drawing near Manchester and had let the postillion drive on with the coach, while we loitered hand in

hand through the forest of Arden. The azure sky was not more blue than the eyes which lifted shyly to mine, nor the twinkling stars which would soon gaze down on us one half so bright.

I laughed happily. "Once—in a boy's way—a thousand years ago."

"And were you caring for her—much?"

"Oh, vastly."

"And she—was she loving you too?"

"More than tongue could tell, she made me believe."

"Oh, I am not wondering at that," said my heart's desire. "Of course she would be loving you."

'Twas Aileen's way to say the thing she thought, directly, in headlong Highland fashion. Of finesse she used none. She loved me (oh, a thousand times more than I deserved!) and that was all there was about it. To be ashamed of her love or to hide it never, I think, occurred to her. What more natural then than that others should think of me as she did?

"Of course," I said dryly. "But in the end my sweetheart, plighted to me for all eternity, had to choose betwixt her lover and something she had which he much desired. She sighed, deliberated long—full five seconds I vow—and in end played traitor to love. She was desolated to lose me, but the alternative was not to be endured. She sacrificed me for a raspberry tart. So was shattered young love's first dream. 'Tis my only consolation that I snatched the tart and eat it as I ran. Thus Phyllis lost both her lover and her portion. Ah, those brave golden days! The world, an unexplored wonder, lay at my feet. She was seven, I was nine."

"Oh." There was an odd little note of relief in the velvet voice that seemed to reproach me for a brute. I was forever forgetting that the ways of 'Toinette Westerleigh were not the ways of Aileen Macleod.

The dying sun flooded the topmost branches of the forest foliage. My eyes came round to the aureole which was their usual magnet.

"When the sun catches it 'tis shot with glints of gold."

"It is indeed very beautiful."

"In cloudy weather 'tis a burnished bronze."

She looked at me in surprise.

"Bronze! Surely you are meaning green?"

"Not I, bronze. Again you might swear it russet."

"That will be in the autumn when they are turning colour just before the fall."

"No, that is when you have it neatly snodded and the firelight plays about your head."

She laughed, flushing. "You will be forever at your foolishness, Kenn. I thought you meant the tree tips."

"Is the truth foolishness?"

"You are a lover, Kennie. Other folks don't see that when they look at me."

"Other folks are blind," I maintained, stoutly.

"If you see all that I will be sure that what they say is true and love is blind."

“The wise man is the lover. He sees clear for the first time in his life. The sun shines for him—and her. For them the birds sing and the flowers bloom. For them the world was made. They——”

“Whiles talk blethers,” she laughed.

“Yes, they do,” I admitted. “And there again is another sign of wisdom. Your ponderous fool talks pompous sense always. He sees life in only one facet. Your lover sees its many sides, its infinite variety. He can laugh and weep; his imagination lights up dry facts with whimsical fancies; he dives through the crust of conventionality to the realities of life. ’Tis the lover keeps this old world young. The fire of youth, of eternal laughing youth, runs flaming through his blood. His days are radiant, his nights enchanted.”

“I am thinking you quite a poet.”

“Was there ever a better subject for a poem? Life would be poetry writ into action if all men were lovers—and all women Aileens.”

“Ah, Kenneth! This fine talk I do not understand. It’s sheer nonsense to tell such idle clavers about me. Am I not just a plain Highland lassie, as unskilled in flattering speeches as in furbelows and patches? Gin you will play me a spring on the pipes I’ll maybe can dance you the fling, but of French minuets I have small skill.”

“Call me dreamer if you will. By Helen’s glove, your dreamer might be the envy of kings. Since I have known you life has taken a different hue. One lives for years without joy, pain, colour, all things toned to the dull monochrome of gray, and then one day the contact with another soul quickens one to renewed life, to more eager unselfish living. Never so bright a sun before, never so beautiful a moon. ’Tis true, Aileen. No fear but one, that Fate, jealous, may snatch my love from me.”

Her laughter dashed my heroics; yet I felt, too, that back of her smiles there was belief.

“I dare say. At the least I will have heard it before. The voice iss Jacob’s voice, but——”

I blushed, remembering too late that my text and its application were both Volney’s.

“’Tis true, even if Jacob said it first. If a man is worth his salt love must purify him. Sure it must. I am a better man for knowing you.”

A shy wonder filled her eyes; thankfulness too was there.

“Yet you are a man that has fought battles and known life, and I am only an ignorant girl.”

I lifted her hand and kissed it.

“You are my queen, and I am your most loyal and devoted servant.”

“For always, Kenn? When you are meeting the fine ladies of London will you love a Highland lassie that cannot make eyes and swear choicely?”

“Forever and a day, dear.”

Aileen referred to the subject again two hours later when we arose from the table at the Manchester ordinary. It was her usual custom to retire to her room immediately after eating. To-night when I escorted her to the door she stood for a moment drawing patterns on the lintel with her fan. A fine blush touched her cheek.

“Were you meaning all that, Kennie?”

“All what, dear heart?”

“That—nonsense—in the forest.”

“Every bit of it.”

Her fan spelt Kenneth on the door.

“Sometimes,” she went on softly, “a fancy is built on moonlight and laughing eyes and opportunity. It is like sunshine in winter on Raasay—just for an hour and then the mists fall.”

“For our love there will be no mists.”

“Ah, Kenn, you think so now, but afterward, when you take up again your London life, and I cannot play the lady of fashion, when you weary of my simpleness and are wishing me back among the purple heather hills?”

“That will be never, unless I wish myself there with you. I am no London Mohawk like Volney. To tramp the heather after muircocks or to ride to hounds is more my fancy. The Macaronis and I came long since to the parting of the ways. I am for a snug home in the country with the woman I love.”

I stepped to the table, filled a glass with wine, and brought it to her.

“Come, love! We will drink together. How is it old Ben Jonson hath it?

“‘Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I’ll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth seek a drink divine;
But might I of Jove’s nectar sup
I would not change from thine.’”

“Drink, sweetheart.”

She tasted, then I drained the glass and let it fall from my fingers to shiver on the floor.

Before we parted Aileen had one more word for me, “Kennie.”

“Yes, dear heart,” I cried, and was back at her side in a moment.

“What you said in the woods—I am knowing it all true. It is great foolishness, but my heart is singing the same song,” and with that she whipped the door to in my face.

I sauntered into the common room, found a seat by the fireplace, and let my eye wander over the company. There were present some half dozen yokels, the vicar’s curate, a country blood or two, and a little withered runt of a man in fustian with a weazened face like a wrinkled pippin. The moment I clapped eyes on him there came to my mind the dim recollection of a former acquaintance and the prescient fear of an impending danger. That I had seen him I was ready to take oath, yet I could not put my finger upon the circumstances. But the worst of it was that the old fellow recognized me, unless I were much mistaken, for his eyes never left me from the first.

From my mother I have inherited a Highland jauntiness which comes stealing over me when sobriety would set me better. Let the situation be a different one, uncertain of solution, with heads tipping in the balance, and an absurd spirit of recklessness straightway possesses me. But now, with this dear child on my hands, carelessness and I were far apart as the poles. Anxiety gripped me, and I sweated blood. Yet I must play the careless traveller, be full of good stories, unperturbed on the surface and apparently far

from alarm. I began to overdo the part, recognized the fact, and grew savage at myself. Trying to conciliate him, I was free with the ale, and again overdid it.

He drank my ale and listened to my stories, but he sat cocking on his seat like an imp of mischief. I rattled on, insouciant and careless to all appearances, but in reality my heart like lead. Behind my smiling lips I cursed him up hill and down dale. Lard, his malicious grin was a thing to rile the gods! More than once I wake up in the night from dreaming that his scrawny hand was clapping the darbies on my wrists.

When we were ready to start next morning the post boy let me know that one of the horses had gone lame. Here was a pretty pickle. I pished and pshawed, but in the end had to scour the town to find another in its place. 'Twas well on toward noon when the boy and I returned to the ordinary with a nag that would serve.

Of other lovers I have scant knowledge, but the one I know was wont to cherish the memory of things his love had said and how she had said them; with what a pretty tilt to her chin, with what a daring shyness of the eyes, with what a fine colour and impetuous audacity she had done this or looked that. He was wont in advance to plan out conversations, to decide that he would tell her some odd brain fancy and watch her while he told it. Many an hour he spent in the fairy land of imagination; many a one he dreamed away in love castles built of fancied rambles in enchanted woods, of sweet talks in which he always said and did the right thing; destined alas! never to pass from mind to speech, for if ever tongue essayed the telling it faltered some fatuous abortion as little like love's dream as Caliban resembled Ariel. Fresh from the brave world of day-dreams, still smiling happily from some whimsical conceit as well as with anticipation of Aileen's gladness at sight of me, I passed through the courtyard and into the ordinary.

A hubbub at the foot of the stairway attracted me. A gaping crowd was gathered there about three central figures. My weasened pippin-face of the malicious grin was one of them; a broad-shouldered, fair-faced and very much embarrassed young officer in the King's uniform stood beside him; and from the stairway some three steps up Aileen, plainly frightened, fronted them and answered questions in her broken English.

"I am desolated to distress you, madam," the boy officer was saying, "but this man has laid an information with me that there is a rebel in your party, one who was in Manchester with the Pretender's force some months since. It will be necessary that I have speech with him."

"There iss no rebel with me, sir. The gentleman with whom I travel iss of most approved loyalty," she faltered.

"Ah! He will no doubt be able to make that clear to me. May I ask where he is at present?"

Aileen went white as snow. Her distress was apparent to all.

"Sir, I do entreat you to believe that what I say iss true," she cried whitely.

The little rat in fustian broke out screaming that he would swear to me among ten thousand: as to the girl she must be the rebel's accomplice, his mistress mayhap. Aileen, her big, anxious eyes fixed on the officer, shrank back against the stair rail at her accuser's word. The lad commanded him sharply to be quiet, but with the utmost respect let Aileen understand that he must have talk with me.

All this one swift glance had told me, and at this opportune moment I sauntered up, Volney's snuff-box in my hand. If the doubt possessed me as to how the devil I was to win free from this accusation, I trust no shadow of fear betrayed itself in my smirking face.

"Egad, here's a gathering of the clans. Hope I'm not *de trop*," I simpered.

The lieutenant bowed to me with evident relief.

“On the contrary, sir, if you are the gentleman travelling with this lady you are the desired complement to our party. There has been some doubt expressed as to you. This man here claims to have recognized you as one of the Pretender’s army; says he was present when you bought provisions for a troop of horsemen during the rebel invasion of this town.”

“Slife, perhaps I’m Charles Stuart himself,” I shrugged.

“I swear to him. I swear to him,” screamed fustian.

On my soul merely to look at the man gave me a nausea. His white malevolence fair scunnered me.

I adjusted Volney’s eye-glass with care and looked the fellow over with a candid interest, much as your scientist examines a new specimen.

“What the plague! Is this rusty old last year’s pippin an evidence against me? Rot me, he’s a pretty scrub on which to father a charge against a gentleman, Lud, his face is a lie. No less!”

“May I ask your name, sir, and your business in this part of the country?” said the lieutenant.

Some impulse—perhaps the fact that I was wearing his clothes—put it into my head to borrow Volney’s name. There was risk that the lad might have met the baronet, but that was a contingency which must be ventured. It brought him to like a shot across a lugger’s bows.

“Sir Robert Volney, the friend of the Prince,” he said, patently astonished.

“The Prince has that honour,” I smiled.

“Pray pardon my insistence. Orders from headquarters,” says he apologetically.

I waved aside his excuses peevishly.

“Sink me, Sir Robert Volney should be well enough known not to be badgered by every country booby with a king’s commission. Lard, I vow I’ll have a change when Fritz wears the crown.”

With that I turned on my heel in a simulation of petty anger, offered my arm to Aileen, and marched up the stairs with her. My manner and my speech were full of flowered compliments to her, of insolence to the young gentleman below, for there is nothing more galling to a man’s pride than to be ignored.

“’Twas the only way,” I said to Aileen when the door was closed on us above. “’Tis a shame to flout an honest young gentleman so, but in such fashion the macaroni would play the part. Had I stayed to talk with him he might have asked for my proof. We’re well out of the affair.”

But we were not out of it yet. I make no doubt that no sooner was my back turned than the little rat in fustian, his mind set on a possible reward, was plucking at the lad’s sleeve with suggestions and doubts. In any case there came presently a knock at the door. I opened. The boy officer was there with a red face obstinately set.

“Sir, I must trouble you again,” he said icily. “You say you are Sir Robert Volney. I must ask you for proofs.”

At once I knew that I had overdone my part. It had been better to have dealt with this youth courteously; but since I had chosen my part, I must play it.

“Proofs,” I cried blackly. “Do you think I carry proofs of my identity for every country bumpkin to read? Sink me, ’tis an outrage.”

He flushed, but hung doggedly to his point.

“You gain nothing by insulting me, Sir Robert. I may be only a poor line officer and you one high in power, but by Heaven! I’m as good a man as you,” cried the boy; then rapped out, “I’ll see your papers, if you have me broke for it.”

My papers! An inspiration shot into my brain. When Volney had substituted for me at Portree he had given me a pass through the lines, made out in his name and signed by the Duke of Cumberland, in order that I might present it if challenged. Hitherto I had not been challenged, and indeed I had forgotten the existence of it, but now— I fished out the sheet of parchment and handed it to the officer. His eye ran over the passport, and he handed it back with a flushed face.

“I have to offer a thousand apologies for troubling you, Sir Robert. This paper establishes your identity beyond doubt.”

“Hope you’re quite satisfied,” I said with vast irony.

“Oh, just one more question. The lady travelling with you?”

I watched him silently.

“She is from the Highlands, is she not?” he asked.

“Is she?”

“To be sure ’tis sufficient if Sir Robert Volney vouches for her.”

“Is it?”

“And of course the fact that she travels in his company——”

My answer was a yawn, half stifled behind my hand. The lad glared at me, in a rage at me for my insolence and at himself for his boyish inability to cope with it. Then he swung on his heel and stamped down-stairs. Five years later I met him at a dinner given by a neighbour of mine in the country, and I took occasion then to explain to him my intolerable conduct. Many a laugh we have since had over it.

We reached London on a dismal Wednesday when the rain was pouring down in sheets. Aileen I took at once to our town house that she might be with Cloe, though I expected to put up with my old nurse in another part of the city. I leave you to conceive the surprise of Charles and my sister when we dropped in on them.

The news they had for us was of the worst. Every week witnessed the execution of some poor Jacobites and the arrival of a fresh batch to take their place in the prisons. The Scotch Lords Balmerino, Cromartie and Kilmarnock were already on trial and their condemnation was a foregone conclusion. The thirst for blood was appalling and not at all glutted by the numerous executions that had already occurred. ’Twas indeed for me a most dismal home-coming.

CHAPTER XV

A REPRIEVE!

“My Lord of March, is Arthur Lord Balmerino guilty of High Treason?”

Lord March, youngest peer of the realm, profligate and scoundrel, laid his hand on the place where his heart ought to have been and passed judgment unctuously.

“Guilty, upon my honour.”

The Lord High Steward repeated the same question to each of the peers in order of their age and received from each the same answer. As it became plain that the prisoner at the bar was to be convicted the gentleman-gaoler gradually turned the edge of his axe toward Balmerino, whose manner was nonchalant and scornful. When the vote had been polled my Lord bowed to the judges with dignity and remarked, “I am sorry to have taken up so much of your time without avail, my lords. If I pleaded ‘not guilty’ my principal reason was that the ladies might not miss their show.” Shortly afterward he was ushered out of Westminster Hall to his carriage.

From the view-point of the whigs Balmerino was undoubtedly guilty as Lucifer and not all the fair play in the world could have saved him from Tower Hill. He was twice a rebel, having been pardoned for his part in “the ’15,” and ’twas not to be expected that so hardened an offender would again receive mercy. But at the least he might have been given courtesy, and that neither he nor his two fellows, Kilmarnock and Cromartie, did at all receive. The crown lawyers to the contrary took an unmanly delight in girding and snapping at the captives whom the fortune of war had put in their power. Monstrous charges were trumped up that could not be substantiated, even the Lord High Steward descending to vituperation.

Horry Walpole admitted Balmerino to be the bravest man he had ever seen. Throughout the trial his demeanour had been characteristic of the man, bold and intrepid even to the point of bravado. The stout old lord conversed with the official axe-bearer and felt the edge of the ominous instrument with the unconcern of any chance spectator. There was present a little boy who could see nothing for the crowd and Balmerino alone was unselfish enough to think of him. He made a seat for the child beside himself and took care that he missed nothing of the ceremony. When the Solicitor-General, whose brother, Secretary Murray, had saved his own life by turning evidence against Balmerino, went up to the Scotch Lord and asked him insolently how he dared give the peers so much trouble, Balmerino drew himself up with dignity and asked, “Who is this person?” Being told that it was Mr. Murray, “Oh!” he answered smiling, “Mr. Murray! I am glad to see you. I have been with several of your relations; the good lady your mother was of great use to us at Perth.”

Through the crowd I elbowed my way and waited for the three condemned Scotch lords to pass into their carriages. Balmerino, bluff and soldierly, led the way; next came the tall and elegant Kilmarnock; Lord Cromartie, plainly nervous and depressed, brought up the rear. Balmerino recognized me, nodded almost imperceptibly, but of course gave no other sign of knowing the gawky apprentice who gaped at him along with a thousand others. Some one in the crowd cried out, “Which is Balmerino?” The old lord turned

courteously, and said with a bow, "I am Balmerino." At the door of the coach he stopped to shake hands with his fellow-sufferers.

"I am sorry that I alone cannot pay the debt, gentlemen. But after all 'tis but what we owe to nature sooner or later, the common debt of all. I bear in mind what Sir Walter Raleigh wrote the night before his head paid forfeit.

"‘Cowards fear to die; but courage stout,
Rather than live in snuff, will be put out.’"

"Poor Murray drags out a miserable life despised by all, but we go to our God with clean hands. By St. Andrew, the better lot is ours."

"I think of my poor wife and eight fatherless bairns," said Cromartie sadly.

Rough Arthur Elphinstone's comforting hand fell on his shoulder.

"A drieck outlook, my friend. You must commend them to the God of orphans if the worst befalls. As for us— Well, in the next world we will not be tried by a whig jury."

Balmerino stepped into the coach which was waiting to convey him to the Tower. The gentleman-gaoler followed with the official axe, the edge of which still pointed toward its victim. He must have handled it carelessly in getting into the carriage, for I heard Balmerino bark out,

"Take care, man, or you'll break my shins with that d——d axe."

They were the last words I ever heard from his lips. The door slammed and the coach drove away to the prison, from which my Lord came forth only to meet the headsman and his block.

Sadly I made my way towards the city through the jostling crowds of sightseers. Another batch of captives from the North was to pass through the town that day on their way to prison, and a fleering rabble surged to and fro about the streets of London in gala dress, boisterous, jovial, pitiless. From high to low by common consent the town made holiday. Above the common ruck, in windows hired for the occasion, the fashionable world, exuding patronage and perfume, sat waiting for the dreary procession to pass. In the windows opposite where I found standing room a party from the West End made much talk and laughter. In the group I recognized Antoinette Westerleigh, Sir James Craven, and Topham Beauclerc.

"Slitterkins! I couldn't get a seat at Westminster Hall this morning for love or money," pouted Mistress Westerleigh. "'Tis pity you men can't find room for a poor girl to see the show."

"Egad, there might as well have been no rebellion at all," said Beauclerc dryly. "Still, you can go to see their heads chopped off. 'Twill be some compensation."

"I suppose you'll go, Selwyn," said Craven to that gentleman, who with Volney had just joined the group.

"I suppose so, and to make amends I'll go to see them sewn on again," returned Selwyn.

"I hear you want the High Steward's wand for a memento," said Beauclerc.

"Not I," returned Selwyn. "I did, but egad! he behaved so like an attorney the first day and so like a pettifogger the second that I wouldn't take the wand to light my fire with."

"Here they come, sink me!" cried Craven, and craned forward to get a first glimpse of the wretched prisoners.

First came four wagon-loads of the wounded, huddled together thick as shrimps, their pallid faces and forlorn appearance a mute cry for sympathy. The mob roared like wild beasts, poured out maledictions on

their unkempt heads, hurled stones and sticks at them amid furious din and clamour. At times it seemed as if the prisoners would be torn from the hands of their guard by the excited mob. Scarce any name was found too vile with which to execrate these unfortunate gentlemen who had been guilty of no crime but excessive loyalty.

Some of the captives were destined for the New Prison in Southwark, others for Newgate, and a few for the Marshalsea. Those of the prisoners who were able to walk were handcuffed together in couples, with the exception of a few of the officers who rode on horseback bound hand and foot. Among the horsemen I easily recognized Malcolm Macleod, who sat erect, dour, scornful, his strong face set like a vise, looking neither to the right nor the left. Another batch of foot prisoners followed. Several of the poor fellows were known to me, including Leath, Chadwick, and the lawyer Morgan. My roving eye fell on Creagh and Captain Roy shackled together.

From the window above a piercing cry of agony rang out.

“Tony! Tony!”

Creagh slewed round his head and threw up his free hand.

“’Toinette!” he cried.

But Miss Westerleigh had fainted, and Volney was already carrying her from the window with the flicker of a grim smile on his face. I noticed with relief that Craven had disappeared from sight.

My relief was temporary. When I turned to leave I found my limbs clogged with impedimenta. To each arm hung a bailiff, and a third clung like a leech to my legs. Some paces distant Sir James Craven stood hulloing them to the sport with malign pleasure.

“To it, fustian breeches! Yoho, yoho! There’s ten guineas in it for each of you and two hundred for me. ’Slife, down with him, you red-haired fellow! Throw him hard. Ecod, I’ll teach you to be rough with Craven, my cockerel Montagu!” And the bully kicked me twice where I lay.

They dragged me to my feet, and Craven began to sharpen his dull wit on me.

“Two hundred guineas I get out of this, you cursed rebel highwayman, besides the pleasure of seeing you wear hemp—and that’s worth a hundred more, sink my soul to hell if it isn’t.”

“Your soul is sunk there long ago, and this blackguard job sends you one circle lower in the Inferno, Catchpoll Craven,” said a sneering voice behind him.

Craven swung on his heel in a fury, but Volney’s easy manner—and perhaps the reputation of his small sword too—damped the mettle of his courage. He drew back with a curse, whispered a word into the ear of the nearest bailiff, and shouldered his way into the crowd, from the midst of which he watched us with a sneer.

“And what mad folly, may I ask, brought you back to London a-courting the gallows?” inquired Volney of me.

“Haven’t you heard that Malcolm Macleod is taken?” I asked.

“And did you come to exchange places with him? On my soul you’re madder than I thought. Couldn’t you trust me to see that my future brother-in-law comes to no harm without ramming your own head down the lion’s throat? Faith, I think Craven has the right of it: the hempen noose is yawning for such fools as you.”

The bailiffs took me to the New Prison and thrust me into an underground cell about the walls of which moisture hung in beads. Like the rest of the prisoners I was heavily ironed by day and fastened down to

the floor by a staple at night. One hour in the day we were suffered to go into the yard for exercise and to be inspected and commented upon by the great number of visitors who were allowed access to the prison. On the second day of my arrival I stood blinking in the strong sunlight, having just come up from my dark cell, when two prisoners shuffled across the open to me, their fetters dragging on the ground. Conceive my great joy at finding Creagh and Donald Roy fellow inmates of New Prison with me. Indeed Captain Roy occupied the very next cell to mine.

I shall not weary you with any account of our captivity except to state that the long confinement in my foul cell sapped my health. I fell victim to agues and fevers. Day by day I grew worse until I began to think that 'twas a race between disease and the gallows. Came at last my trial, and prison attendants haled me away to the courts. Poor Leath, white to the lips, was being hustled out of the room just as I entered.

“By Heaven, Montagu, these whigs treat us like dogs,” he cried passionately to me. “They are not content with our lives, but must heap foul names and infamy upon us.”

The guards hurried us apart before I could answer. I asked one of them what the verdict had been in Leath's case, and the fellow with an evil laugh made a horrid gesture with his hands that confirmed my worst fears.

In the court room I found a frowning judge, a smug-faced yawning jury, and row upon row of eager curious spectators come to see the show. Besides these there were some half-score of my friends attending in the vain hope of lending me countenance. My shifting glance fell on Charles, Cloe, and Aileen, all three with faces like the corpse for colour and despairing eyes which spoke of a hopeless misery. They had fought desperately for my life, but they knew I was doomed. I smiled sadly on them, then turned to shake hands with George Selwyn.

He hoped, in his gentle drawl, that I would win clear. My face lit up at his kindly interest. I was like a drowning man clutching at straws. Even the good-will of a turnkey was of value to me.

“Thanks, Selwyn,” I said, a little brokenly. “I'm afraid there's no chance for me, but it's good hearing that you are on my side.”

He appeared embarrassed at my eagerness. Not quite good form he thought it, I dare say. His next words damped the glow at my heart.

“Gad, yes! Of course. I ought to be; bet five ponies with Craven that you would cheat the gallows yet. He gave me odds of three to one, and I thought it a pretty good risk.”

It occurred to me fantastically that he was looking me over with the eye of an underwriter who has insured at a heavy premium a rotten hulk bound for stormy seas. I laughed bitterly.

“You may win yet,” I said. “This cursed prison fever is eating me up;” and with that I turned my back on him.

I do not intend to go into my trial with any particularity. From first to last I had no chance and everybody in the room understood it. There were a dozen witnesses to prove that I had been in the thick of the rebellion. Among the rest was Volney, in a vile temper at being called on to give testimony. He was one of your reluctant witnesses, showed a decided acrimony toward the prosecution, and had to have the facts drawn out of him as with a forceps. Such a witness, of high social standing and evidently anxious to shield me, was worth to the State more than all the other paltry witnesses combined. The jury voted guilty without leaving the court-room, after which the judge donned his black cap and pronounced the horrible judgment which was the doom of traitors. I was gash with fear, but I looked him in the face and took it smilingly. It was Volney who led the murmur of approval which greeted my audacity, a murmur which

broke frankly into applause when Aileen, white to the lips, came fearlessly up to bid me be of good cheer, that she would save me yet if the importunity of a woman would avail aught.

Wearily the days dragged themselves into weeks, and still no word of hope came to cheer me. There was, however, one incident that gave me much pleasure. On the afternoon before the day set for our execution Donald Roy made his escape. Some one had given him a file and he had been tinkering at his irons for days. We were in the yard for our period of exercise, and half a dozen of us, pretending to be in earnest conversation together, surrounded him while he snapped the irons. Some days before this time he had asked permission to wear the English dress, and he now coolly sauntered out of the prison with some of the visitors quite unnoticed by the guard.

The morning dawned on which nine of us were to be executed. Our coffee was served to us in the room off the yard, and we drank it in silence. I noticed gladly that Macdonald was not with us, and from that argued that he had not been recaptured.

“Here’s wishing him a safe escape from the country,” said Creagh.

“Lucky dog!” murmured Leath, “I hope they won’t nail him again.”

Brandy was served. Creagh named the toast and we drank it standing.

“King James!”

The governor of the prison bustled in just as the broken glasses shivered behind us.

“Now gentlemen, if you are quite ready.”

Three sledges waited for us in the yard to draw us to the gallows tree. There was no cowardly feeling, but perhaps a little dilatoriness in getting into the first sledge. Five minutes might bring a reprieve for any of us, and to be in the first sledge might mean the difference between life and death.

“Come, gentlemen! If you please! Let us have no more halting,” said the governor, irritably.

Creagh laughed hardily and vaulted into the sledge. “Egad, you’re right! We’ll try a little haltering for a change.”

Morgan followed him, and I took the third place.

A rider dismounted at the prison gate.

“Is there any news for me?” asked one poor fellow eagerly.

“Yes, the sheriff has just come and is waiting for you,” jeered one of the guards with brutal frankness.

The poor fellow stiffened at once. “Very well. I am ready.”

A heavy rain was falling, but the crowd between the prison and Kennington Common was immense. At the time of our trials the mob had treated us in ruffianly fashion, but now we found a respectful silence. The lawyer Morgan was in an extremely irritable mood. All the way to the Common he poured into our inattentive ears a tale of woe about how his coffee had been cold that morning. Over and over again he recited to us the legal procedure for bringing the matter into the courts with sufficient effect to have the prison governor removed from his position.

A messenger with an official document was waiting for us at the gallows. The sheriff tore it open. We had all been bearing ourselves boldly enough I dare say, but at sight of that paper our lips parched, our throats choked, and our eyes burned. Some one was to be pardoned or reprieved. But who? What a moment! How the horror of it lives in one’s mind! Leisurely the sheriff read the document through, then deliberately went

over it again while nine hearts stood still. Creagh found the hardihood at that moment of intense anxiety to complain of the rope about his neck.

“I wish the gossoon who made this halter was to be hanged in it. ’Slife, the thing doesn’t fit by a mile,” he said jauntily.

“Mr. Anthony Creagh pardoned, Mr. Kenneth Montagu reprieved,” said the sheriff without a trace of feeling in his voice.

For an instant the world swam dizzily before me. I closed my eyes, partly from faintness, partly to hide from the other poor fellows the joy that leaped to them. One by one the brave lads came up and shook hands with Creagh and me in congratulation. Their good-will took me by the throat, and I could only wring their hands in silence.

On our way back to the prison Creagh turned to me with streaming eyes. “Do you know whom I have to thank for this, Kenneth?”

“No. Whom?”

“Antoinette Westerleigh, God bless her dear heart!”

And that set me wondering. It might be that Charles and Aileen alone had won my reprieve for me, but I suspected Volney’s fine hand in the matter. Whether he had stirred himself in my affairs or not, I knew that I too owed my life none the less to the leal heart of a girl.

CHAPTER XVI

VOLNEY'S GUEST

Of all the London beaux not one had apartments more elegant than Sir Robert Volney.^[3] It was one of the man's vanities to play the part of a fop, to disguise his restless force and eager brain beneath the vapid punctilios of a man of fashion. There were few suspected that his reckless gayety was but a mask to hide a weary, unsatisfied heart, and that this smiling debonair gentleman with the biting wit was in truth the least happy of men. Long he had played his chosen rôle. Often he doubted whether the game were worth the candle, but he knew that he would play it to the end, and since he had so elected would bear himself so that all men should mark him. If life were not what the boy Robert Volney had conceived it; if failure were inevitable and even the fruit of achievement bitter; if his nature and its enveloping circumstance had proven more strong than his dim, fast-fading, boyish ideals, at least he could cross the stage gracefully and bow himself off with a jest. So much he owed himself and so much he would pay.

Something of all this perhaps was in Sir Robert Volney's mind as he lay on the couch with dreamy eyes cast back into the yesterdays of life, that dim past which echoed faintly back to him memories of a brave vanished youth. On his lips, no doubt, played the half ironic, half wistful smile which had become habitual to the man.

And while with half-shut eyes his mind drifted lazily back to that golden age forever gone, enter from the inner room, Captain Donald Roy Macdonald, a cocked pistol in his hand, on his head Volney's hat and wig, on his back Volney's coat, on his feet Volney's boots. The baronet eyed the Highlander with mild astonishment, then rose to his feet and offered him a chair.

"Delighted, I'm sure," he said politely.

"You look it," drolled Macdonald.

"Off to the wars again, or are you still at your old profession of lifting, my Highland cateran?"

Donald shrugged. "I am a man of many trades. In my day I have been soldier, sailor, reiver, hunter and hunted, doctor and patient, forby a wheen mair. What the gods provide I take."

"Hm! So I see. Prithee, make yourself at home," was Volney's ironical advice.

Macdonald fell into an attitude before the glass and admired himself vastly.

"Fegs, I will that. The small-clothes now— Are they not an admirable fit whatever? And the coat— 'Tis my measure to a nicety. Let me congratulate you on your tailor. Need I say that the periwig is a triumph of the friseur's art?"

"Your approval flatters me immensely," murmured Volney, smiling whimsically. "Faith, I never liked my clothes so well as now. You make an admirable setting for them, Captain, but the ruffles are somewhat in disarray. If you will permit me to ring for my valet Watkins he will be at your service. Devil take him, he should have been here an hour ago."

“He sends by me a thousand excuses for his absence. The fact is that he is unavoidably detained.”

“Pardon me. I begin to understand. You doubtless found it necessary to put a quietus on him. May one be permitted to hope that you didn’t have to pistol him? I should miss him vastly. He is the best valet in London.”

“Your unselfish attachment to him does you infinite credit, Sir Robert. It fair brings the water to my een. But it joys me to reassure you at all events. He is in your bedroom tied hand and foot, biting on a knotted kerchief. I persuaded him to take a rest.”

Völney laughed.

“Your powers of persuasion are great, Captain Macdonald. Once you persuaded me to leave your northern capital. The air, I think you phrased it, was too biting for me. London too has a climate of its own, a throat disease epidemic among northerners is working great havoc here now. One trusts you will not fall a victim, sir. Have you—er—developed any symptoms?”

“’Twould nae doubt grieve you sair. You’ll be gey glad to learn that the crisis is past.”

“Charmed, ’pon honour. And would it be indiscreet to ask whether you are making a long stay in the city?”

“Faith, I wish I knew. Donald Roy wad be blithe to answer no. And that minds me that I will be owing you an apology for intruding in your rooms. Let the facts speak for me. Stravaiging through the streets with the chase hot on my heels, your open window invited me. I stepped in, footed it up-stairs, and found refuge in your sleeping apartments, where I took the liberty of borrowing a change of clothes, mine being over well known at the New Prison. So too I purloined this good sword and the pistol. That Sir Robert Völney was my host I did not know till I chanced on some letters addressed to that name. Believe me, I’m unco sorry to force myself upon you.”

“I felicitate myself on having you as a guest. The vapours had me by the throat to-night. Your presence is a sufficing tonic for a most oppressive attack of the blue devils. This armchair has been recommended as an easy one. Pray occupy it.”

Captain Roy tossed the pistol on a table and sat him down in the chair with much composure. Völney poured him wine and he drank; offered him fruit and he ate. Together, gazing into the glowing coals, they supped their mulled claret in a luxurious silence.

The Highlander was the first to speak.

“It’s a geyan queer warld this. *Anjour d’hui roi, demain rien*. Yestreen I gaped away the hours in a vile hole waiting for my craig (neck) to be raxed (twisted); the night I drink old claret in the best of company before a cheery fire. The warm glow of it goes to my heart after that dank cell in the prison. By heaven, the memory of that dungeon sends a shiver down my spine.”

“To-morrow, was it not, that you were to journey to Tyburn and from thence across the Styx?”

“Yes, to-morrow, and with me as pretty a lot of lads as ever threw steel across their hurdies. My heart is wae for them, the leal comrades who have lain out with me in the heather many a night and watched the stars come out. There’s Montagu and Creagh now! We three have tholed together empty wame and niddering cold and the weariness o’ death. The hurly o’ the whistling claymore has warmed our hearts; the sight of friends stark from lead and steel and rope has garred them rin like water. God, it makes me feel like a deserter to let them take the lang journey alane. Did you ken that the lad came back to get me from the field when I was wounded at Drum Mossie Moor?”

“Montagu? I never heard that.”

“Took his life in his hand to come back to that de’il’s caldron where the red bluid ran like a mountain burn. It iss the boast of the Macdonalds that they always pay their debts both to friend and foe. Fine have I paid mine. He will be thinking me the true friend in his hour of need,” finished Donald bitterly.

“You don’t know him. The temper of the man is not so grudging. His joy in your escape will help deaden his own pain. Besides, what could you do for him if you were with him at the end? ’Twould be only one more sacrifice.”

The grim dour Highland sternness hung heavy on Donald’s face.

“I could stand shoulder to shoulder with him and curse the whigs at all events. I could cry with him ‘God save King James’ in the teeth of the sidier roy.”

Volney clapped his hands softly. “Hear, hear!” he cried with flaming eyes. “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Jacobite.”

The Gael turned to him impetuously, his blue eyes (as I conceive) moist with emotion.

“Man, could I persuade you to be saving the lad? It was for this that I waited in your rooms to see you. They say that you are a favourite of princes, that what you ask you get. Do for once a fine thing and ask this boy’s life.”

“They exaggerate my power. But for argument’s sake suppose it true. Why should I ask it? What have I to gain by it?”

Volney, his eyes fixed on the fire, asked the question as much to himself as to the Highlander. The manner of his tone suggested that it was not a new one to him.

“Gain! Who spoke of gain? Are you a Jew peddler or an English gentleman?” cried Donald.

“They call me dissolute, gambler, profligate. These be hard names, but I have earned them all. I make no apologies and offer no excuses. As I have lived my life, so have I lived it. For buttered phrases I have no taste. Call me libertine, or call me man of fashion; ’tis all one. My evil nature—*C’est plus fort que moi*. At least I have not played the hypocrite. No canting sighs! No lapses to morality and prayers! No vices smugly hidden! The plain straight road to hell taken at a gallop!” So, with chin in hand and dark eyes lit by the flickering flame, this roué and sentimentalist philosophized.

“And Montagu?” cried the Gael, harking back to his prosaic text.

“Has made his bed and he must lie in it.”

“By Heaven, who ruined him and made an outlaw of him? Who drove him to rebellion?”

“You imply that I strewed his bed with nettles. Perhaps. ’Tis well my shoulders are broad, else they could not bear all that is laid upon them.”

“You would never be letting a petty private grudge influence you?”

Volney turned, stung to the quick.

“You go too far, Captain Macdonald. Have I given bonds to save this fool from the consequences of his folly? I cherish no hatred toward him, but I play no Jonathan to his David. Egad, it were a pretty rôle for me to essay! You would cast me for a part full of heroics, the moving of heaven and earth to save my dearest enemy. Thank you, I am not for it. Neither for nor against him will I lift a hand. There is no malice in my heart toward this poor condemned young gentleman. If he can win free I shall be glad, even though

his gain is my loss, but further than that I will not go. He came between me and the thing I most desired on earth. Shall I help him to the happiness which will condemn me to misery?"

For an instant the habitual veil of mockery was snatched aside and the tortured soul of the man leaped from his burning eyes.

"You saved him at Portree," was all that Donald could say.

"I paid a debt to him and to Cumberland. The ledger is now balanced."

The Jacobite paced up and down the room for a minute, then stopped and touched the other on his shoulder where he sat.

"I too am somewhat in your debt, Sir Robert. When Montagu opposed you he fought for his own hand. Therein he was justified. But I, an outsider, interfered in a quarrel that was not mine own, spoiled sport for you, in short lost you the lassie. You followed her to Scotland; 'twas I that drove you back to England when Montagu was powerless. From first to last I am the rock on which your love bark has split. If your cause has spelled failure I alone am to blame."

"So? What then?"

"Why this: without Captain Donald Roy Macdonald the lad had been helpless. Donald was at his back to whisper words of advice and encouragement. Donald contrived the plot which separated you from the lady. Donald stood good fairy to the blessed pair of bairns and made of himsel' a match-making auld mither. You owe your hatred to Donald Roy and not to the lad who was but his instrument."

The macaroni looked at the other with an odd smile twitching at the corners of his mouth.

"And so?"

"And so," continued the Macdonald triumphantly, a challenge in his voice and manner, "and so, who but Donald should be your enemy? My certes, a prettier foe at the broadsword you will not find in a' Scotland."

"I do not quite take your meaning. Would you fight with me?"

"Blithe would I be to cross the steel with you, but little that would help Kenneth. My plan is this: save the lad from the halter and I will tak' his place."

"You mean that if I compass his freedom you will surrender to be executed?"

"I am meaning just that."

"I thought so from the first. 'Slife, man, do you think I can change my foes like gloves? *Chacun paie son écot*."

"Why not? Iss not a man a better foe than a halfling boy?"

"I would never seek a better foe or a better friend than either you or Montagu, Captain. On my soul, you have both the true ring. But as to your offer I must decline it. The thing is one of your wild impracticable Highland imaginings, a sheer impossibility. You seem to think I have a blood feud and that nothing less than a foeman's life will satisfy me. In that you err. I am a plain man of the world and cannot reach your heroics."

The Jacobite's face fell.

"You are going to let the boy die then?"

Volney hesitated, then answered with a shrug.

“I shall be frank with you. To-day I secured Montagu a reprieve for two weeks. He shall have his chance such as it is, but I do not expect him to take it. If he shows stubborn I wash my hands of him. I have said the last word. You may talk till Yule without changing my mind.” Then, with an abrupt turn of the subject: “Have you with you the sinews of war, Captain? You will need money to effect your escape. My purse is at your service not less than my wardrobe, or if you care to lie hidden here for a time you will be quite safe. Watkins is a faithful fellow and devoted to me.”

The Highlander flushed, stammering out:

“For your proffered loan, I accept it with the best will in the world; and as to your offer of a hiding-place, troth! I’m badly needing one. Gin it were no inconvenience——”

“None in the world.”

“I will be remembering you for a generous foe till the day of my death. You’re a man to ride the water wi’.”

“Lard! There’s no generosity in it. Every Mohawk thinks it a pleasure to help any man break the laws. Besides, I count on you to help drive away the doldrums. Do you care for a hand at piquet now, Captain?”

“With pleasure. I find in the cartes great diversion, but by your leave I’ll first unloose your man Watkins.”

“Slife, I had forgot him. We’ll have him brew us a punch and make a night of it. Sleep and I are a thousand miles apart.”

[3]

[illegible]

CHAPTER XVII

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

There came to me one day a surprise, a marked hour among my weeks struck calm. Charles, Cloe, and Aileen had been wont to visit me regularly; once Selwyn had dropped in on me; but I had not before been honoured by a visit from Sir Robert Volney. He sauntered into my cell swinging a clouded cane, dressed to kill and point device in every ruffle, all dabbed with scented powder, pomatum, and jessamine water. To him, coming direct from the strong light of the sun, my cell was dark as the inside of Jonah's whale. He stood hesitating in the doorway, groping with his cane for some guide to his footsteps.

For an instant I drew back, thinking he had come to mock me; then I put the idea from me. However much of evil there was in him, Volney was not a small man. I stepped forward to greet him.

"Welcome to my poor best, Sir Robert! If I do not offer you a chair it is because I have none. My regret is that my circumstances hamper my hospitality."

"Not at all. You offer me your best, and in that lies the essence of hospitality. Better a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred, Egad," returned my guest with easy irony.

All the resources of the courtier and the beau were his. One could but admire the sparkle and the versatility of the man. His wit was brilliant as the play of a rapier's point. Set down in cold blood, remembered scantily and clumsily as I recall it, without the gay easy polish of his manner, the fineness is all out of his talk. After all 'tis a characteristic of much wit that it is apposite to the occasion only and loses point in the retelling.

He seated himself on the table with a leg dangling in air and looked curiously around on the massive masonry, the damp floor, the walls oozing slime. I followed his eye and in some measure his thoughts.

"Stone walls do not a prison make," I quoted gaily.

"Ecod, they make a pretty fair imitation of one!" he chuckled.

I was prodigious glad to see him.

His presence stirred my sluggish blood. The sound of his voice was to me like the crack of a whip to a jaded horse. Graceful, careless, debonair, a man of evil from sheer reckless wilfulness, he was the one person in the world I found it in my heart to both hate and admire at the same time.

He gazed long at me. "You're looking devilish ill, Montagu," he said.

I smiled. "Are you afraid I'll cheat the hangman after all?"

His eyes wandered over the cell again. "By Heaven, this death's cage is enough to send any man off the hooks," he shivered.

"One gets used to it," I answered, shrugging.

He looked at me with a kind of admiration. "They may break you, Montagu, but I vow they will never

bend you. Here are you torn with illness, the shadow of the gallows falling across your track, and never a whimper out of you.”

“Would that avail to better my condition?”

“I suppose not. Still, self-pity is the very ecstasy of grief, they tell me.”

“For girls and halfling boys, I dare say.”

There he sat cocked on the table, a picture of smiling ease, raffish and fascinating, as full of sentimental sympathy as a lass in her teens. His commiseration was no less plain to me because it was hidden under a debonair manner. He looked at me in a sidelong fashion with a question in his eyes.

“Speak out!” I told him. “Your interest in me as evidenced by this visit has earned the right to satisfy your curiosity.”

“I dare swear you have had your chance to save yourself?” he asked.

“Oh, the usual offer! A life for a life, the opportunity to save myself by betraying others.”

“Do you never dally with the thought of it?” he questioned.

I looked up quickly at him. A hundred times I had nursed the temptation and put it from me.

“Are you never afraid, Montagu, when the night falls black and slumber is not to be wooed?”

“Many a time,” I told him, smiling.

“You say it as easily as if I had asked whether you ever took the air in the park. ’Slife, I have never known you flinch. There was always a certain d——d rough plainness about you, but you play the game.”

“’Tis a poor hound falls whining at the whip when there is no avoiding it.”

“You will never accept their offer of a pardon on those terms. I know you, man. Y’are one of those fools hold by honour rather than life, and damme! I like you for it. Now I in your place——”

“——Would do as I do.”

“Would I? I’m not so sure. If I did it would be no virtue, but an obstinacy not to be browbeat.” Then he added, “You would give anything else on earth for your life, I suppose?”

“Anything else,” I told him frankly.

“Anything else?” he repeated, his eyes narrowing. “No reservations, Montagu?”

Our eyes crossed like rapiers, each searching into the other’s very soul.

“Am I to understand that you are making me an offer, Sir Robert?”

“I am making you an offer of your life.”

“Respectfully declined.”

“Think again, man! Once you are dead you will be a long time dead. Refuse to give her up, and you die; she is not for you in any case. Give way, and I will move heaven and earth for a pardon. Believe me, never was such perfect weather before. The birds sing divinely, and Charles tells me Montagu Grange is sorely needing a master.”

“Charles will look the part to admiration.”

“And doubtless will console himself in true brotherly fashion for the loss of his brother by reciting his

merits on a granite shaft and straightway forgetting them in the enjoyment of the estate.”

“I think it likely.”

He looked at me gloomily. “There is a way to save you, despite your obstinacy.”

I shuffled across to him in a tumult of emotion. “You would never do it, would never be so vile as to trade on her fears for me to win her.”

“I would do anything to win her, and I would do a great deal to save your life. The two things jump together. In a way I like you, man.”

But I would have none of his liking. “Oh, spare me that! You are the most sentimental villain unhung, and I can get along without your liking.”

“That’s as may be,” said he laughing, “but I cannot well get along without you. On my honour, you have become one of my greatest sources of interest.”

“Do you mean that you would stake my life against her hand?” I demanded whitely.

He gave me look for look. “I mean just that. By Heaven, I shall win her fair or foul.”

I could only keep saying over and over again, “You would never do it. Even you would never do that.”

“Wouldn’t I? You’ll see,” he answered laughing hardily. “Well, I must be going. Oh, I had forgot. Balmerino sent you this note. I called on him yesterday at the Tower. The old Scotchman is still as full of smiles as a bride.”

Balmerino’s letter was the friendliest imaginable. He stated that for him a pardon was of course out of the question, but that Sir Robert Volney had assured him that there was a chance for me on certain conditions; he understood that the conditions had to do with the hand of a young woman, and he advised me, if the thing were consistent with honour, to make submission, and let no foolish pride stand in the way of saving my life. The letter ended with a touching reference to the cause for which he was about to die.

I was shaken, I confess it. Not that I thought for a moment of giving up my love, but my heart ached to think of the cruel position into which she would be cast. To save her lover’s life, she must forsake her love, or if she elected the other alternative must send him to his death. That Volney would let this burden of choice fall on her I would scarce let myself believe; and yet—there was never a man more madly, hopelessly in love than he. His passion for her was like a whirlwind tossing him hither and thither like a chip on the boiling waters, but I thought it very characteristic of the man that he used his influence to have me moved to a more comfortable cell and supplied with delicacies, even while he plotted against me with my love.

After that first visit he used to come often and entertain me with the news and gossip of the town. I have never met a more interesting man. He was an onlooker of life rather than an actor, an ironical cynic, chuckling with sardonic humour. The secret of his charm lay perhaps in a certain whimsical outlook and in an original turn of mind.

Once I asked him why he found it worth while to spend so many hours with me when his society was so much sought after by the gayest circle in the town.

“I acquit you of any suspicion of philanthropy, Sir Robert. I give you credit for pursuing a policy of intelligent selfishness. You must know by this time that I will not purchase my life, nor let it be purchased, on the terms which you propose. Well then, I confess it puzzles me to guess what amusement you find in such a hole as this.”

“Variety spices life. What’s a man to do to keep himself from ennui? For instance, I got up this morning at

ten, with Selwyn visited Lady Dapperwit while she was drinking coffee in her nightrail, talked a vast deal of scandal with her, strolled in the park with Fritz, from there to White's in a sedan, two hours at lunch, and an hour with you for the good of my soul."

"The good of your soul?" I quizzed.

"Yes, I visit you here and then go away deuced thankful for my mercies. I'm not to be hanged next week, you know. I live to marry the girl."

"Still, I should think you might find more interesting spots than this."

"I am a student of human nature, Montagu."

"A condemned prisoner, never a wit at the best of times, full of fears and agues and fevers! One would scarce think the subject an inviting one for study."

"There you do yourself injustice. Y'are the most interesting man I know. A dozen characters are wrapped up in you. You have the appearance of being as great a rip as the rest of us, and I vow your looks do not belie you, yet at times you have the conscience of a ranting dissenter. I find in you a touch both of Selwyn's dry wit and of Balmerino's frosty bluntness; the cool daring of James Wolfe combined with as great a love of life as Murray has shown; the chivalry of Don Quixote and the hard-headedness of Cumberland; sometimes an awkward boy, again the grand manner Chesterfield himself might envy you; the obstinacy of the devil and——"

"Oh, come!" I broke in laughing. "I don't mind being made a composite epitome of all the vices of the race, but I object to your crossing the Styx on my behalf."

"And that reminds me of the time we came so near crossing together," he broke out, diverting the subject in his inconsequent fashion. "D'ye remember that Dr. Mead who dressed our wounds for us after our little argument? It appears that he and a Dr. Woodward fell into some professional dispute as to how a case should be treated, and Lud! nothing would satisfy them but they must get their toasting forks into action. The story goes that they fought at the gate of Gresham College. Mead pinked his man. 'Take your life,' quoth he. 'Anything but your medicine,' returns Woodward just before he faints. Horry Walpole told me the story. I suppose you have heard Selwyn's story of Lord Wharton. You know what a spendthrift Wharton is. Well the Duke of Graftsbury offered him one of his daughters in marriage, a lady of uncertain age and certain temper. But the lady has one virtue; she's a devilish fine fortune. A plum, they say! Wharton wrote Graftsbury a note of three lines declining the alliance because, as he put it, the fortune was tied up and the lady wasn't."

"Not bad. Talking of Selwyn, I suppose he gets his fill of horrors these days."

"One would think he might. I met him at the Prince's dinner yesterday, and between us we two emptied nine bottles of maraschino. Conceive the splitting headache I'm wearing to-day."

"You should take a course in Jacobitism," I told him gravely. "'Tis warranted to cure gout, liver trouble, indigestion, drunkenness, and sundry other complaints. I can warrant that one lives simply while he takes the treatment; sometimes on a crust of bread and a bowl of brose, sometimes on water from the burn, never does one dine over-richly."

"Yet this course is not conducive to long life. I've known a hundred followers of it fall victim to an epidemic throat disease," he retorted. Then he added more gravely, "By the way, you need have no fears for your friend Miss Flora Macdonald. I learn on the best of authority that she is in no danger whatever."

"And Malcolm?" I asked.

“His name has been put near the foot of the list for trial. Long before that time the lust for blood will be glutted. I shall make it a point to see that his case never comes to trial. One cannot afford to have his brother-in-law hanged like a common cutpurse.”

Day by day the time drew nearer on which my reprieve expired. I saw nothing of Aileen now, for she had followed the King and his court to Bath, intent on losing no opportunity that might present itself in my favour. For one reason I was glad to have her gone; so long as she was out of town Sir Robert could not urge on her the sacrifice which he intended.

The time of my execution had been set for Friday, and on the preceding Monday Volney, just arrived from the executions of Balmerino and Kilmarnock, drove out to New Prison to see me. He was full of admiration for Balmerino’s bold exit from the stage of life and retailed to me with great gusto every incident of the last scene on Tower Hill.

“I like your bluff Balmerino’s philosophy of life,” he told me. “When I called on him and apologized for intruding on the short time he had left the old Lord said, ‘O sir, no intrusion at all. I am in no ways concerned to spend more time than usual at my devotions. I think no man fit to live who is not fit to die, and to die well is much the easier of the two.’ On the scaffold no bridegroom could have been more cheerful. He was dressed in his old blue campaign uniform and was as bold and manly as ever. He expressed joy that Cromartie had been pardoned, inspected with interest the inscription on his coffin, and smilingly called the block his pillow of rest. ’Pon honour, the intrepid man then rehearsed the execution with his headsman, kneeling down at the block to show how he would give the signal for the blow. He then got up again, made a tender smiling farewell with his friends, and said to me, ‘I fear some will think my behaviour bold, Volney, but remember what I say, that it arises from confidence in God and a clear conscience.’ He reaffirmed his unshaken adherence to the house of Stuart, crying aloud, ‘God save King James!’ and bowed to the multitude. Presently, still cheerfully, he knelt at the block and said in a clear voice, ‘O Lord, reward my friends, forgive my enemies, bless Prince Charles and his brother, the Duke, and receive my soul.’ His arms dropped for the signal, and Arthur Elphinstone of Balmerino passed to the Valhalla where brave men dwell as gods.”

“God bring peace to his valiant restless soul,” I said, much moved.

“’Tis a thing to admire, the sturdy loyalty of you Jacobites,” he said after a pause. “You carry it off like gentlemen. Every poor Highlander who has yet suffered has flung out his ‘God save King James’ on the scaffold. Now I’ll wager you too go to death with the grand air—no canting prayers for King George, eh?”

“I must e’en do as the rest,” I smiled.

“Yet I’d bet a pony you don’t care a pinch of snuff for James Stuart. ’Tis loyalty to yourselves that animates you.”

Presently he harked back to the topic that was never closed between us.

“By this time next week you will have touched the heart of our eternal problem. The mystery of it will perhaps be all clear to you then. ’Tis most strange how at one sweep all a man’s turbulent questing life passes into the quiet of—of what? That is the question: of unending death or of achieved knowledge?” Then he added, coming abruptly to the issue: “The day draws near. Do you think better of my offer now?”

“Sir Robert, I have lived a tempestuous life these past months. I have known hunger and cold and weariness; I have been at the top of fortune’s wave and at the bottom; but I have never found it worth my while to become divorced from honour. You find me near dead from privations and disease. Do you think

I would pay so much for such an existence? Believe me, when a man has passed through what I have he is empty of fears.”

“I could better spare a better man,” he said.

“Sorry to inconvenience you,” I told him grimly.

“I’ faith, I think you’re destined to do that dead or alive.”

“I think I am. You will find me more in your way dead than alive.”

“I’ll outlive your memory, never fear.” Then quietly, after a moment’s hesitation: “There’s one thing it may be a comfort for you to know. I’ve given up any thought of putting her on the rack. I’ll win fairly or not at all.”

I drew a deep free breath. “Thank you for telling me.”

“I mean to marry her though. I swear to you, Montagu, that my heart is wrapped up in her. I thought all women alike until I met this one. Now I know better. She could have made a different man of me; sometimes I think she could even yet. I vow to you I would not now injure a hair of her head, but willy-nilly, in the end I shall marry the girl.”

“To ruin her life?”

“To save mine rather.”

“Do you think yourself able to change the whole course of your life for her?”

He mused. “Ah, Montagu! There your finger falls pat on the pulse of my doubt. My heart cries aye, my reason gives a negative.”

“Don’t worry overmuch about it,” I answered, railing at him. “She’ll never look at you, man. My grave will be an insurmountable barrier. She will idealize my memory, think me a martyr and herself a widowed maid.”

The shot scored. ’Twas plain he must have often thought of that himself.

“It may interest you to know that we are engaged to be married,” I added.

“Indeed! Let me congratulate you. When does the happy event occur, may I ask? Or is the day set?”

He had no need to put into words more clearly the irony of the fate that encompassed us.

“Dead or alive, as you say, I bar your way,” I said tartly.

“Pooh, man! I give you six weeks of violent grief, six months of tender melancholy.”

“You do not know the Scotch. She will die a maid,” I answered.

“Not she! A live lover is more present than a dead one. Has she sworn pretty vows to you, Montagu? ‘At lovers’ perjuries, they say, love laughs.’ Is there nothing to be said for me? Will her heart not always whisper that I deserve gratitude and love, that I perilled my life for her, saved the lives of her brother and her lover, neither of them friends of mine, again reprieved her lover’s life, stood friend to her through all her trouble? You know a woman’s way—to make much of nothing.”

“Forgive, if I prod a lagging memory, Miss Westerleigh?”

Long he laughed and merrily.

“Eloped for Gretna Green with Tony Creagh last night, and I, poor forsaken swain, faith! I do not pursue.”

You may be sure that dashed me. I felt as a trapped fox with the dogs closing in. The future loomed up clear before me, Aileen hand in hand with Volney scattering flowers on my grave in sentimental mood. The futility of my obstinacy made me bitter.

“Come, Montagu! Listen to reason,” urged the tempter. “You get in my way, but I don’t want to let you be sponged out. The devil of it is that if I get you a pardon—and I’m not sure that I can get it—you’ll marry the girl. I might have you shipped to the Barbadoes as a slave with some of the others, but to be frank I had rather see you hanged than give you so scurvy an end. Forswear what is already lost and make an end of it.”

I turned away blackly. “You have my answer. Sir Robert, you have played your last card. Now let me die in peace.”

He shrugged impatiently and left me. “A fool’s answer, yet a brave man’s too,” he muttered.

Aileen, heart-broken with the failure of her mission, reached town on Thursday and came at once to the prison. Her face was as the face of troubled waters. I had no need to ask the question on my lips. With a sobbing cry she threw herself on my breast. My heart was woe for her. Utter weariness was in her manner. All through the long days and nights she had agonized, and now at last despaired. There seemed no tears left to shed.

Long I held her tight, teeth set, as one who would keep his own perforce from that grim fate which would snatch his love from him. She shivered to me half-swooning, pale and of wondrous beauty, nesting in my arms as a weary homing-bird. A poignant grief o’erflowed in me.

“Oh, Aileen! At least we have love left,” I cried, breaking the long silence.

“Always! Always!” her white lips answered.

“Then let us regret nothing. They can do with me what they will. What are life and death when in the balance dwells love?” I cried, rapt in unearthly worship of her.

Her eyes found mine. “Oh, Kenneth, I cannot—I cannot—let you go.”

Sweet and lovely she was beyond the dream of poet. I trembled in an ecstasy of pain. From the next cell there came to us softly the voice of a poor condemned Appin Stewart. He was crooning that most tender and heart-breaking of all strains. Like the pibroch’s mournful sough he wailed it out, the song that cuts deep to a Scotchman’s heart in time of exile.

“Lochabar no more, Lochabar no more.

We’ll maybe return to Lochabar no more.”

I looked at Aileen, my face working. A long breath came whistling through her lips. Her dear face was all broken with emotion. I turned my eyes aside, not daring to trust myself. Through misty lashes again I looked. Her breast lifted and fell in shaking sobs, the fount of tears touched at last. Together we wept, without shame I admit it, while the Stewart’s harrowing strain ebbed to a close. To us it seemed almost as the keening of the coronach.

So in the quiet that comes after storm, her dear supple figure still in my arms, Sir Robert Volney came in unexpectedly and found us. He stopped at the door, startled at her presence, and methought a shadow fell on his face. Near to death as I was, the quality of his courage was so fine and the strength of the passion in him so great that he would have changed places with me even then.

Aileen went up to him at once and gave him her hand. She was very simple, her appeal like a child’s for

directness.

“Sir Robert, you have already done much for me. I will be so bold as to ask you to do more. Here is my lover’s life in danger. I ask you to save it.”

“That he may marry you?”

“If God wills.”

Volney looked at her out of a haggard face, all broken by the emotions which stirred him.

A minute passed, two minutes. He fought out his fight and won.

“Aileen,” he said at last, “before heaven I fear it is too late, but what man can do, that will I do.”

He came in and shook hands with me. “I’ll say good-bye, Montagu. ’Tis possible I’ll see you but once more in this world. Yet I will do my best. Don’t hope too much, but don’t despair.”

There was unconscious prophecy in his words. I was to see him but the once more, and then the proud, gallant gentleman, now so full of energy, was lying on his deathbed struck out of life by a foul blow.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SHADOW FALLS

It would appear that Sir Robert went direct from the prison to the club room at White's. He was observed to be gloomy, preoccupied, his manner not a little perturbed. The usual light smile was completely clouded under a gravity foreign to his nature. One may guess that he was in no humour to carry coals. In a distant corner of the room he seated himself and fell to frowning at the table on which his elbow rested. At no time was he a man upon whom one would be likely to foist his company undesired, for he had at command on occasion a hauteur and an aloofness that challenged respect even from the most inconsiderate.

We must suppose that he was moved out of his usual indifference, that some long-dormant spring of nobility was quickened to a renewed life, that a girl's truth and purity, refining his selfish passion, had bitten deep into the man's callous worldliness. For long he sat in a sombre silence with his head leaning on his hand, his keen mind busy with the problem—so I shall always believe—as to how he might even yet save me from the gallows.

By some strange hap it chanced that Sir James Craven, excited with drink, the bile of his saturnine temper stirred to malignity by heavy losses at cards, alighted from his four in hand at White's shortly after Volney. Craven's affairs had gone from bad to worse very rapidly of late. He had been playing the races heavily and ruin stared the man in the face. More than suspected of dubious play at cards, it had been scarce a week since the stewards of a leading racetrack had expelled him for running crosses. Any day a debtor's prison might close on him. Within the hour, as was afterward learned, his former companion Frederick Prince of Wales had given him the cut direct on the Mall. Plainly his star was on the decline, and he raged in a futile passion of hatred against the world. Need it be said that of all men he most hated his supplanter in the Prince of Wales' good-will, Sir Robert Volney.

To Volney then, sitting gloomily in his distant solitude, came Craven with murder in his heart and a bitter jest on his lips. At the other side of the table he found a seat and glared across at his rival out of a passion-contorted face. Sir Robert looked past him coldly, negligently, as if he had not been there, and rising from his seat moved to the other side of the room. In the manner of his doing it there was something indescribably insulting; so it seemed to Topham Beauclerc, who retailed to me the story later.

Craven's evil glance followed Volney, rage in his bloodshot eyes. If a look could kill, the elegant macaroni had been a dead man then. It is to be guessed that Craven struggled with his temper and found himself not strong enough to put a curb upon it; that his heady stress of passion swept away his fear of Volney's sword. At all events there he sat glowering blackly on the man at whose charge he chose to lay all his misfortunes, what time he gulped down like water glass after glass of brandy. Presently he got to his feet and followed Sir Robert, still dallying no doubt with the fascinating temptation of fixing a quarrel upon his rival and killing him. To do him justice Volney endeavoured to avoid an open rupture with the man. He appeared buried in the paper he was reading.

"What news?" asked Craven abruptly.

For answer the other laid down the paper, so that Sir James could pick it up if he chose.

"I see your old rival Montagu is to dance on air to-morrow. 'Gad, you'll have it all your own way with the wench then," continued Craven boisterously, the liquor fast mounting to his head.

Volney's eyes grew steelly. He would have left, but the burly purple-faced baronet cut off his retreat.

"Damme, will you drink with me, or will you play with me, Volney?"

"Thanks, but I never drink nor play at this time of day, Sir James. If it will not inconvenience you to let me pass——"

With a foolish laugh, beside himself with rage and drink, Craven flung him back into his chair. "'Sdeath, don't be in such a hurry! I want to talk to you about— Devil take it, what is it I want to talk about?— Oh, yes! That pink and white baggage of yours. Stap me, the one look ravished me! Pity you let a slip of a lad like Montagu oust you."

"That subject is one which we will not discuss, Sir James," said Volney quietly. "It is not to be mentioned in my presence."

"The devil it isn't. I'm not in the habit of asking what I may talk about. As for this mistress of yours——"

Sir Robert rose and stood very straight. "I have the honour to inform you that you are talking of a lady who is as pure as the driven snow."

Buck Craven stared. "After Sir Robert Volney has pursued her a year?" he asked with venomous spleen, his noisy laugh echoing through the room.

I can imagine how the fellow said it, with what a devilish concentration of malice. He had the most irritating manner of any man in England; I never heard him speak without wanting to dash my fist in his sneering face.

"That is what I tell you. I repeat that the subject is not a matter for discussion between us."

Craven might have read a warning in the studied gentleness of Volney's cold manner, but he was by this time far beyond reck. By common consent the eyes of every man in the room were turned on these two, and Craven's vanity sunned itself at holding once more the centre of the stage.

"And after the trull has gadded about the country with young Montagu in all manner of disguises?" he continued.

"You lie, you hound!"

Sir James sputtered in a speechless paroxysm of passion, found words at last and poured them out in a turbid torrent of invective. He let fall the word baggage again, and presently, growing more plain, a word that is not to be spoken of an honest woman. Volney, eyeing him disdainfully, the man's coarse bulk, his purple cheeks and fishy eyes, played with his wine goblet, white fingers twisting at the stem; then, when the measure of the fellow's offense was full, put a period to his foul eloquence.

Full in the mouth the goblet struck him. Blood spurted from his lips, and a shower of broken glass shivered to the ground. Craven leaped across the table at his enemy in a blind fury; restrained by the united efforts of half a dozen club members, the struggling madman still foamed to get at his rival's throat—that rival whose disdainful eyes seemed to count him but a mad dog impotent to bite.

"You would not drink with me; you would not play with me; but, by God, you will have to fight with me," he cried at last.

“When you please.”

“Always I have hated you, wanted always to kill you, now I shall do it,” he screamed.

Volney turned on his heel and beckoned to Beauclerc.

“Will you act for me, Topham?” he asked; and when the other assented, added: “Arrange the affair to come off as soon as possible. I want to have done with the thing at once.”

They fought within the hour in the Field of the Forty Footsteps. The one was like fire, the other ice. They were both fine swordsmen, but there was no man in England could stand against Volney at his best, and those who were present have put it on record that Sir Robert’s skill was this day at high water mark. He fought quite without passion, watching with cool alertness for his chance to kill. His opponent’s breath came short, his thrusts grew wild, the mad rage of the man began to give way to a no less mad despair. Every feint he found anticipated, every stroke parried; and still his enemy held to the defensive with a deadly cold watchfulness that struck chill to the heart of the fearful bully. We are to conceive that Craven tasted the bitterness of death, that in the cold passionless face opposite to him he read his doom, and that in the horrible agony of terror that sweated him he forgot the traditions of his class and the training of a lifetime. He stumbled, and when Sir Robert held his hand, waiting point groundward with splendid carelessness for his opponent to rise, Craven flung himself forward on his knees and thrust low at him. The blade went home through the lower vitals.

Volney stood looking at him a moment with a face of infinite contempt, than sank back into the arms of Beauclerc.

While the surgeon was examining the wound Craven stole forward guiltily to the outskirts of the little group which surrounded the wounded man. His horror-stricken eyes peered out of a face like chalk. The man’s own second had just turned his back on him, and he was already realizing that the foul stroke had written on his forehead the brand of Cain, had made him an outcast and a pariah on the face of the earth.

The eyes of Volney and his murderer met, those of the dying man full of scorn. Craven’s glance fell before that steady look. He muttered a hope that the wound was but slight; then, in torture, burst out: “’Twas a slip. By Heaven, it was, Volney! I would to God it were undone.”

“To every coward safety, and afterward his evil hour,” quoted Volney with cold disdain.

The murderer turned away with a sobbing oath, mounted his horse and rode for the coast to begin his lifetime of exile, penury, and execration.

“Do I get my passport?” asked Sir Robert of the surgeon.

The latter began to talk a jargon of medical terms, but Volney cut him short.

“Enough! I understand,” he said quietly. “Get me to my rooms and send at once for the Prince of Wales. Beauclerc, may I trouble you to call on Cumberland and get from him an order to bring young Montagu to my place from the prison? And will you send my man Watkins for a lawyer? Oh, and one more commission—a messenger to beg of Miss Macleod her attendance. In case she demurs, make it plain to her that I am a dying man. Faith, Topham, you’ll be glad I do not die often. I fear I am an unconscionable nuisance at it.”

Topham Beauclerc drove straight to the residence of the Duke of Cumberland. He found the Duke at home, explained the situation in a few words, and presently the pair of them called on the Duke of Newcastle and secured his counter-signature for taking me temporarily from the New Prison. Dusk was falling when Beauclerc and the prison guards led me to Volney’s bedroom. At the first glance I saw plainly that he was

not long for this world. He lay propped on an attendant's arm, the beautiful eyes serene, an inscrutable smile on the colourless lips. Beside him sat Aileen, her hand in his, and on the other side of the bed the Duke of Cumberland and Malcolm. When he saw me his eyes brightened.

"On time, Kenneth. Thanks for coming."

Beauclerc had told me the story, and I went forward with misty eyes. He looked at me smiling.

"On my soul I believe you are sorry, Montagu. Yes, I have my quietus. The fellow struck foul. My own fault! I always knew him for a scoundrel. I had him beaten; but 'tis better so perhaps. After all I shall cross the river before you, Kenneth." Then abruptly to an attendant who entered the room, "Has the Prince come yet?"

"But this moment, sir."

The Prince of Wales entered the room, and Volney gave him his old winsome smile.

"Hard hit, your Highness!"

"I trust it is not so bad as they say, Robert."

"Bad or good, as one looks at it, but this night I go wandering into the great unknown. Enough of this. I sent for you, Fritz, to ask my last favour."

The face of the stolid Dutchman was all broken with emotion.

"'Tis yours, Robert, if the thing is mine to grant."

"I want Montagu spared. You must get his pardon before I die, else I shall not pass easy in mind. This one wrong I must right before the end. 'Twas I drove him to rebellion. You will get him pardoned and see to it that his estates are not confiscated?"

"I promise to do my best. It shall be attended to."

"To-day?"

"This very hour if it can be arranged."

"And you, Cumberland, will do your share."

The Duke nodded, frowning to hide his emotion.

Volney fell back on the pillows. "Good! Where is the priest?"

A vicar of the Church of England came forward to offer the usual ministrations to the dying. Volney listened for a minute or two with closed eyes, then interrupted gently.

"Thank you. That will suffice. I'll never insult my Maker by fawning for pardon in the fag hour of a misspent life."

"The mercy of God is without limits——"

"I hope so. That I shall know better than you within the space of four-and-twenty hours. I'm afraid you mistake your mission here. You came to marry Antony, not to bury Cæsar." Then, turning to me, he said with a flare of his old reckless wit: "Any time this six weeks you've been qualifying for the noose. If you're quite ready we'll have the obsequies to-night."

He put Aileen's hand in mine. The vicar married us, the Prince of Wales giving away the bride. Aileen's pale face was shot with a faint flush, a splash of pink in either alabaster cheek. When the priest had made

us man and wife she, who had just married me, leaned forward impulsively and kissed our former enemy on the forehead. The humorous gleam came back to his dulling eyes.

“Only one, Montagu. I dare say you can spare that. The rest are for a better man. Don’t cry, Aileen. ’Fore Heaven, ’tis a good quittance for you.”

He looked at the soft warmth and glow of her, now quickened to throbbing life, drew a long breath, then smiled and sighed again, her lover even to the last.

A long silence fell, which Sir Robert broke by saying with a smile, “In case Selwyn calls show him up. If I am still alive I’ll want to see him, and if I’m dead he’ll want to see me. ’Twill interest him vastly.”

Once more only he spoke. “The shadow falls,” he said to Aileen, and presently dozed fitfully; so slipped gradually into the deeper sleep from which there is no awakening this side of the tomb. Thus he passed quietly to the great beyond, an unfearing cynic to the last hour of his life.

THE AFTERWORD

My pardon came next day, duly signed and sealed, with the customary rider to it that I must renounce the Stuarts, and swear allegiance to King George. I am no hero of romance, but a plain Englishman, a prosaic lover of roast beef and old claret, of farming and of fox-hunting. Our cause was dead, and might as well be buried. Not to make long of the matter, I took the oath without scruple. To my pardon there was one other proviso: that I must live on my estate until further notice. If at any time I were found ten miles from Montagu Grange, the pardon was to be void.

Aileen and I moved to our appointed home at once. It may be believed that our hearts were full of the most tender joy and love, for I had been snatched from the jaws of death into the very sunshine of life. We had but one cloud to mar the bright light—the death of many a dear friend, and most of all, of that friendly enemy who had given his life for her good name. Moralists point out to me that he was a great sinner. I care not if it be so. Let others condemn him; I do not. Rather I cherish the memory of a gallant, faultful gentleman whose life found wrong expression. There be some to whom are given inheritance of evil nature. Then how dare we, who know not the measure of their temptation, make ourselves judges of their sin?

At the Grange we found awaiting us an unexpected visitor, a red-haired, laughing Highlander, who, though in hiding, was as full of merriment as a schoolboy home for the holidays. To Cloe he made most ardent love, and when, at last, Donald Roy slipped across the waters to St. Germain, he carried with him a promise that was redeemed after the general amnesty was passed.

Six weeks after my pardon Malcolm Macleod and Miss Flora Macdonald stopped at the Grange for a short visit with us. They were on their way north, having been at length released without a trial, since the passion for blood was now spent.

“We three, with Captain Donald Roy and Tony Creagh, came to London to be hangit,” smiled Major Macleod as they were about to resume their journey. “Twa-three times the rope tightened around the

gullets of some of us, yet in the end we all win free. You and Tony have already embraced the other noose; Donald is in a geyan ill way, writing Latin verses to his lady's eyes; and as for me,"—he smiled boldly at his companion—"I ride to the land of heather side by side with Miss Flora Macdonald."

Here I drop the quill, for my tale is told. For me, life is full of many quiet interests and much happiness, but even now there grips me at times a longing for those mad wild days, when death hung on a hair's breadth, and the glamour of romance beckoned the feathered foot of youth.

FINIS

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