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# A BLOT ON THE SCUTCHEON

**BY**

**MAY WYNNE**

**AUTHOR OF "HENRY OF NAVARRE," "A MAID OF BRITTANY,"
"FOR CHURCH AND CHIEFTAIN," ETC.**

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**TO MY MOTHER**

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# A Blot on the Scutcheon

## CHAPTER I

# SIR HENRY'S HEIR

The evening sunshine fell athwart the pleasant gardens of Berrington Manor, glorifying all. Stray beams of light stole through the mullioned windows of the old grey building, peeping unbidden into dusty corners and dim recesses. They shone, too, on the figure of an old man, seated near an open casement, in the wainscotted library.

But Sir Henry Berrington was heedless of the dancing shafts of glory which played daringly amongst the powdered hairs of his wig and shone on the gold buttons adorning his blue coat.

He was busy adjusting his lace cravat, as though it choked him, whilst he addressed his friend, Squire Poynder, who sat opposite, sipping his port and puffing smoke from a long and blackened pipe.

"My heir, indeed," Sir Henry was crying, with much heat, and a twisted frown of displeasure on his fine old face, "that gawk of a lad! with the brains of a mouse, I'll be sworn, and a name which any honest Englishman would be ashamed of. Michael! *Michael*! Faith, Hugh, you laugh at me, but it's sober truth I'm telling you. Heir of mine he is, I'll not deny it. And the son of his father, too, unless I'm mistaken. Thus more shame and dishonour to the name I'm proud—or was proud—to bear. Lord grant I may be in my grave before the boy proves my words."

Squire Poynder puffed at his pipe in silence. It was not often that his friend ever alluded—even indirectly—to his son.

It was time to change the conversation.

The Squire gulped an inspiring draught of wine, pulled his pipe reluctantly from his lips, and, remarking hastily that the lad was young, turned his host's attention to the points of a certain black mare which a neighbour had for sale.

And, meantime, in the garden, perched on the bough of a chestnut-tree, overhanging a sunken wall, sat the object of Sir Henry's dislike and choler, one Michael Berrington, sole heir to Berrington Manor, its wide estates—and something more, of which, as yet, he was in pleasant ignorance.

A well-grown lad of fifteen, his clothes the shabbier for rough usage rather than long wear, curly brown hair caught back by a black ribbon, a long face which gave the impression of being one of many points, accentuated by the long, thin nose; lean cheeks, fine grey eyes, and a mouth which showed sensitiveness and a love of humour, closing, too, with the resoluteness of a strong will.

An expressive, if not a handsome, face, with possibilities of improvement when the owner reached maturity; above all, the desire for laughter and mischief dominant. And what wonder, since his mother was Irish and a pretty little wit to boot before she married Stephen Berrington?

Michael's mother had not been sorry when Death's call had dried her tears shed for a worthless husband. Yet she had laughed for her boy's sake, laughed with a breaking heart, and Michael had grown up laughing till that mother of his died.

He had wept then.

And afterwards his grandfather had sent for him, and he had come to Berrington Manor, in the county of Kent, in that year of grace, 1780.

Once there he had quickly discovered two things. First, that his grandfather hated him; secondly, that, with no soft eyes to utter mute reproaches, he could let that spirit of dare-devilry within him run riot. He did not fear canings.

So he sat, swinging long, lean legs over the sunken wall, and then, heedless of a rent in his plum-coloured coat, gave a quick leap to the ground and set off at a swinging pace across the meadow.

He was going with Jake Williams to see a cock-fight at Dunley Town that evening, regardless of certain injunctions anent late hours.

The road was rough after the soft springiness of the meadow, and Michael paused once to shake out a stone which had slipped sideways into his buckled shoe.

As he did so, the unexpected trifle, which was to change his whole life, happened.

Bounce!

Only the falling of a soft ball from over a high wall near.

An absurdly trivial thing!

It would have been so easy to throw it back, especially as he had caught the sound of a childish cry of dismay from the other side. But Michael did not throw it back. Instead, he climbed

like a monkey up the wall, hanging on to sturdy strands of ivy till he had swung himself to the top.

"Ah!"

It was a mutual exclamation.

The boy, looking down, saw a vision of the daintiest of seven-year-old maidens,—a study in brown, from her little, brown, flowered-cotton dress with its quaint fichu, to the brown curls, partly hidden by a muslin cap, whilst great brown eyes, soft as velvet, and coy under their long lashes, were raised shyly to his.

And the brown eyes saw a broad-shouldered lad, lean of limb and face, with pointed nose, high cheek-bones, laughing mouth, and grey eyes, which made her own rosy cheeks dimple in amusement.

"Ah, I thank you," cried the Brown Fairy, dropping the demurest of curtsies; "I cried for my ball."

"Fie!" he laughed; "you are no baby. See! I mean to give you the ball myself, and you shall give me something too."

She watched him breathlessly, as he clambered down the old, gnarled medlar-tree which grew against the wall, and clapped her hands when he offered her the ball with the grandest and most courtly of bows.

"I like you, boy," she said. "You shall stay here and play ball with me."

"With pleasure, little mistress," he made gay answer. "But you must give me a kiss first for bringing you your plaything."

At this, child though she was, she made a fine show of indignation.

"I am no village wench to be kissed at will, sir," she declared, with a faintly foreign accent which was very fascinating. "I am Gabrielle de Varenac Conyers, and one day I shall be a grand lady."

And she nodded her brown curls at him.

"Gabrielle? 'tis a nice name," responded Michael critically, "and you are a very pretty Gabrielle. So instead of being a grand lady you shall be my little sweetheart, and one day we will be married, and I will love you and share all that I have. So kiss me now, Gabrielle, and promise."

But the Brown Fairy only dimpled afresh and shook her curls.

"Bah!" she retorted. "I tell you I am going to be a *very* grand lady. Perhaps I shall have to go away, however, from this dear garden and home, and be Madame la Marquise, far off over the sea. I do not want to go away. So, if you will let me stay here *always* and have my white rabbits and dear old Nurse Bond, why, then I perhaps will be your little sweetheart."

She announced this with much deliberation, so that Michael's eyes twinkled merrily.

"You shall certainly stay here," he said. "For I am Michael Berrington, and one day the old Manor yonder will be mine, and then I shall come for you, Gabrielle, and you shall be *my* lady."

She nodded, dancing first on one foot then on the other.

"It is better than playing ball all alone," she cried gleefully. "I am glad I threw it over the wall and that you brought it back, for now you will have to be my brave knight, such as Nurse has told me of, and I will be your sweet lady."

Michael bowed. "Yes," he promised, "I will be your knight, and you shall give me kisses when I ask for them."

Again she clapped her hands, then paused, a pink finger pressed against her lips.

"And will you fight the dragons when they come?" she asked, "and save me from being devoured?"

"Of course," he replied, thinking that never before had he seen so pretty a baby-maid or listened to so sweet a voice.

Her eyes were bright as stars as she came a step nearer.

"Then you may kiss me, my knight," she said with quaint gravity. "And I will be your true love for ever and ever, like the princesses and queens in old Nurse's tales."

And Michael bent his dark head to the level of pouting lips.

## CHAPTER II

### SWEETHEARTS TRUE

So Michael found the way to Langton Hall and to little Mistress Gabrielle Conyers's heart. But never a word said he of his discovery, not even when Jake Williams upbraided him with being late for the first round with the cocks.

And they were mettled birds too.

So summer days glided past, and Sir Henry, hearing first of one mischievous prank, then another, swore again and again that the devil himself must be in his grandson, and urged on Master Timothy Parblett to spare not the rod.

But Master Timothy, though he talked boastfully before Sir Henry, was a very lamb in the presence of his pupil, for Michael had muscle in his long arms, and a breadth of chest which made the worthy tutor tremble as he viewed it.

But the devil had gone out of the lad, it seemed, when he scaled the wall of Langton Hall and greeted the little Brown Fairy who waited there for him.

There was no one to love Gawky Mike, with his impish pranks, at Berrington Manor; and so dewy kisses from sweet, childish lips were the more cherished, and the very thought of them stirred unknown depths in the boy's soul.

And Gabrielle—little coquette—knew her power. The sauciness of the pretty baby! What a tyrant she was, refusing him any grace till he had done her will—sometimes treating him with disdain, at others with a friendliness which was enchanting; Michael, great booby, taking it all in deadliest earnest.

Then, one day, her lips pouted in earnest. "Morice is coming to-day," she confided to her loyal knight. "Bah! I am not glad, although Nursie says it is wicked, seeing that he is my only brother. But then he should not pull my hair and call me Mistress Mouse. I do not like it; and he is very rough. He is not like you, Michael."

And Michael, rough, dare-devil Michael, smiled triumphantly into approving brown eyes. He had ever been gentle knight on this side of the old wall.

The next day found Gabrielle in tears, nursing a black bruise on a dimpled arm.

It is true the tears had been squeezed into evidence as soon as she heard a certain voice humming a merry tune in the road yonder.

But sympathy is welcome balm in trouble. The Brown Fairy told a harrowing tale of how Morry had caught her arm because she stole his peach at breakfast.

Michael vowed vengeance hot and strong.

The opportunity came sooner than they expected, for, at this moment, who should come down the path but Morry himself! A fine young cockerel, this, of nearly seventeen summers, attired according to the latest mode, and flicking, with a little ebony cane, at the heads of yellow marigolds. 'Twas a flaunting flower he should have cherished.

Full gape he stood at sight of Gabrielle being comforted by a dust-begrimed youth in plum-coloured coat and breeches, and with a face grim set at sight of him.

"An' who the devil are you, sir?" he cried, with a mighty fashionable oath to set seal to his aping manhood. "Be off on the instant if you don't want my cane about your shoulders."

But Michael did not waste time in words. Two soft brown eyes had been swimming in tears as a round, white wrist was raised for his inspection of a certain ugly mark on it.

With a wild snort he leapt across the marigolds and snatched the dainty cane out of its owner's clasp.

"Now fight me like a man," he roared, bull-like in his rage, "or else sure you'll take the soundest thrashing you've tasted yet, for a coward born."

Mr. Morice St. Just Conyers was not accustomed to such a challenge. It shocked his delicate sensibilities, yet, after all, he had fight in him.

Little Gabrielle watched them from the shelter of the old medlar-tree, sobbing in very terror

as she saw the raining of hard blows and the blood on Michael's face.

But the lads paid no heed to her sobs and prayers, for their blood was up, and they were as hard set to their work as game cockerels in the pit.

And Michael was the winner, though he panted vigorously as he stood over his fallen adversary.

"And if ye want more at any time, sir," quoth he, with immense dignity, "you'll find Michael Berrington ready enough to teach you another lesson."

Young Conyers' face had not been pretty before, but, at sound of his enemy's name, it became uglier still.

"Michael Berrington," he screamed. "What! the son of that foul coward, Stephen Berrington? Faugh! I would have sent the lackeys to beat you from the place had I known it."

The colour crept up in a dull flush under Michael's tan. "I can't hit a man who is down," he growled; "but be careful of your words, sir, or I'll cram them down your throat another day."

But Morice Conyers had risen slowly to his feet, white of cheek, swollen of feature, but scornful-eyed.

"I'll not waste words with the son of a traitor and murderer," said he slowly, and beckoned to his little sister.

"Come, Gay," he said; "there will be a talking for you when we reach home, an' a whipping into the bargain if you do not promise amendment of such ways. Fie on you for a naughty chit."

But Gabrielle's eyes were glowing as she looked from her brother to the blood-stained countenance of her true knight.

Had he not fought for her?

With a defiant toss of brown curls she had flown to Michael's side.

"I hate Morry," she cried, flinging warm arms around his neck. "And ... and I love you, Michael."

The words rang in the boy's ears as he stood alone amongst trampled marigolds long after an indignant brother had dragged off to summary justice a sobbing and rebellious sister.

## CHAPTER III

### A TRAITOR'S SON

"So you fought Morice Conyers?"

Michael nodded.

He had found that the shorter his answers the better pleased his grandfather was.

The old man's hand, resting idly on his knee, clenched and unclenched.

Outside the birds were singing carols of love to the roses after the joy of a summer shower. The scent of wet, brown earth was alluring to Michael, yet he sat still, knowing that something momentous stirred in the evening air.

The lines round Sir Henry's mouth were hardening.

"Who won?"

"I, sir."

"Ah!"

It was an enigmatical sound.

Michael plucked up courage and met the stare of cold blue eyes steadily.

"He had used his little sister roughly."

"What was that to you?"

"She is a playmate of mine, sir."

"*Playmate of yours!*"

"Yes, sir."

"A Conyers playmate to your father's son? What do you mean, boy?"

Michael drew himself up stiffly and told the tale in brief. He had played with little Gabrielle Conyers—and fought for her. He did not say how he was for ever and ever her true knight.

Yet when he had finished, the old man opposite was sneering.

"It was well for you her father knew nought of such play," said he sourly, "or I might have had to look farther for an heir."

Michael's eyes blazed.

"May I speak, sir?" he asked huskily, and never waited even for the curt nod of acquiescence.

"I would know about my father," he said slowly and very steadily. "My mother wept when I spoke of him, but she would say no word save that I should know well enough one day. Neither would she tell me whether he were alive or dead. But I am a child no longer, and will be at the mercy of no man who dares call my father foul names, whilst I have no knowledge to enable me to slit their tongues for such lies."

Silence in the wainscotted room.

How the bird-song without jarred.

"So you would know?" said Sir Henry dully. "Then I will tell you."

The proud, aristocratic old face was very hard and set.

"Your father," he said monotonously, "was my only son. He was handsome—you shall see his portrait presently. And I was proud of him. So was his mother. But she should not have hidden his faults from me. It is so with women: they weaken with their pampering where discipline should strengthen. I knew nothing of his gambling at Oxford, or his reputation later on at Arthur's and White's, where Stephen Berrington became, I believe, a notable figure—as a pigeon ready for plucking.

"I remained here and knew nothing, only picturing my son according to my fancy. Then the inevitable happened. He got mixed up in one of those bubble Jacobite plots which were for ever being blown by the friends of poor Prince Charlie. He and his bosom companion, Ralph Conyers, were burning, it seemed, with zeal for the royal exile. I do not say that I altogether disapproved, though warning them of the penalties of rashness.

"They did not listen—I hardly expected them to, though I warned them again before they set out on that fatal day to Ireland, where, in due course, their hero was to land.

"I need not tell you the story in detail. They failed. The cracking of an egg-shell was no harder than the quashing of such a plot, though there were brave gentlemen concerned in it. Too much heart and too little brain is a bad mixture for success in such enterprises. Stephen was imprisoned at Dublin Castle with Ralph Conyers and others."

A long pause. Sir Henry's face was ashen, his old lips twitching nervously.

Michael's dark head was bent eagerly forward, but there was fear in his grey eyes.

"Yes," he muttered. "He was imprisoned?"

"For treason. When I heard the news I wept for my son, yet I honoured him, thinking he was giving his life for a gallant cause."

"He escaped?"

The old man's lips were twisted into that bitterly sarcastic smile of his.

"Ay," he replied. "Stephen Berrington escaped scot free by betraying his comrades."

Tick, tick, tick.

The solemn, monotonous chant of the great clock in the corner was the only sound in the room.

Michael sat, white and rigid as the stern old man opposite.

"Betrayed!"

"Betrayed. I learnt that the son I mourned as dead was alive—free; but the price was dishonour. I cursed him then, as I curse him now."

It was very terrible, the concentrated and undying fury in those quiet, even tones.

Michael shuddered, covering his face with his hands.

"The son of a traitor," he moaned—"a traitor! And he was right."

"Who?"

"Morice Conyers. Yet I would have killed him for calling me a traitor's son."

"He spoke truth. His father was one of those who suffered even more, perhaps, than those whom my son's words helped to send to the scaffold. Ralph Conyers was imprisoned for ten years and came back a cripple, whose limbs were twisted and bent with rheumatism and ague. Do you wonder if he too curses the name of Berrington?"

"My father! And such an act!"

"You do well to tremble. It is an ill heritage for you, lad,—a stained and blotted scutcheon, with coward and traitor written across an unsullied sheet."

"And he—is still alive?"

"I do not know. Yet I pray Heaven he is not. I have never seen him since. And he knew better than to come whining to me. I would have had him whipped from the doors. His mother saw him by stealth once, and he told her a tale. I did not listen to it. She died soon after; I think of a broken heart. It did not help me to love my son better. He wrote once to tell me of his marriage to an Irishwoman and of your birth. I did not answer. He has not written again."

"My mother wept," said Michael slowly, "whenever I asked concerning him. Yet I do not think he is dead."

"And why not?"

"A letter came once, not long since. The messenger who brought it was from abroad. My mother did not welcome him very warmly, and afterwards she cried. The messenger went away laughing, and that maddened me. I ran after him, demanding that he should fight, but he caught me by the wrist, looking down for a long time into my face.

"'Your father's son? Impossible!' he mocked. 'Impossible save for that big nose of yours and the set of your shoulders. Ha, ha! So you would not run away in face of an enemy? Morbleu! A game cockerel, I protest.'

"So, making me a very mocking bow, he went away. And my mother wept again very sorely and very often, till the day she died."

"Saying nought of him?"

"As I knelt beside her, at the last, she put her arms around me closely.

"'Pray God you may not meet him!' she moaned, 'or, if you do, pray God you may save him from——' But she died before she finished her words."

Sir Henry's chin was sunk on his breast. The reopening of an unhealable wound is sore enough work.

Let it be closed henceforth.

Yet, being open, he would tell the lad all now, before forbidding mention of such subject again. "Come," he said, rising, clutching at his ebony stick with the sudden weakness of age. "You shall see his likeness, and then—well, it is good that the dead past buries its dead."

Sir Henry Berrington did not believe in ghosts. Yet they haunted the picture-gallery up there. Ah yes! Curse he might and did, yet the ghosts laughed and sang with merry, boyish voices, shouting in glee as they romped with Chieftain and Bride, the great deerhounds, crying aloud to tell father or mother of some youthful sport, carolling out some brave, rollicking ditty of gallant deeds.

Ah, yes! It was not the old mother alone who had wept on the neck of these ghosts, holding out wide, empty arms to embrace shadows, and turning away—alone.

But the old man's step was firmer now as he trod the gallery floor, head erect and shoulders set as he passed between rows of smiling or frowning ancestors, followed by a lean, dark-browed boy, whose head was a trifle bent and his eyes deprecating as they met the fixed stare of painted ones around.

Was it *his* fault that the scutcheon they left so fair was stained and blotted by a foul and

treacherous deed?

The setting sun sent a flare of light through the great window, with its blazonment of arms and rich colouring, at the end of the gallery. It shone strangely on the dusty curtain which hung there over the last picture on the wall.

Force himself though he would, Sir Henry's hand trembled as he drew back the velvet folds.

And Michael, looking, saw the picture of a young man, dressed in the extravagant fashion of a period twenty years earlier. Rich setting to rich beauty.

Stephen Berrington, aged twenty-two, was a son any mother might have been proud of.

Surely it was no traitor's face, but rather that of a very pretty gentleman. Weak? Yes; chin and mouth proved that—a youth to be led rather than born to rule. And Satan had led him to his own destruction. So Sir Henry said, even whilst Stephen's mother wept for her son on her knees. A woman puts love before honour where a brave man makes the latter his deity.

Thus Michael looked on his father's face and found scorn overcoming the pity.

A traitor—and his father!

No wonder Morice Conyers had mocked him. Yet he would prove that a man can be a traitor's son, and yet no traitor himself. The blood drummed in his head and through his pulses at the thought.

Yes, he would prove that, and, by his own deeds, wipe out the stain which seemed ready to tear his shrinking soul.

The curtain fell back into its place. Sir Henry turned to his grandson.

They did not speak, but stood there in the dying sunlight, whilst grey eyes alone spoke their promise to sunken blue ones.

Then the old, withered hand fell on the lad's shoulder.

"You understand?" he said simply.

Michael understood.

## CHAPTER IV

### ON THE COACH FROM OXFORD

A rough night, cold and wet, with a thin sleet falling and the wind blowing from the north-east full against the great coach which lumbered on its way from Oxford to London.

Passengers inside huddled together, stamping benumbed feet and wishing for the journey's end. Passengers outside poured anathemas against the weather and the slowness of the horses into the depths of fur-lined coats, wherein their faces were buried.

Only two or three of the younger men perched near the driver were able to crack occasional jokes, whilst one alone strove huskily to troll a stanza of some popular ditty.

Insulting! Positively insulting to sing of drinking and being jolly, or drowning melancholy either, in face of such a gale, and the coach an hour behind time! Even his comrades upbraided him, whilst one beetroot-nosed individual near looked positively murderous.

But Michael Berrington was made that way, and—so an Oxford wag declared—would have found food for laughter with a noose around his neck.

"Hi, there! Hi! hi. For Heaven's sake, my masters! Hey——"

Michael leant over the side of the coach and called aloud to the driver to pull up.

A man, in holland smock, and face as white as chalk, had burst through the hedge on their left and was running frantically after them.

"Hey, hi, for Heaven's——"

He was breathless before he reached them, and the anathemas of the beetroot-nosed passenger rose high above his fur collar.

But Michael—nimble now as when, ten years before, he had scaled a high garden wall with a child's ball—had swung himself down on to the ground beside the man.

"Come," he cried gaily; "you've been running. Have a drink, my friend, and tell us the merry news afterwards. I'll wager it's worth the hearing."

The man gulped down the contents of the extended flask readily enough, and proceeded to tell his tale in crescendo tones.

He had been working yonder with the mangels for Farmer Benton's sheep, and had just stepped into the copse near, when he heard voices on the other side of it, and the jingling of bits.

Gentlemen of the road they were,—three of them, black-masked, and dainty in their dress as any lords. How they laughed too, little dreaming of the mangel-digger, as they discussed how they and the rest of their band meant to rob the Oxford coach at Craven's Hollow, not far from Reading. Seven was the hour, and the prey secure. A lonely place, my masters, and rich booty. They had news of a certain gentleman whose valise was worth risking their necks for.

The man told his tale in the broad Berkshire dialect, but the outline of it was enough for those who rode on the Oxford coach.

Marry! What a to-do there was! Gabbling, crying, cursing,—one urging this thing, one the other, whilst the excitement of the beetroot-nosed passenger caused more than one to wonder what his valise contained.

And above all the cackling and hysterical shrieks of the women, rose a rollicking voice.

"The hour of seven," cried Michael Berrington, with gusty laughter. "And it's not six of the clock yet. Why, troth, we'll be miles away past Craven's Hollow and through Reading itself before then, so you give me leave to handle the ribbons."

More clamour at this you may be sure, more cursings too, and cries that to be robbed by highwaymen was better than to have their necks broken by a mad young blood from Oxford University.

But Michael's friends were nearest the driver, and the beetroot-nosed passenger stood their champion, so that, before more could be said, the driver of the "Red Reindeer" was whisked from his seat and stowed struggling away in the custody of two chuckling Oxonians, whilst Michael gathered up the reins with a cry of encouragement to the horses, which were growing restive with long standing in the cold.

It was Tom Blakeley who wound the horn, and he of the beetroot nose who cried "Well played," as the greys leapt forward under the light touch of the lash, leaving the mangel-digger—richer by many a coin of the realm—to pass the time of night with a certain bearded traveller who swore, with mighty pretty oaths and hectorings, that he would rather tramp it through the slush to Reading than trust his neck to any devil-may-care Oxford scholar.

And meantime Michael Berrington drove as surely those four sleek but sweating greys had never been driven before.

Those within the coach vowed that their last hour had come, and clung together, the women in hysterics, and the men swearing as a sudden jolt would fling them one against the other, whilst shrieks and groans told of bumps and bruises manifold.

Outside, however, things wore a merrier aspect.

The Oxford grads were enjoying themselves, trolling out jocular songs as though they sat to see the finish of the punch-bowl at a College wine, rather than a likely finish in a neighbouring ditch with a broken neck or two thrown in.

But the stranger with the nose and valise neither sang nor swore, but sat behind Michael, urging him to quicken his steeds' pace again and again, in tones which were inflected with growing anxiety.

But Michael needed no urging.

He was at least half an Irishman and was bred for a sportsman; moreover, he meant winning that race.

Faith! those inside might split, slit, and confound themselves and others till they were hoarse, the coachman, pinioned firmly by Nat and Horace Goulden, might entreat and implore for pity on horses and passengers, but Michael heeded nothing of them all.

High above the shrieking wind and creaking of tossing boughs overhead rose his strong, young voice, whooping on the straining, panting steeds as they dashed downhill at a gallop.

It was Providence that looked to the wheels of the coach.

A yell from Tom Blakeley, perched behind, set hearts a-thumping lustily.

Cross roads and a stretch of common land had shown keen eyes the sight of a group of horsemen riding with loose rein to meet them.

Half a mile lower was Craven's Hollow, and our merry gentlemen of the road were on their way for their tryst.

But the Oxford coach was half an hour before her time.

"Hola! Hola! Hola!"

It was a wonder those chanting grads did not fling themselves from the coach-top in their excitement.

They were ahead of their pursuers.

Blunderbusses and pistols had been handed up from the arm-chest below, but it was agreed that a fight was to be avoided.

These gentry of the black mask were straight shooters and might let more hot blood than was desirable.

"Hola! Hola! gallant greys! The best feed Reading can provide, and no more journeyings to-night if you do it."

Michael's voice, coaxing at first, rose to shrill command, as the long whip cracked, and the great coach swung round a corner at such an angle as nearly sent Tom Blakeley spinning after his horn.

But the men behind quite understood the game now, and were ready enough to play it out. One does not see a rich prize disappearing round the corner without giving chase.

And their horses were fresh.

Yet the coach had a good start.

Craven's Hollow at last!

"Steady there, Michael, steady! Bad going, and a rickety old bridge which wants treating with respect."

But Michael was deaf to caution. To steady down meant capture, and one must risk something for success.

So down the hollow rattled the great, clumsy vehicle, and even the youngsters grouped round the box-seat forgot to sing and shout now, but clung on in silence—wondering——

Over!

A positive gasp of relief went up as the greys, galloping across the wooden bridge, went sturdily up the hill, whilst the coach swayed and rocked from side to side of the rough lane.

"Huzza, huzza!" cried Blakeley, waving his hat; and the shout was taken up with growing fervour as the passengers, looking back, saw half a dozen horsemen come down the Hollow pell-pell.

La! what a crash and what a yell of triumph from the hill-top.

The bridge, strained to its last plank by the coach, had split and broken as the pursuers set horse-hoof on it, thus precipitating two of the foremost riders into the stream.

It was highly regrettable that they could not wait to see the end of the adventure; but the greys were already half-way down the hill, and yonder twinkled the lights of Reading.

It was unlikely that the gentry behind would leave their comrades to drown in a swollen torrent, since there is considerable honour amongst thieves; so the Oxford coach proceeded at a more respectable rate towards the town, thus enabling those within to right and congratulate themselves on being alive.

On the outside a merry chorus was being sung, and one Michael Berrington, much patted on the back, urged to write himself down hero as he drove his panting horses up to the sign of the "Blue Boar."

Even the beetroot-nosed traveller asked leave to shake hands and congratulate the finest young whip he had ever driven behind.

Michael, being no swaggerer, laughed, and passed off the honours with a jest.

But it was good to know that the name of Berrington was being toasted that night in the little inn-parlour of a Reading posting-house.

One day—ah well! Youth must have its dreams, and we all figure as heroes to ourselves in them some time in our lives.

## CHAPTER V

### A LEGACY

Oxford to London, London to Berrington. And arriving there to be greeted with the news that old Sir Henry was dying.

Shock enough for the young man to whom Sir Henry meant everything of affection in life. Ten years had passed since he had come, a raw, uncouth lad fresh from the little Irish village and his mother's death-bed.

Sir Henry had been as much bogey to him then as he had been thorn in flesh to Sir Henry. But the years had altered that,—years, and the story of his father.

That story had changed young Michael Berrington from a scapegrace lad into something of sterner, more manlike, mould; though, at twenty-four, he was known at Oxford as Hotspur Mike by reason of the devilry of his pranks. Yet it was a Hotspur who had won himself a certain honour, and there was no mud thrown against the name.

And Sir Henry had come to love this big, stalwart grandson of his, finding him true stuff, with Berrington honour to stiffen his backbone for all his wild Irish blood.

Michael's pranks were not those of a coward, and his grey eyes looked straight and fearless in owning a fault, punishment or no.

So the ten years had passed in strengthening fibres which grew down into native soil, and the old man and young one had been drawn very near to each other.

And now Sir Henry was dying.

Michael's hand fell listless on the great head of Comrade, the deerhound, as he sat opposite to the little, black-coated doctor who took his snuff and ran nervous fingers through his wig, as his manner was in breaking ill news.

This young man, with the white, set face and enigmatical grey eyes, disturbed him far more than the vapourings and hysterical screaming with which my lady received the news of the passing of my lord.

"He is dying?"

"I regret very greatly to say—yes, Mr. Michael. It is a case of inflammation around the heart. I fear——"

"May I go to him?"

"As I was about to say, Mr. Michael, Sir Henry has asked to see you. Any moment——"

"Any moment?"

"May be his last. The valves of the heart being——"

But Michael did not want explanations.

His grandfather was dying and had asked for him. That was enough.

Instinct and canine sympathy brought Comrade with drooping tail and ears at his heels.

In the great, wainscotted bedroom, with its huge, four-poster bed and dark hangings, Sir Henry Berrington lay dying.

It was very gloomy, that room, and though lights flared in the silver candlesticks on the table and mantel-shelf, yet there were shadows—heavy shadows.

Shadows too under the tired old eyes; but there was no fear in the latter.

A true Berrington feared only one thing—dishonour.

Poor Sir Henry. Was it that ghost which haunted him even now!

A strong, lean hand was gently drawing back the bed curtain.

"Ah, Michael."

The tremulous voice spoke a hundred unuttered welcomes in the brief sentence.

"Grandfather."

It was not weakness which shook the other tones.

Sir Henry smiled. How good the touch and clasp of warm young fingers is on those that grow cold and chill!

For a moment the shadows have gone, as blue eyes look into the clear depths of grey. This is a Berrington who will hold honour high—a Berrington whom he can trust to remember all that is due to the name.

The old man's heart throbbed quickly, whilst mute lips thanked God for such an heir. Then, once more, the shadow fell. Bending low, Michael listened to the faintly gasping breaths.

"He ... may be ... alive. If so ... he ... will come back ... when he hears. He ... was always afraid ... of me. That was how ... it began. My boy ... Stephen ... I ... have cursed him ... but his mother ... loved him. If he comes ... back ... I leave the ... honour of ... Berrington in your hands, ... Michael. Swear you will ... watch over it ... always?"

"I swear."

A smile broke over the tired lips, as though a burden had been dropped from weary arms into the safe clasp of stronger ones.

"Michael," whispered the old man. "Yes ... can trust ... Michael. He ... has not failed me.... Would ... God he had ... been my son. Yet Mary ... loved Stephen.... Poor lad ... afraid of me ... and then ... a traitor.... May God ... forgive——"

One long sigh, and Sir Henry had gone to finish his plea for pardon in the presence of Heaven itself.

* * * * *

But Michael sat pondering long by the dead man's side, pondering on many things, till the candles guttered and went out with a final flare, leaving him alone in the darkness with Death.

Yet he was not afraid, even though the sigh which broke from his lips presently was half a sob.

Supposing his father were yet alive?

"I swear."

It was the mute reiteration of an oath.

## CHAPTER VI

### MISTRESS GABRIELLE GOES PRIMROSING

"I vow that I would sooner be a nun than live here all my life alone."

And Beauty in a passion stamped her little foot, scolded her dog, and then ran upstairs to put her hat on.

At seventeen one's own company is apt to be wearisome; but then, as Morice said, there was no pleasing his sister. She refused to come to London under the chaperonage of my Lady Helmington, and as often as not she stayed upstairs in her chamber when he drove his friends down from London.

It is true that the friends were of a convivial spirit, and had on one occasion treated Mistress Gabrielle de Varenac Conyers as if she were Betty the serving-wench at some ale-house, instead of a very haughty young lady.

And Gabrielle, being of a high spirit, had greatly resented the treatment, and vowed, many

times over, that she would never again put in an appearance at her brother's orgies, or run risk of such insults.

Morice, however, had only laughed and driven away. A gay buck was he, such as a man in the Prince of Wales's set need be. Ah! the tales he could have told of Carlton House and the goings on there!

Of course Gabrielle, little fool, wouldn't listen to a word of them, and was scathing in her remarks when he told the story of how the Prince himself had driven Richmond, the black boxer, down to Moulsey, and held his coat for him when he beat Dutch Sam, or how that merry Princeling another time dressed a second champion of the gloves up as a bishop, and took him with him thus attired to a fête.

Miss Gabrielle, a disdainful maiden of sweet seventeen, tilted a very pretty nose, and declared His Royal Highness to be nothing better than a buffoon.

Perhaps she was right. At any rate no wonder she sighed, picturing the absent Morry at the dicing-board, or under the table snoring away in drunken slumbers till the morning.

In those halcyon days of youth "Prince Florizel's" set was more notorious for riotous living than for respectability.

And, in the meantime, pretty Gabrielle lived virtually alone at the dull old Hall in Surrey.

Her father was dead. Poor, rheumatic, growling old man—prematurely old—cursing against Fate and the friend who had betrayed him. Cursing at a Government, too, which had given him the name of rebel, and a King who was little better than usurper—a stodgy German—half madman—whom an English people chose for their liege Sovereign.

But Gabrielle did not trouble about politics, and, though she shed a few filial tears for a cantankerous parent they had soon been dried.

If only Morry had been different they two might have been very happy together.

But Morry was a natural product of the times, and not likely to change so long as he and his boon comrades had money to spend at the gaming-table, or a bottle of good wine to get drunk on, not omitting other delights such as boxing, racing, the smiles of French ballet-dancers, and the latest fantasies of the mode.

Poor little Gabrielle! It was a good thing for her that she had a will and virtue of her own, and shrank from the blustering offers of an introduction into London society, under the painted wing of my Lady Helmington.

Still, seventeen is not apt to be prosaic, and therefore small wonder that a tear stole down a pink cheek as a slim little maiden wandered aimlessly down a garden path and through a wicket-gate. What was the use of being pretty and sweet as a May morning, as old Nurse Bond had just called her, when there was no one to see her but a set of drunken young jackanapes?

What use that the brimming laughter of fun and coquetry rose to her lips when there was no lover to be enthralled?

Ah! a lover! Blush as she might at such forward desires, yet that was what she wanted.

Such a lover as one read of in the romances. A Romeo to whom she might play Juliet. The picture was a fitting one for springtide. But where was he?

Not here, alas! though the setting would have been ideal,—a wood carpeted with primrose blossoms, birds warbling their prettiest and gayest amongst larches and slender ash, all dressed in the freshest of green robes, and, in the centre, herself,—a Queen amongst her feathered subjects, with sunshine to crown her tumbled curls, and a hat, turned basket, half filled with flowers.

Eden and the most seductive Eve, all waiting for an errant Adam!

He came. Of course he came! She knew he would at last, and smiled a welcome which set the dimples in her cheek playing at hide-and-seek in the most bewitching way.

After all she was but a child, tired of her own company, and she knew the name of her Adam though she had not seen him for three years, nor spoken to him for ten.

So she dropped him the merriest of curtsies, laughing as she watched the colour creep up under his skin at sight of her.

His own bow was formal enough, but he raised his hat with grace.

"Sure, sir, you have been long in coming," she cried, swinging her hat by its blue ribbon, and eyeing him with some show of admonition.

She was quite aware that he did not know her.

"Your pardon, mistress," stammered Michael Berrington, shame-faced as a girl. "I almost—forget——"

She checked him, clapping her hands.

"Fie, sir, but that is what a man of honour should never do, though, certes, it is many a long year since you vowed to be my true knight for ever and ever."

She blushed rosy-red over the last words, only afterwards realising their meaning.

But the blush became her, rendering her more enchanting than ever.

Michael, however, had paled, for he knew now that this was the little Brown Fairy of other days, grown into lovelier girlhood.

Yet was not her name Gabrielle Conyers, daughter to the man whom his father had betrayed?

Instinct and impulse ofttimes help a woman better than long training in worldly wisdom. Gabrielle had heard the story of Stephen Berrington. But she held out friendly hands to his son.

"I am all alone," she murmured plaintively, "and very dull. Come and help me gather my primroses."

Half-conquered by a flash from hazel eyes, the young man took a step forward.

"But——" he answered with an effort. "Perhaps, madam, you do not know my name is Berrington."

An adorable dimple completed the conquest.

"Michael, not Stephen," she retorted boldly. "Old stories and memories should have no place in the present, sir, so forget, pray, your name, if it displeases you, and remember only your ancient vow. I hold you to it."

She would not have coquetted thus with any of the fops and lordlings whom Morry brought from town, but that same woman's instinct of hers told her that this stalwart young man with the lean face of many angles, and steadfast grey eyes, was to be trusted.

He yielded, tossing aside misgivings with one of those sudden changes of mood which characterized him, and knelt beside her on the mossy bank to gather the sweet-scented blossoms with which her hands were already half-filled.

Spring-time and youth, sunshine, bird-song, the seductive spell of a woodland glade, all helped to cast their glamour, and, before him, the slim, girlish figure in its simple gown of white, with a bunch of blue ribbons loosely knotted in the fichu at her breast, and a face which Greuze would have loved to paint, framed in a mass of tumbled curls.

No wonder that Michael Berrington's blood quickened in his veins and his grey eyes kindled.

Love is like the dawn which, slow of coming in northern skies, yet breaks through the trammels of night to swift and glorious radiance in the south.

So, in passionate, impulsive natures, love sometimes dawns, with no warning murmurs, no slowly stirring desire, but swift and warm as the King of Day himself.

Thus surely came love to Michael Berrington, as he gathered primrose-posies in the sunshine of a spring day, and looked long into a young maid's laughing eyes. Yet he did not call this strange new sweetness, love, but was content to feel it thrilling and animating his whole being. So lonely he had been since old Sir Henry's death, haunted with ghosts as the old Manor seemed,—ghosts of living and dead, which remorselessly pursued him.

But winter blackness had rolled suddenly aside as a girl's rippling laugh broke on his ear.

"Dreaming, Sir Knight. Fie on you again! You should be minding your devoir. I asked you to gather me primroses."

He was awake once more, and dreams put aside for a more profitable moment.

"Sweet flowers for sweeter wearer," he said. "Would I were indeed your knight, little mistress, so should you ever walk on primrose paths."

She looked at him from over the great posy she held in her hands.

"Nay," she replied, "I think the primrose path would soon be left if you were no more faithful than you have been these ten years. Alas! I remember now the tears I shed watching vainly day by day under the shadow of the old wall for my playmate."

"You watched?"

"And wept."

"I thought——"

"And so did I—that you had vowed to be my true knight."

"It was before you knew my name—or understood."

"Understood what?"

She was plucking at green leaves and would not spare him.

"That your father would not have had you speak to a traitor's son."

"Bah! But my father died four years ago."

"The traitor's son remains."

"We cannot answer for our fathers' sins. As long as *you* are not a traitor, what matter?"

For answer he silently raised her little hand to his lips.

She was smiling as presently she withdrew it. So, after all, the lover had come.

"You will be my friend?" she asked simply; but her eyes, under veiled lashes, flashed with coquetry.

"To death if you will have me."

"In life I should prefer it. I need a friend, sir."

"I am sure so fair a lady must have many."

"Not one."

"Not one? But you have a brother?"

"Morry! There! I must not be scornful, for I love him devoutly—when he's sober. But the Prince of Wales has admitted him into his most select circle. You understand, sir?"

Understand! The Prince of Wales's debts, extravagances, follies, and empty-headed good-nature were the gossip of every ale-house throughout England!

Yes, Michael Berrington understood.

"There is only old Nurse Bond," sighed Gabrielle. "My father had no kin and my mother's are in Brittany. Sometimes I vow that I will go out to them for protection."

"You forget the Revolution in France. Ere long, methinks, these friends of yours are like to seek protection from you."

"Perhaps; but I would rather go out there. As for the Revolution, Morry says it is a good thing, and Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan say the same."

"And every young rake in the Prince of Wales's set to boot. Yet I will not believe that they think it, mistress. It is a party question, and they air their opinions to annoy Burke and Pitt. But it is too fair a day for politics, and I am no politician. Where shall I bestow my posies?"

She laughed, ready enough to change from grave to gay.

"My hat is full. You must lend me yours." And she pointed to the flat, three-cornered hat on the bank. "Or, stay—my apron!"

She spread out a miniature muslin apron to hold a sweet burden of blossoms.

"You have been most diligent, sir."

"My name is Michael."

"You should be a saint then."

"Alas! Only a poor sinner, I fear, though I claim company with the angels."

"The angels?"

"One, gathering primroses, is enough for me. Do you come here every day?"

"My name is Gabrielle."

"Gabrielle."

How she blushed as he said it very slowly, dwelling tenderly on each syllable.

But it was vain to shake her curls, for she had given him permission.

"I must be returning to the Hall," she said primly, "or my brother and his friends will be there before me."

"And you are alone?"

A swift pity stirred him. Poor little child! How sorely she must need a protector.

But she drew herself up with quaint pride.

"There is Nurse Bond," she replied. "I sup with her when Morry's friends are not to my liking."

He held soft little fingers in both his strong hands, little guessing how the power in them comforted her.

"You call me your knight," said he. "Pray God I may ever be your true and faithful one; that you will let me be such."

She could not laugh or mock him with empty coquetry as she looked into his eyes, for here was no longer the merry, careless youth who tossed yellow blossoms into her apron, but a man who was ready to be lover, too.

And she had sighed so long for one—ever since Lady Helmington promised last autumn to take her to London.

"Thank you," she answered, quite simply in return. "I—I do not think I shall be afraid of Morry's friends again."

Michael's eyes flashed.

"If they give you reason to be so," quoth he, "I pray you tell me their names. They shall learn a lesson in manners at least—from a traitor's son."

The last words revealed—in part—to the girl a latent bitterness in this man's life. Yet she smiled as she ran home, through the wicket and over the lawns, leaving a trail of primrose blooms behind her, for she knew that thus unexpectedly on a May day she had reached womanhood's first goal.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

Michael Berrington walked home alone, but he was no longer lonely.

In his hand he held a tiny bunch of primroses, in his heart was already enshrined a small oval face with hazel stars for eyes, and alluring dimples which might well have tempted St. Anthony's self.

He was dreaming of dimples, eyes, and all the pretty foolishness of a youthful lover's first great passion as he entered his home.

Comrade, the faithful deerhound, met him at the entrance.

"There is news, yonder, master, but I cannot quite understand it," the great animal tried dumbly to explain, and restlessly led the way back towards the library.

Lights were burning, the door open, and old Bates the butler coming nervously forward, when a voice, rich, sweet, and powerful, though broken once and again by an explanatory hiccough, broke the silence:

"The jolly Muse, her wings to try,
  No frolic flights need take,
But round the bowl would dip and fly
  Like swallows round a lake.
And that I think's a reason fair
  To drink and fill again."

"Mr. Michael, Mr. Michael," faltered Bates, in nervous agitation.

But Michael Berrington put him aside with commanding hand.

He knew he was going in to greet his father for the first time in his life.

Stephen Berrington lolled back in the wide armchair. Before him on a table was placed a large bowl of punch, in his mouth was a long pipe.

He was very much at home.

He rose, smiling, at sight of the tall figure on the threshold. If he had been drinking he was by no means drunken, and his appearance was that of a very handsome but somewhat dissipated man of fifty, dressed in the height of fashion, his powdered wig a little awry, but his eyes bright and wonderfully amused at the present moment. His manner was perfectly friendly.

"Why, Michael!" he cried. "Demn it all, lad, if the first sight of you doesn't make me feel an old man. Come, you'll shake hands with a prodigal father? You're not your poor mother's son, else."

He held out a welcoming hand as he spoke, but Michael ignored it, dropping into a chair.

In all his visions and pictures of his father's return he had never imagined this.

Stephen Berrington did not appear to take offence at his son's refusal of greeting, but sank back into his chair, refilling his glass with punch.

"Old Bates hasn't forgotten his mixture," he observed drily, "though it's nearly thirty years since I tasted it. Thirty years! Well! you'll have heard the story, Mike, and I suppose have long since written me down as a black-hearted devil who's no fit company for honest men."

He passed his hand wearily over his brow as he spoke.

Michael flushed. Though he had expected his father's return eventually, the shock of this unlooked-for home-coming had thrown him off his balance.

"I was with my mother and grandfather on their death-beds," said he, shortly.

His father sighed.

"Yes," he said. "I don't wonder you refused my hand, lad; yet there's more excuse than you know of. I can't tell you all now, but I will—one day."

Michael was twisting the stems of a little bunch of primroses between nervous fingers.

"Ralph Conyers is dead also," he replied unsteadily.

Stephen Berrington looked up sharply.

"I know," he answered. "Ah yes! Of course *that* story has been drummed well into you. A moment's weakness, and a man's whole lifetime to be cursed for it."

"It cost his friends more."

"Oh, aye; I know. But what of it? If I had not spoken we should have all been strung up in a row. I could not have saved Pryor and Farquhar. No, nor Conyers either, for that matter. As it was I saved my own skin, and never really hurt theirs. What blame?"

"Need a gentleman ask that question?"

"Tra, la, la! Sir Henry always was a good schoolmaster there. A trifle out of date, though, my son, as you will find. Why, even Morry himself took my word for it and shook hands afterwards."

"Morry?"

"Morice Conyers—poor old Ralph's son. A buck worth having for a son, too. Why! we're the best of friends."

"Morice Conyers your friend?"

"You look unbelieving, my Bayard, but it is true that I drove down here on friend Morry's coach, and, had it not been for my ardent longing to embrace you and see again these ancestral halls, I should now be toasting the prettiest eyes in the kingdom, and drinking to the august health of our liege lord Prince Florizel, who is at present between the sheets in his royal residence at Carlton House, suffering from an attack of indigestion."

Then, suddenly dropping his lighter tone of badinage, the speaker leant forward.

"Look here, Michael," he said,—and there lacked not a certain wistful pleading in his tones,—"others have agreed to let the past be forgotten; can't my own son join them there? It's true my crop of wild oats was plentiful enough. As for that Jacobite affair, I—well—I've often wished that I'd been in Pryor's place, and written finis on a jumble of mistakes and a life which was not then quite such a wretched failure."

"If it had been only——"

"Roast me, sir! Are you my Lord High Inquisitor to ask what else I've been doing through these years, and call me blackguard for everything not explained?"

"You forget my mother."

Stephen Berrington's hand dropped, whilst his blue eyes wavered and fell before the stern gaze of the younger man.

"Aye," he muttered, "I'll cry 'Mea culpa' there. My poor little Norah. Yes, I'll admit I was to blame."

"You broke her heart."

"Slit me if I would, had she ever won mine! The marriage was a mistake. But come, lad, I've had enough of platitudes and fault-finding. I come to make merry, and find a dour face as ill to meet as Calvin's own,—and, as for drink, the bowl is empty. Ha, ha! I'm for Langton Hall and a night of it with my merry friends. Tra lal-de-lal! You may come, too; an' you list, son Michael. You'll remember your filial duties an' fall on my neck in welcome after a stoop or so of punch and some of Conyers' boasted port. Rare bucks those, and the devil of a time awaiting us. Cast glum looks to the dogs, boy, and join me. You'll be welcome. I'll stake my head on that. Steenie Berrington's son needn't fear the cold shoulder."

He rose, staggering slightly, and laying a hand on his son's arm to steady himself.

Something in the touch sent a thrill—half shudder—through Michael.

*His father*. Yes! *His father*.

Old Sir Henry's dying words came back to him vividly enough.

"If he returns I leave the honour of Berrington in your hands. Swear you will watch over it always."

Yes, he had sworn that he would hold the honour even when it lay in another's power to trample it under foot; and swiftly it came to him that he could not keep that oath and stand against this newly-found parent. For the honour of his house he must be his father's friend and companion.

Perhaps he found it less hard to yield, feeling that helpless touch on his arm, and seeing that half-pleading, half-defiant look on the handsome but weak face.

"Yes," he replied. "I will come."

Sir Stephen greeted the decision with a roar of laughter.

"Well done, Mike," he cried. "Split me, but I don't believe you're so sour after all, in spite of those straight looks. We'll be comrades, eh, boy? and drown the ghosts in the flowing bowl. They'll need drowning," he added, leaning against his son's broad shoulder and speaking in a whisper. "That's why I didn't come before. Not that I care for Sir Henry; he may frown an' curse at me till he rots, I'll but drink the deeper. But the little mother is different; she looks sad, and I see her crying over there by her tambour frame, and I know the tears are for me. That's what I can't stand, Mike, d'you hear? It makes me—there, there, I'm a drunken fool or yet not drunk enough,

'And that I think's a reason fair
To drink and fill again.'"

He flung back his head with a rollicking laugh over the refrain. Ghosts there should not be at Berrington Manor.

"Let's to the Hall," he cried, with an oath. "There's good wine, good company, and pretty faces there, if Phil Berkeley's to be believed. He vows Morry's sister's a jewel fit for a king's crown. You'll be your father's son where a pair of pretty eyes are to be toasted, eh, boy? Ha! ha!"

But Michael did not reply, though his own eyes were grim for those of a youth who went a-wooing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### AT LANGTON HALL

"I protest, Mistress Gabrielle, it is wanton cruelty of you to bury yourself alive in this dreary hole when all London is in darkness awaiting its sun of beauty to shine on it." Gabrielle laughed, a clear, little contemptuous laugh, which cut crisply through Lord Denningham's languorous tones.

"Of a truth I'm sorry for London, my lord," said she shortly, "since it must be a small place for one such light to be sufficient for its illumination, but I'd be sorrier for myself if I were there."

"You've never tried, my sweet princess," he retorted, with lazy ardour and a bold stare at the charms which the simplicity of a white gown and posy of primroses, nestling in the soft laces at her breast, set off to advantage. "You don't know the delights of conquest. Why, every beau in town would be at your feet, and every belle would be wanting to scratch your pretty eyes out. What could woman want more?"

"I can scarce be woman yet," she answered, laughing in spite of obvious annoyance at his glances, "for I should need much more. My woods and my primroses for instance."

Her eyes grew dreamy over a memory. Lord Denningham grinned as he slowly took a pinch of snuff.

"Even Arcadia needs the shepherd's flute—or the lover's whisper," said he. "You must show me your woods to-morrow, and teach me that primrose-plucking is more entertaining than rout or race-course. I vow I'm ready to learn—and be convinced—by such a mistress."

The note of passion running through the thinly-veiled sarcasm sent the rosy blushes to her cheeks, but her white brow was set in a wrinkle of frowns.

"Nay, my lord," she returned coldly. "You're past conversion, and my woods are no more for you than I am for your gay London. I want neither lovers nor racketings."

Her eyes strayed to where, at the other end of the great saloon, Lady Helmington's fat shoulders were shaking with excitement as she dealt the cards.

Her ladyship was as fond of gambling as her lord was of rum punch.

But Lord Denningham was smiling as he toyed with the gilt inlaid snuff-box in his hand.

"Not lovers then, for such a little lady," quoth he, persisting. "But a lover—or husband—the most devoted, on the soul of——"

She interrupted him, more rosy red with anger than maiden coyness.

"No, nor lover neither, I thank you, my lord," she replied hastily. "I'll not need or wish to go to town for such."

He opened languid blue eyes in surprise.

"What! Do primrose woods supply those too?" said he. "Fie! madam, I shall tell Morry."

She rose, scarlet with temper, and prettier than ever for her passion, sweeping past her insolent admirer with the air of an angry queen.

Half way up the great room she stopped to speak—and this time with smiling graciousness—to a grey-wigged gentleman in a suit of sober green, with fine lace ruffles and jabot,—a gentleman somewhat old, somewhat bent, and more than somewhat rubicund about the nose. Yet his face was kindly and his bearing paternal towards pretty little Mistress Gabrielle.

Jack Denningham, roué, gambler, and very fine gentleman—in his own eyes—turned away with a chuckle. He had quite determined that this country chit should have the inestimable honour of being Lady Denningham. In the meantime her tantrums and graces amused him.

A jolly shout of welcome from a young man dressed in the height of fashion, from spangled satin waistcoat to buckled shoes, made him turn his head towards the opening door, to which his host was already hastening.

"Come, Steenie, we were waiting for you; ha! ha!" cried Morice Conyers, slapping Sir Stephen Berrington heartily on the back.

"Dice and cards had lost their savour without the salt of your company; as for the punch bowl, it was awaiting its master."

Sir Stephen, surrounded at once by a merry throng of youths, laughed gaily. He was steady now on his legs, and there were no ghosts at Langton Hall—or he forgot them amidst boon comrades.

But Michael, standing in the background, remembered the man whose life had rotted for years in a dungeon, and wondered very greatly how Morice Conyers could touch the hand that had sent his father to a living death.

But Morice had no such thought, though his brow knit slightly at sight of Michael, remembering, perhaps, a more recent event under the shadow of a high wall, where a dainty stripling had been sent sprawling by a sturdy, black-browed boy.

Sir Stephen's merry voice broke through an unpleasant memory.

"Another name for our Florizel's train, Morry," he cried gaily. "My son Michael—a rare buck I'll prophesy."

Morice Conyers bowed—a trifle formally. The tall, broad-shouldered figure in its plain but handsome dress, with dark head held proudly, and a quiet look of steady doggedness in the grey eyes, did not promise a boon companion of the Carlton House order.

A voice from behind broke a moment's pause.

It was that of the green-clad stranger to whom Mistress Gabrielle had been talking.

"Present me, Conyers," he demanded. "Though I'm thinking we have met before."

Michael bowed gravely, but without recognition.

Mr. Guy Barton's twinkling blue eyes surveyed him with friendly interest.

"You may better recall, sir," he observed, "the Oxford coach which you drove with exceeding profit to my pocket last November."

Michael smiled as he held out his hand. He remembered now the beetroot-nosed gentleman with the valise who had been the special subject of interest to Dandy Dick and his followers.

And meantime, whilst Mr. Barton told the tale amidst shouts of approving laughter, the hero of it crossed boldly to where a little figure sat solitary in a big, crimson satin-covered chair with dark head drooping rather wearily.

"Mistress Gabrielle."

Oh! she was awake now, and the blushes were not those of anger.

It was the lover of the primrose woods come to her thus unexpectedly, and all the handsomer in his rich suit and silken hose. For a woman notices these things, though Michael could only have told that it was the same sweet face which had shone suddenly through the grey gloom of his young life and set it a-flood with undreamt-of glory.

He was no courtier, this Michael Berrington. And had no pretty compliments of sparkling frothiness and emptiness to bestow on his lady. Yet she had no fault to find with him for that, though she was quick to note the furrow on his brow which had not been there when they plucked primroses together.

"You are sad?" she asked him. "Tell me what it is."

The child's frankness was no less sweet than the woman's sympathy behind it.

"My father has returned," he replied. "That is how I found entrance here. He is your brother's friend."

She paled a little at the words, and her soft brown eyes took a harder look as she glanced across the room to where Morice hung on the arm of Sir Stephen Berrington in merriest mood.

"Your father?" she whispered, and Michael drew back his breath sharply.

The faint contempt and anger in the two words struck him the cruellest blow he had ever felt.

Perhaps she knew it and repented, for she laid a soft little hand on his clenched one.

"Forgive me," she whispered. "Only—for the moment—I thought of *my* father."

Michael's face was stern.

"And I also, mistress," he replied. "We have no right here. It shames me——"

He faltered, and she checked further speech by her own contrition.

"Hush," she implored. "See, we are friends. It was our primrose bond, or, rather, an older one still—of ten years since." She smiled with a flash of coquetry to give meaning to her words. "And as you are my knight I lay command upon you never to speak word of that again. The past is dead, quite dead. Your father is Morry's friend—and you are mine."

"Till death, if you will have it so," he whispered, and would have added more but that a clamour rose from the card-table where Lady Helmington, having won her rubber and being in a vastly good humour, declared that she was positively dying with hunger, and hoped that supper was served.

Mistress Conyers, youthful and very unwilling hostess, rose to reassure her famished guest that an ample meal awaited them in the dining-room, bidding Morice escort her ladyship thither, whilst—after an instant's hesitation and a faint rising of colour—she demanded the arm of Sir Stephen Berrington.

With ladies in such a minority, and Lady Helmington willing enough, for one, to join in the revelry, supper at Langton Hall was a noisy repast.

Yet Michael noted with pleasure that his father lacked nothing in respect to his young hostess, whilst on her left hand was seated Mr. Guy Barton, a silent and imperturbable gentleman who ate with relish paying no heed to my Lord Denningham's anger at being ousted from a coveted position.

Those were hard-drinking days, when intoxication was considered no disgrace, and rather the exception if a gentleman did not need his valet or butler to escort him to bed; and Sir Stephen's punch-brewing was proverbial, even at Carlton House.

Lady Helmington might fume and fuss in vain, waiting for her whist in the saloon after supper, tête-à-tête with a little prude who turned a deaf and obviously disapproving ear to all the scandal and gossip of town, declaring that the very idea of London depressed her.

It was useless to think that the merry-makers in the dining-room would be in the mood for more card-playing that night. Her ladyship, tired of waiting, declared at last that she was nearly dead of fatigue, and departed in a huff to bed—or, rather, to the rating of her French maid, whilst Gabrielle, after a few minutes' wistful lingering, followed her unwelcome guest, not daring to remain alone, unchaperoned, yet longing—she did not tell herself for what, though she kissed the half-withered posy of primroses ere she laid them aside. Primroses and spring sunshine made pleasant memories, and—and how well he had looked in his Court suit of satin; so different from those popinjay friends of Morry's. She hated them all, in especial that Lord Denningham, with his nasty eyes and familiar speeches.

Show *him* her woods, indeed! Faugh! A likely tale. She hated blue eyes that looked—so——. Grey eyes for her—grey eyes that could gaze straight down and down till they found—her heart?

Nay! Sweet seventeen would not say so unbidden, yet still—perhaps—if she dreamt that night, grey eyes would be there with the sunshine and the primroses.

Mistress Gabrielle was smiling as she stood for a moment at the window, her dark curls falling over her white night-rail, before she turned with a blush and sigh, which latter was half laugh of soft content, to climb into the big four-poster bed with its quaint carvings of griffin and goblin, which might have scared the fancy of a maid less healthy and pure-hearted.

As for Michael Berrington, he was finding that the honour of the highest names in the land was like as not to find a common resting-place at the bottom of a punch-bowl; and, try as he might, he was little likely to do good by fishing therein.

The punch of his father's brewing and the port of bygone generations of Conyers were playing havoc with tongues and limbs of the younger beaux of that merry company.

Disgusted with drunken jests, which suited ill with his present mood, the young man took the first opportunity to slip away unseen.

He was hoping to find some one awaiting him in the saloon.

But, as I have said, the little lady he wanted had already retired, less from desire than modesty, and he was left to wander alone the length of the great room pondering philosophically on the strange trick of fate that brought him here. Surely the ghost of Ralph Conyers, bent, twisted Ralph, who had carried a life-grudge to the grave, would be peeping at him from the shadows, shaking a crippled fist at the son of the man who first betrayed and then outraged his memory?

His father the friend of Morice Conyers! His father the traitor who had sent Ralph Conyers to his grave!

Lord! what a world!

And a third note,—be it added beneath his breath,—he himself the man who would woo Ralph

Conyers's pretty daughter and win her—if the world could hold so much happiness for a sinner—as his wife.

The very thought, mingling with a vision of hazel eyes and the soft roundness of a white throat, set his pulses galloping.

He opened the casement window, stepping out on to the terrace to cool the fever in his veins. Old Ben Jonson's song rang in his ears:

"Drink to me only with thine eyes
  And I will pledge with mine.
Or leave a kiss within the cup
And I'll not ask for wine."

A kiss!

The very thought seemed to bewilder him,—lips meeting his, eyes to dream the same dream into his, the soft clasp of yielding arms, the caress of a velvet cheek against his burning one.

Fool and idiot! Away with such fantasies! Was it likely that such an angel would look at him so? Would—love—*him*?

He became fierce in his self-contempt, even though the hot blood of youth surged wildly in his veins, ready to beat down all barriers. She love him. Absurd!

Yet stay! Think of those golden hours in Barham woods only that afternoon.

Cupid had been in frolicsome mood then, and yet he could shoot his arrows straight. Standing there in the moonlight alone he was picturing the scene, lingering over the memory of how one bolder sunbeam had been made willing captive in the coils of an errant curl, whilst dimples had danced riotously in smooth cheeks.

Love! love! Golden in the glamour of youth, and none less sweet and true because it was born and matured in the fleeting hours of a single spring day.

A hand touching his arm, and a deep voice in his ear, broke the fairy spell which Queen Mab had been busy to weave around him.

Guy Barton knew better than most how to measure his punch—and his man.

"You are no songster then, my hero of the road?" quoth he in kindly tones. "Well, well, so much the better. I confess I don't care for all their tunes in there. Besides, I wanted a chat with Sir Henry's grandson."

"Sir Henry? You knew my grandfather?"

The very suggestion was passport already to the younger man's favour.

"Why, yes! An old friend of mine and a dear one to boot. You'd not heard him talk of Guy Barton?"

"Of a truth I'm recalling the name. There was some tale of a main of cocks——"

"Ha, ha! the old story. Yes, the hero of the cock-pit. Though I'll not be vaunting before the man who handled the ribbons through Craven's Hollow. You did me good service then, Mr. Berrington."

"'Twas nothing. Yet I'm glad to have served my grandfather's friend."

"Your own too, boy, if you'll have it. I see your father's back at Berrington."

"He returned to-day."

"Returned to-day. H'm! And a night of it at Langton Hall to celebrate the occasion. But he's your father. I'll not say more."

"I thank you, sir. Perhaps you knew him when younger?"

"I knew his mother, too. Poor lady! she's not the first to die of heart-break for a bad son. No, I'm no friend to Steenie Berrington, but I'll stand yours, as I say,—if you'll have me. I think I read grandfather before sire in your face."

"Sir Henry was both to me."

"Ah, yes; I believe it. Well, lad, I don't take friends from every bylane as a rule, yet I'll trust you with three-fold reason."

He tapped his snuff-box significantly.

"The Oxford coach, your grandfather, and your own eyes. I am a reader of character rather than books."

Michael bowed.

The elderly gentleman with the loquacious tongue and beetroot nose was already more to his liking than the gay friends of Prince Florizel.

Mr. Barton had taken his arm in a most confidential manner.

"I'm the friend of little Gabrielle Conyers, too," he observed shrewdly. "She needs one, poor maid. You know her brother?"

"I fought him once as a boy, and I meet him for the second time here to-night."

"Are you, too, a discerner of men?"

"Nay. I'm apt to be too hasty in my judgments, sir."

"Ah yes! Your mother was Irish, I remember. Hot blood for a fight, warm heart for a friend, true love for a wife. So you do not admire our friend's French-embroidered waistcoats?"

"I am no beau, and am little likely to choose my friends from the Carlton House set."

"Yet poor Morice has his finer qualities. Given adversity and a good sword he'd make a fighter and a gentleman."

"At present he is doubtless a pretty fool in the eyes of his tailor—and Lady Helmington."

"If the latter can raise her gaze from the whist-table, which is doubtful. But I still look for the day when Ralph Conyers' son will forget his follies and become a man. Still, I confess that I do not like *French* waistcoats."

"The Prince, I believe, admires them."

"Yes, so it is said. But he wears them with more discretion. Did you happen to notice a gentleman who sat on our host's left hand at supper!"

"A little under-sized fellow with black eyes and moustachios?"

"Monsieur Marcel Trouet, accredited agent of the French Republic."

"Of the French Republic! You mean that Morice Conyers——

"Is in sympathy with the glorious Revolution across the Channel," replied Mr. Barton, taking a pinch of snuff with great deliberation. "You may have heard of the London Corresponding Society, Mr. Berrington?"

"Since my grandfather's death I have remained in Surrey. I fear the news of the towns has not sufficiently interested me."

"Ah! You think it might interest you now?"

"I am convinced of it."

"A secret society is scarcely a concern for men of honour to interest themselves in," went on Mr. Barton calmly. "Yet it appears that many calling themselves such have joined these absurd, and, to my way of thinking, pernicious bodies of sympathisers with a Revolution which should have for its motto 'Murder, plunder, and rapine' instead of 'Liberty, equality, and fraternity.' Yet, when the Society of the Friends of the People numbers such names as Grey, Sheridan, Erskine, and even Lord John Russell on its lists, small wonder that more virulent types of seditionary bands, such as this London Corresponding Society, should spring up."

"And its object is—sympathy——?"

"Pah! Sympathy! *Sedition*, lad, sedition, brewed and stirred here for English palates by French cooks like Marcel Trouet. Pamphlets, such as ought to bring the writers to the gallows, are sown broadcast amongst the people, army, and navy, urging them on to follow Johnny Crapaud's example, and drag down all law and existing order. Yes, and this fine Society of which I am speaking is the worst of all, because it works in the dark. No one knows the five names of the governing committee, though there are over seven thousand enrolled in the ranks. And, as I have said, the French Republicans do something more than smile on their English friends. That is why such men as Monsieur Trouet sit at English tables as honoured guests. Do you understand?"

Michael's face was very white.

"And my father?"

Guy Barton shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not Sir Stephen Berrington's personal acquaintance *now*," he observed. "But he and Morice Conyers are excellent comrades." He laid his hand on his companion's shoulder.

"I have told you this," he said gently, "for two reasons. Firstly, because Sir Henry was my very dear friend—and your father is his son, and a Berrington. Secondly, because little Gabrielle Conyers holds a daughter's place in my heart, and—well—I saw the child greet you. You understand? If her brother goes mixing himself up with seditious societies and the like, she will need a strong arm and more than one honest friend. Morice should have more respect for his sister than to bring home his John Denninghams and Marcel Trouets."

Hand gripped hand there in the moonlight, but, before Michael had time to answer, a burst of song and an opening casement interrupted him.

> "Let's drink and be jolly and drown melancholy,
> So merrily let us rejoice, too, and sing.
> So fill up your bowls, all ye loyal souls,
> And toast a good health, to great George our King."

A roar of laughter and stamping followed the chorus, whilst out on to the terrace came lurching a trio of half-drunken revellers, their wigs awry, waistcoats wine-stained, faces flushed and excited.

"A good health to great G-George our K-King," hiccoughed one, and fell flat on the lawn.

Guy Barton turned with a frown of disgust to his new friend.

"Come," said he shortly. "'Tis time for gentlemen to be returning home. They'll be singing the Marseillaise next."

And Michael followed readily enough. He had seen his father on the steps talking and jesting with Marcel Trouet.

Even a drunkard should be more discriminating in his company.

## CHAPTER IX

### "WHEN TWO'S COMPANY AND THREE NONE"

"Lack-a-day, if the old master could see it," groaned Bates to himself, as he ran hurrying across the hall, carrying the great silver loving-cup, which had been so carefully hoarded away for twenty years and more, towards the supper-room.

"But times are changed since Sir Stephen came home. Ah! it's Mr. Michael should ha' been master here instead o' him. What with junketings an' drunkenness, gamblin' an' boxin', with balls an' such like now to top all—no wonder the timber in Barham woods wants a-fellin', an' the tenants grumblin' at skinflint ways. Love-a-daisy! say I—'Old ways is best—old ways is best.'"

But old Bates's lamentations, echoed though they might be by the household and dependants of Berrington, found no place in the hearts of the merrymakers, who crowded the supper-room and great saloon, which, for the nonce, served as ballroom.

A gay scene, surely.—Fair faces and handsome figures, sparkle of jewels, and sheen of satin and silk, vivid colouring with stately setting, long mirrors reflecting the bright throng of dancers with their powdered wigs and rich clothing.

Sir Stephen himself, growing younger, though perhaps more portly, in prosperity, was life and soul to his entertainment. A gallant figure, too, in coat of mauve velvet with white satin knee-breeches and buckled shoes, broidered waistcoat and fine lace ruffles. It was easy to forget the brand which had marked him, in former days, as one outside the pale of honourable company.

Fair lips were ready to smile now on the owner of Berrington Manor. Roguish eyes looked coy as he bowed before their dainty owners, and tongues which, under other circumstances, might have been caustic, became honeyed in their phrases when addressing him.

As for company, the countryside was there as well as the party from town. Persons of fashion, these latter, at whom the country misses, whose style was as ancient as their lineage, stared agape.

But in the embrasure of a window Gabrielle Conyers looked up reproachfully into the dark, lean face of Michael Berrington.

"You're quite a stranger, sir," said she, with some asperity.

"I have been in town, Mistress Conyers."

"Ah yes! I know what that means." The child assumed an air of worldly wisdom. "Gambling, drinking, duelling, and playing all sorts of foolish pranks to amuse your master."

"My master?"

"The Prince, of course. You're in his set now, I suppose, like Morry and Lord Denningham. No wonder the country palls."

He looked wistfully down into the up-turned face. In her gown of flowered silk, with its soft pink kerchief and laces, Gabrielle looked like some dainty fairy from dreamland—in his eyes at least.

"Pardon me, mistress. I love the country. It could never weary me."

"Yet you go to town?"

"It was—necessary."

"Necessary?"

She intended to have an explanation and not be baulked of her scolding, since past weeks had been sadly long and monotonous.

"My father went to town."

She shook her dark curls in disdain.

"And are you so tied to Sir Stephen's apron-strings that you must follow against your will? I'll not believe it."

"It is true."

He bent forward a little, her soft hazel eyes impelling him.

"Shall I tell you," he said softly, "what I mean? Nay! I think you know already."

"I do not," she persisted.

"My father's honour went to town too."

"Ah!"

She was remembering.

"And you?"

"The honour of Berrington was the idol my grandfather worshipped. I took it—as a trust."

"You loved him—old Sir Henry?"

Her eyes were dewy.

"I loved him—and promised."

She rose, touching his arm as the band struck up a fresh measure.

"You will lead me through the minuet?"

He bowed.

She did not meet his glance just then. A stately dance—too stately for some of the younger beaux who leant back, lolling against the walls.

Lord Denningham, side by side with Marcel Trouet, was looking vicious.

That dark-faced fellow—the younger Berrington—was as handsome as he was sour and strait-laced; a suit of peach-coloured velvet suited him to perfection.

Yet Lord Denningham's glance was not one of admiration.

The young devil—his rival—could smile too on occasion, it seemed, whilst Gabrielle was dimpling with happy smiles.

The minuet was over at last, and the ballroom insufferably hot. At least so Gabrielle declared, as her partner led her down the wide staircase and out through the open window on to the lawns.

A lake, surrounded by choice shrubs, and a seat under shelter of the rockery near, proved an ideal halting-place, whilst moonlight was good for dreams and fairy visions. Michael half lay on the grass at her feet.

"My primroses are faded," she said suddenly, coming back from dreamland to look into the dark face upturned to meet her gaze. "You did not come again to help me gather them."

"And now it is too late?"

The passion vibrating through the whisper stirred her pulses as the moonlight had failed to do.

"Spring is over."

"And summer is here."

"My roses have thorns. I do not gather many alone. See how one tore my finger but yesterday."

He took the little hand in his, and, growing bolder, or more desperate, held the scarred finger to his lips.

She drew it away, laughing.

"If you had been there——"

"Ah, mistress, if I might be always there to pluck the thorns away, so that for you life might have only roses."

"Nay, you might hurt your own hands, and I would not have that. But you shall come with me to Barham woods to gather the honeysuckle that grows there. It is sweet, without cruel prickings, yet sometimes it twines out of reach. You shall help me."

He did not answer, for very fear of saying too much, and thus frightening her with the passion which he needs must hold in check as a strong man reins back restive steed.

But perhaps she guessed what he might say, and, woman-like, tempted him on.

"Do you hear the ripple of the water among the sedges?" she whispered. "It sets me dreaming; and you—do you ever dream, Michael?"

The soft cadences of her words stole like soothing music to his throbbing heart.

"One dream I have," he answered huskily, "and only one. Yet when I dream it I pray never to awake."

"Tell it to me," she demanded, smiling as she turned her face half from him.

"I dare not."

"I thought you brave. But is it so ill a fancy, then, that comes to you in your sleep?"

"Rather so fair that I would never look away."

"Then I would see it too. Tell me of it."

"'Twere easier for you to look in your mirror, mistress, for tongue of mine could never tell half the charms of which I dare to dream."

She laughed again, laying her hand on his shoulder very lightly.

"I am glad you are my knight," she said, with the whimsical frankness of a child. "For when you say your pretty speeches they sound true, and not hollow, like those of the others."

Vaguely jealous, he was yet grateful.

"Your knight," he answered, in that deep, low voice of his which rang with suppressed feeling, "to pluck aside the thorns and shield my lady with my life."

Her lips were parted, smiling at a picture his words conveyed.

Yet her eyes challenged his.

"But you have other work to do, that takes you away from your lady's side."

He drew a sharp breath.

"Aye," he answered more sternly. "Pray God I may not forget."

"Forget?"

"That of which you reminded me yourself, my lady."

She flushed a little over the two last words.

"Your other work?"

"The honour of Berrington."

Her little foot tapped the gravel path impatiently.

"Must honour ever come first?"

"Would my lady have her knight place it second?"

"Nay, love should have first place," she declared boldly; and now her eyes were tender.

"Twin sisters to go hand in hand rather," he said softly, "as you and I would have them."

"But it is lonely at Langton Hall," she replied piteously, as a spoilt child.

"Less lonely than London town, I warrant. Yet my father remains at Berrington now."

"And my brother's friends stay at the Hall. It does not please me."

"You will not forget the honeysuckle?"

"I do not forget what I want."

"Nor I—even in dreams," he whispered, raising the white hand which lay against his sleeve and kissing it reverently.

A step on the path behind startled them, for it had seemed before that the world was empty save for they two. But no Paradise lacks its serpent.

Lord Denningham might have been conscious of the simile.

"A moonlight rhapsody," he sneered. "But I fear, madam, your brother grows impatient."

She rose with immense dignity.

"You will give me your hand to my coach, sir?" she asked of Michael.

Lord Denningham laughed shortly beneath his breath.

"The squire of dames is a pleasant role to fill—and a safe one," he observed with another sneer.

Michael drew himself up proudly.

"Lord Denningham will find me ready enough to fill another, anon," he retorted.

The young nobleman toyed with a ribbon about his neck.

"And that?" he scoffed.

"A teacher of manners to blatant puppy-dogs."

"You forget, sir, that puppy-dogs bite sometimes, and I have heard that a Berrington is afraid of a cracked skin."

"It is dangerous to listen to too many tales, my lord."

The voices of both were rising higher, whilst Michael's eyes were ablaze at his adversary's last insult.

Swords half drawn and hotter words to follow were intercepted by Gabrielle herself.

"I have already requested the favour of your hand to my coach, Mr. Berrington," she said, with a calmness and severity which were, alas! betrayed by a tremulous catch in the young voice. "A—a lady does not ask a gentleman twice."

He bowed gravely, offering her his arm, which she took, demurely curtseying.

"We shall meet again, my lord," he muttered behind his hand to Lord Denningham.

The latter grinned sardonically.

"I have heard of a Berrington hiding behind a woman's petticoats before," he drawled aloud; but in a low tone, "I'll tell you the tale, sir, at my own leisure."

"Come, Michael," cried Gabrielle sharply; "my brother waits."

Lord Denningham, left alone to moonlight reflection, took snuff with a scowl. He had thought the winning of a country mouse like to be easy work, since past experience had told him that the worse a man is the more probable that he takes the fancy of an innocent maid.

Little Gabrielle Conyers evidently had other tastes; and my lord, half in love by reason of her flouting, swore tremendous oaths.

Thus he was found, later, by Marcel Trouet, whose business in life was to act as a political firebrand, but who did not find his good friends the English of the most inflammable material.

But to-night Marcel was smiling.

"We drink good healths in ze house," he observed, taking Denningham's arm familiarly. "Come, come. We drink well, we sing very well, but we do need your voice to lead the rest. They are sheep who bleat for ze shephaird."

His lordship yawned.

"Why leave them then?" he retorted.

Trouet chuckled.

"Hélas," he murmured. "I am no shephaird, but only what you call the sheep-dog that barks, barks, always barks. But the shephaird of this noble Société de Correspondance——" He bowed with exaggerated politeness.

"I do behold him now," he said suavely. And Denningham followed slowly towards the house, from which the last coach had rolled away, leaving only a little knot of men around—and beneath —the supper-table.

They were toasting one Robespierre, a shining light upon the path of liberty.

Michael Berrington was not amongst them.

## CHAPTER X

### THE COUSIN FROM BRITTANY

Gabrielle was singing softly as she bent over her tambour frame.

She could sing now that she was alone in her own little boudoir, with no fear of Morry's intrusions and his wearisome lectures.

The idea of Morry daring to lecture her!

A white chin was tilted upwards at the very thought. And because, forsooth, she chose to reject the suitor he would have had her take for husband.

Marry Lord Denningham indeed! The very thought sent the angry blood racing through her veins.

Why, she would rather be an old maid like Miss Tabitha Mainwaring, or a nun in the Convent of the Sacred Heart, and wear ugly black robes all her life, than be wife to a wretch like that!

The silk snapped short under too hasty fingers, and the song ended in a gasp of indignation, as she recalled the insolently apprising glance of half-closed blue eyes.

She hated Lord Denningham.

How tiresome this work was! She had pricked her finger, and stained the green satin. It was most annoying, but no wonder things went wrong when she thought of that man.

And he might have killed that poor Mr. Berrington when they fought together. The colour was rising to her cheeks now, and the silk she tugged at in such desperation was becoming woefully knotted.

They had fought, of course, because—well—because Lord Denningham had insulted Mr.

Berrington's honour.

But her woman's vanity—in spite of repression—brought a flickering dimple to her cheek as she told herself quite silently that she had been at the root of the quarrel. Not that she cared for the husks of affection which Lord Denningham offered her.

Lady Helmington, in loquacious mood, had given her an insight as to how much his so-called love was worth. The memory of that lady's conversation brought the blush to her cheek.

But Michael!

Ah! he was so different.

The tambour frame lay in her lap, with her fingers idle a-top of it, having given up the battle with frayed silks.

She was dreaming of grey eyes.

Michael! Michael!

The birds at the lattice window were singing the sweet refrain of his name.

Michael! Michael!

Yes, he was her lover—the only one for her in the wide world.

He had come to her in childhood, a lean, untidy lad, with laughing eyes and hair all awry; but, as he knelt on one knee at her feet, she had chosen him there and then as her true knight for ever and ever.

Then the long years rolled between till the day when she stood alone, sighing for a lover, jealous, perhaps, of the songs of mating birds in the spring woods around.

And he had come to her again.

Even now, in the autumn twilight, she seemed to smell the subtle sweetness of primrose-blooms and to be looking through a vista of young foliage to see the tall figure which came striding up the glade with masterful steps and had looked long into her eyes.

He was her knight for ever and ever, and she had known it then as they gathered their spring flowers together and laughed like happy children who share a common joy. But she had not dared to dream too tangibly of that vague, intuitive knowledge till they stood together in the moonlight and listened to the faint lapping of water amongst the sedges. Then, as hand touched hand, heart had gone out to heart, and the crown of youth had come to both in the first dream of love.

Dimples played merrily in the flushed cheeks, and Gabrielle was smiling as she looked from the window where westwards a golden sunset flung a halo of glory over the drowsing landscape.

Russet wood, green meadow, silver stream, all transformed by that wondrous hour and light into a beauty which touched the girl's heart as the chords of a perfect melody might have done.

It was the time to dream of love.

And then came a jarring note.

The sparrow-hawk, wheeling high in mid-air, fell with one deadly swoop upon its little feathered victim, and a faint twitter of pain told of death in life.

Gabrielle shuddered.

Ah! supposing Denningham had killed him! What then?

She dared not think, only vaguely wondered whether poor Miss Tabitha had ever had a lover. If so, she would never smile or scoff again at her quaint, old-maidish ways; for the lover might have died, been killed in some wicked duel. Who could say?

But Michael had not been killed, and the duel was over, with some blood-letting on both sides, but nothing of serious consequence. And now—well, she was glad that Morry and that hateful lordling were in town, but she wished Sir Stephen Berrington would be content with the Manor, or even be laid up with gout for a time, for the blackberries were ripe in Barham woods, and she cared nothing for plucking them alone, since the brambles would tear her hands and gown.

A step without broke through her reverie. A visitor? Nay! Who could it be?

Giles, the butler, stood aside with perplexed face. "Moosoo Yay—Yay—Yay-harn de Quernais," he announced, with dignity which battled with difficulty.

Gabrielle rose hastily, and her eyes were as brightly curious as her cheeks flushed.

"Monsieur Jéhan de Quernais!" she cried. "Why, then, you are my cousin."

And she held out both hands, with a gesture of childish welcome to the young man in the green travelling-suit who stood bowing before her.

Not an ill-looking youth either, this unexpected visitor, but tall and straight, combining grace with that pride of carriage inherent in Breton blood.

Mud-splashed, it is true, even to his sleeves, and the costly lace at his wrists frayed and torn, whilst his dark locks were matted and tumbled. But the face beneath was handsome enough, set in a delicate mould, but strong too, with its oval contour and firmly-compressed lips, whilst the long, thin nose and broad forehead told of a sensitive and intellectual mind.

He smiled in answer to such a welcome, and black eyes flashed a look of admiration and pleasure into the girl's face ere he bent to kiss the extended hands.

"Yes, mademoiselle," he replied, "I believe I have that honour. A slender reason, perhaps, to excuse my presence here, and my claim on your hospitality."

He spoke English perfectly, with only sufficient accent to make it more charming.

Gabrielle laughed, the light-hearted gaiety of a bird in her voice.

"Good, good; I welcome you, cousin. You do not know how bored and weary I was becoming all alone here. And I never guessed how my ennui would be relieved."

She leant forward so that a shaft of sunshine set a halo about her head.

"And you come from France?"

The smiling face opposite clouded instantly.

"From Brittany, mademoiselle."

"My name is Gabrielle. We are cousins. You must not call me mademoiselle, and I shall call you Jéhan."

If he was surprised at the freedom of her speech he was too courtly a gentleman to show it, and merely bowed, accepting her words.

"From Brittany?" Gabrielle continued. "Then you have escaped from——"

A frown from him checked her.

"My mother and sister are still at the Château Kérnak," he said abruptly.

"Your mother and sister? My aunt and another cousin? I know so little of my Breton relations, and I have always wanted to know so much. Will you tell me—Jéhan?"

His ruffled humour was soothed instantly.

"Mademoiselle—pardon—Cousin Gabrielle, there is so much to say that I fear from the beginning I weary you. Your brother——"

It was evident that he required a larger audience than this pretty little cousin who, doubtless, had small comprehension of serious matters.

But Gabrielle knitted her white brows.

"Morry is in town; I am alone here."

"Alone!"

His surprise was manifest.

The girl flushed a little.

"Nurse Bond is here too. I have my meals with her. But you see, monsieur, my mother died before I could toddle, and now that my father is dead there is only Morry, and he so soon wearies of the country."

"And you, Cousin Gabrielle? Do you not weary too?"

She smiled, fingering the long ends of her fichu.

"If I do it is not for town. I will not go, and that makes Morry angry. But—but—I could not breathe there if they are all like Morry's friends and Lady Helmington. However, it is of you I want to talk now, Jéhan. I want to hear of madame my aunt, and your sister, and why you have come, and, well—if you do not mind relating it—about the terrible Revolution which some in

England say is good and right, but which makes me sick with horror."

De Quernais looked grim—an expression which ill-suited a face made for laughter.

"I do not think even your Pitt will hold back for long now," he replied. "You have heard of Paris, and the prisons?"

She shuddered.

"The September massacres? Oh, yes! The poor, poor Queen, and oh! that poor Princess."

"De Lamballe? A heroine, mademoiselle!"

"Yes. How brave, how brave! But why do your mother and sister stay in a country where such things are done?"

"Brittany is not France, as the Marquis de la Rouerie shows them."

"La Rouerie? What a hero! Mr. Barton told me all about him and the Chouannerie. It made me so glad to think that I was partly Breton too."

"That is why I have come, ma cousine. I am a follower of the Marquis."

"And you have come on some dangerous errand? Of course, I see it now. And perhaps we can help you? Is it so, Jéhan?"

"You are wonderful, Gabrielle. Yes, you can help us; or, rather, it is your brother who can do so. I will explain."

He was looking at her eagerly as they sat opposite to one another near the window. She was an angel, this beautiful English cousin who was yet kith and kin to him, and his errand would prosper.

"Yes, explain," she cried, holding out her hand impulsively, "and we will help."

So in the twilight he told his story, and neither heeded the length of the shadows or the dusk which stole grey-footed across the meadows; wrapping the peaceful landscape in its trailing shroud.

"Near the Château Kérnak," said Jéhan softly, "stands the Manor of Varenac. It was there that your uncle, our mother's brother, lived, and the peasants, his tenants, adored him. Whilst Comte Gilles lived there never could have been talk of the Terror coming to the neighbourhood. But a month ago he died. Hélas! we all mourned the good old man, and he died at a bad moment for Brittany. There have been agents from Paris around Varenac and Kérnak since, poisoning the simple minds of the villagers. The Terror, they say, means not only liberty, fraternity, and equality, but riches and soft living for the poor. Also power. It is that which appeals most. And yet the influence of Comte Gilles lives. The men of Varenac have not obeyed the voices of these agents. They wait."

"Wait?"

"For their seigneur's commands."

"And he?"

"Is in England, probably unconscious of his inheritance."

"You mean that Morry——?"

"Is also Monsieur le Marquis de Varenac."

"Ah! And his people await him?"

"As men watch for the dawn. He is to decide."

"Decide?"

"Whether Varenac plants the tree of liberty in her streets and starts on the path of murder, bloodshed, and terrorism, or whether she welcomes the coming of de Rouerie and his avengers."

For a few moments there was silence in the darkening room. Then Gabrielle spoke.

"And Morry must decide!"

"The peasants of three villages await his coming."

She rose, her hand resting against the knot of the fichu at her breast.

"Oh, I would it were I," she cried, "instead of he."

"Yet surely, cousin, you think alike?"

Her voice sounded heavy and lifeless in answer.

"I—do—not—know. Morry has bad friends."

Although she had scarcely addressed Marcel Trouet her suspicions were keen.

But Gabrielle possessed that power which is, perhaps, the best—though ofttimes fatal—prerogative of youth. She could put aside forebodings and doubts to dwell in the pleasanter atmosphere of the present. After all, Morry was half Breton too, and Monsieur le Marquis now, into the bargain. Surely he would not fail to respond to this appeal to his honour?

At any rate she would believe so.

"And when you and Morry return to Varenac I shall come too," she declared, nodding her pretty head. "And learn to know my aunt and cousin. You see how lonely I am here, so I shall come."

"Impossible!"

"Not at all, if you both go."

"Men may go, chère cousine, where maids may not."

"Yes, yes; I have heard that before. But do you know, Jéhan, I have *always* had my own way and done what I willed since I first toddled."

He smiled, well believing it, and wondering what his stately mother, with her old-fashioned ideas of what was convenable for demoiselles of birth, would say to this wayward child, who knew no restrictions and was good comrade before grand lady.

"I shall come," she added determinedly. "It is no use smiling up your sleeve in that way. And so let us go now and find Giles and tell him we are ready to sup. I am hungry, although I have only been sitting here for hours day-dreaming, so you must be famished. I am so sorry, monsieur. I fear I lack virtue as a hostess."

She dropped him a curtsey, apologetic yet half laughing, and led the way downstairs, he following, wondering at her freedom from bashfulness, yet admiring too, for it was done with all the charm and frankness of a child, and lacked any spice of forwardness.

So tête-à-tête they supped, lingering over dessert of grapes and plums, whilst Jéhan de Quernais told of the tempest-lashed old château, not far from St. Malo, where he had lived from babyhood.

A thousand questions had Gabrielle to ask of madame his mother, white-haired, gentle Madame de Quernais, who, Breton of the Breton, looked in wondering horror at the doings and deeds that racked France, and refused to believe it possible that her Breton peasants could ever forget the gulf which separated noble and simple, or what was due to the houses of Varenac and Quernais in respect and honour.

And then there was Cécile—Cousin Cécile, who was just one year her senior. It was clear that Jéhan adored his sister almost as much as his mother. She was perfection in his eyes, and Gabrielle could picture the slim little figure with dark tresses piled high and the pretty baby face beneath, with its big black eyes and arched brows. She had courage and determination too, this Cécile de Quernais, and was no doll who cared only for dress and compliments.

Brittany bred daughters of better stuff than that.

Gabrielle listened and asked questions till she would have wearied a less interested speaker. But Jéhan could not weary when he talked of home.

When at last his young hostess rose, her hazel eyes were determined and red lips positive.

"I shall certainly return with you to Brittany," she declared. "Ah! you do not know how lonely it is here, and how I have always—always—longed for a sister."

Then suddenly the colour flooded her cheeks.

"I shall love Cécile," she said. "But perhaps ... yes, perhaps ... it would be better if she and Madame your mother came ... here."

De Quernais bowed to hide a smile.

"If it is impossible now for you to come to Brittany, my cousin," he murmured, "I shall pray the saints that one day I may have the felicity of taking you there."

But Gabrielle, remembering—for the first time, perhaps, that day—that a cousin is not the same as a brother by many degrees, did not answer.

She was thinking of some one else who was neither kith nor kin, but vastly dearer all the same. If ever she went to Brittany she hoped that Michael Berrington would be beside her. Cousin Jéhan was but a boy!

She did not, however, press the latter to remain at Langton when he suggested—half hesitatingly—that he might ride to town that night in quest of Morry. Certainly no time should be lost on such an errand.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE ADVANTAGES OF A KEYHOLE

The buxom daughter of mine host at the Goat and Compasses, not half-a-mile from Carlton House, had her own opinions. They were decided, and showed an unusual power of discernment.

Mr. Conyers was a very pretty gentleman, in spite of a reprehensible habit of kissing too freely when rosy lips were near and tempting; but he was not to be compared—so Mollie told herself—with Mr. Michael Berrington, who was not pretty at all, and had not even a glance for Mollie, let alone a kiss, but was all eyes and ears for that handsome and lavish gentleman his father, who clung to him one moment and flouted him the next.

Mollie had met a good many Sir Stephens before! Then there was that Frenchman, who talked so much and seemed so fond of making fun of King George—bless him! Mollie did not like foreigners, and was as loyal as she was plump and pretty.

With her ear to the keyhole she was trying hard to hear more of what Moosoo Trouet was saying to Mr. Conyers and that sleepy-eyed Lord Denningham, who had made her blush with the freedom of his remarks as to her charms.

Mollie frowned, and glued her ear closer.

Lack-a-day! She could hear little, and was so intent on courting better success that she fell back with a squeal when a hand caught her shoulder.

Sir Stephen Berrington was laughing.

"Come, chick," he gibed. "We'll have to dub you Mistress of the Keyhole, instead of honest men's hearts. There! don't change colour. I'll not betray you if you run straight away, and cook me an omelette of chickens' livers for a snack before I start for Brighton. And, hark ye, my pretty, a bottle of port as crusty as your father's temper to drink your health in."

Mollie needed no second bidding, for, sure, that Lord Denningham would not have spared her had he known of her curiosity, and Peter Cooling had a strap which he was not too tender a parent to use across an erring daughter's fair shoulders.

Nevertheless, Mollie's cheeks were aflame and her brown eyes sparkling with truly righteous indignation.

Morice Conyers had not thought of eavesdroppers when he made that last speech of his. Loyalty to conviction as well as King makes great demands on one at times. Mollie, the innkeeper's daughter, was something near a lady by instinct just now, and ready to make a mighty sacrifice at the call of honour.

Her reputation as the best omelette maker in England might be at stake, yet she never hesitated more than a second at the kitchen door before she thrust her head inside, bidding the serving-wench put aside kettle-scrubbing, and see to the execution of Sir Stephen's order.

La! there would be some swearing upstairs unless Jenny could rise to the occasion beyond expectations. But what signified a burnt omelette compared with the business in hand?

Mollie, rosier than ever with haste, stood at the parlour door.

Was her father inside? If so, it would be a case of fibbing to get that sober gentleman, Mr. Berrington, outside.

But old Peter was not within. He was discoursing to the ostler in the yard. A broad-shouldered figure in a blue, many-caped coat, adorned by brass buttons, with legs stretched well before him, and hands thrust deeply in his pockets, sat alone.

Mollie advanced, bashful, but brimming with self-importance.

"Mr. Berrington, sir," she cried breathlessly.

Michael turned, half rising as he saw her standing there, for, if he had neither kisses nor smiles for pretty barmaids, he treated every woman he met with a deference which they found vastly pleasing.

"Why, yes, Mollie," quoth he. "The coach is never ready to start yet?"

"No, indeed!" she answered at a gabble. "Sir Stephen has but now ordered an omelette, which that slut Jenny is sure to burn, but I had to leave her, having news of moment for your ear."

Her air of self-importance was amusing.

Michael's grey eyes twinkled.

"News of moment! Now you must not complain to me, child, if Mr. Conyers kisses you too often."

She pouted at that, with the air of a spoilt little coquette.

"Kisses indeed! I'll teach Mr. Conyers! No, no, Mr. Berrington, sir. It's news I bring you. You remember the young gentleman from France who rode up from the country a day since to see that same Mr. Conyers?"

"Jéhan de Quernais? His pardon! Monsieur le Comte. Oh yes, I recall him very well, since he only left yesterday."

"He was cousin to Mr. Conyers, and had a favour to crave from him?"

"Fie, Mollie, you should not interest yourself with the affairs of gentlemen."

"There's no harm done if I have, this time, Mr. Berrington, sir. Perhaps you know, as well as I, that Mr. Conyers sent him back to his country-house, bidding him wait there a few days for him, and promising to do afterwards all he asked."

Michael nodded, recollecting an annoyance that Morry should send this dainty Breton gentleman back to Langton, where Mistress Gabrielle dwelt alone, save for the chaperonage of old Nurse Bond.

"They sent him away," nodded Mollie. "But, poor gentleman, they mean to play a scurvy trick on him from what Mr. Conyers cried, laughing, to that ugly Frenchman just now. They'll play him false, and leave him in the country, whilst they go back to Brittany to do what Moosoo Trouet and the black Revolution want, and from what the pretty young gentleman begged Mr. Conyers to save them."

Michael was frowning now, his cheeks pale and grey eyes stern.

"Where learnt you this, girl?" he rapped out imperiously.

Mollie flushed, hanging her head.

"I ... I learnt it b—but now, sir," she stammered.

"Ah, I see. At the keyhole. Fie, Mollie; it was not well done!"

Yet his tone was more absent than upbraiding, for he was trying to fit the key to the tale.

"I ... I did it to p-pleasure you, sir, and because my father says the Revolution in France is a bloody and wicked thing. And ... and I am sure Moosoo Trouet would be ready to murder us all in our beds as they have been doing in Paris. So, for sake of it all, and the pretty young gentleman from France, I came to tell you. An' it's certain Jenny's burnt the omelette, which if father knew he'd beat me sorely."

A tear in a pretty eye is a wonderful softener to men's hearts.

Michael Berrington took Mollie's hand and tried to express at the same moment his gratitude for her good intent and the wrongness of deceit and eavesdropping.

Mollie sobbed a little, smiled a little, found coquetry vain, and a golden guinea consoling.

Michael's conscience pricked him at the thought that this last might be termed bribery and corruption.

Yet Mollie's news was startling even if incoherent.

What did it mean?

The cousin from Brittany had found more in common with Michael Berrington than with

Morice Conyers, though the latter had been constrainedly affable.

Monsieur Marcel Trouet had been confined to his room through illness during the young Count's stay, but Morry had visited him.

Monsieur Jéhan de Quernais had been pressing and enthusiastic in the cause of his mission. At first Morice, with a round oath, had declared that nothing should take him to Brittany. He had his own pies to bake, and had not the least wish for the embrace of the "widow."*

* The guillotine.

But this hectoring decision, mark you, was before he visited Monsieur Trouet—poor Monsieur Trouet, who lay groaning in bed with that kind Lord Denningham to act as sick nurse!

Afterwards Morry climbed down; that is, he began to feel the bonds of kinship and the great responsibility due to him as Monsieur le Marquis de Varenac.

Yes, he would come and guide his waiting people in the right way.

He and the overjoyed Jéhan talked long into the night over the matter, till Morice felt that he was indeed Breton too, and almost ready to join the ranks of la Rouerie's desperate band, which meant to sweep Robespierre, the guillotine, and the whole Revolution itself into the sea.

But Jéhan must not be impatient.

It was absolutely impossible for his cousin to be whirled off on the instant to Varenac.

He must arrange his affairs. An appointment of the utmost importance, nay, the command of the Prince of Wales himself, took him the next day to Brighton.

Three days, and then he would be at the disposal of Brittany, the Royalists, and, finally, of Jéhan de Quernais. But for those three days he asked his good cousin to accept the hospitality of Langton Hall. He himself would not be there, though he regretted it a thousand times. However, he would find many interests and amusements, as well as the society of his little sister Gabrielle.

Monsieur Jéhan, even though he disliked delay, was ready to admit that he should find Langton Hall charming.

He had seen la belle Cousine Gabrielle.

It was that last speech which had so ruffled poor Michael's humour.

Morry had no right to make it possible that even the breath of a sullying whisper should spread about young Mistress Conyers entertaining a handsome foreigner alone.

Morry—whose ideas of propriety were as elastic as London morals—would have laughed at such a suggestion.

So, perforce, Michael, having no right to interfere, had to swallow his vexation.

He was glad to see in Monsieur Jéhan a discreet and pleasant gentleman.

Yet his own heart-strings tugged him homewards, whilst that fetish, honour, held him bound at the Goat and Compasses.

The power of a strong will over a weak had already given him some influence with Sir Stephen, and he would not leave him alone in the company of such men as Denningham and Trouet.

Mollie's story had convinced him that the honour of more than one house was at stake. And Morice Conyers was Gabrielle's brother.

There was little of the dare-devil, racketing youth left in the sober-eyed man who sat pondering over the fire, whilst without, in the yard, the ostlers called to each other, laughing and joking, as they led out the roan horses which my Lord Denningham was driving to Brighton, comparing them with the blacks which Mr. Berrington handled with such skill.

And upstairs a group of finely-clothed gentlemen lounged over their wine, which they found soothing enough after shouting themselves hoarse in anathemas on Mollie's devoted head for the foulest omelette ever beaten.

But Mollie, escaping in good time to her chamber, laughed softly as she tucked away her guinea in a silken pouch, and reflected how truly angry that hateful little Moosoo would be if he knew how she had tried to foil his nasty, creepy ways.

Faugh! The snake! How she hated him, although he called her "Ze pretty, pretty Mollee."

Mollie indeed! The impertinence!

## CHAPTER XII

### AN UNPRINCELY JEST

The Prince of Wales was in hilarious mood. And with reason too.

At his Brighton Pavilion he had enjoyed full many a carouse with convivial spirits, and this was to be the merriest of all.

Clarence and York were there, besides many another well-known figure which haunted Carlton House,—good drinkers, good gamblers, good comrades all; boon and fitting companions for such a master.

What bursts of merriment went up from the throng gathered around the royal chair!

Florizel had an idea, and the throats of laughing satellites were hoarse with crying: "Excellent!" "Excellent!"

"He'll dine and sleep with us here, at the Pavilion," chuckled the Prince. "A wager that he'll sleep sound."

As he spoke a grand equipage was driving into the courtyard—that gilded coach and famous team of greys were long remembered in Sussex—and from the coach descended an old, grey-headed man. It was His Grace the great Duke of Norfolk, known to his friends as "Jockey of Norfolk," who had driven over from his castle of Arundel at the Prince's invitation.

They had been friends and then quarrelled, as most of the Whigs quarrelled with George, and this visit was to proclaim a kind of reconciliation between them.

Thus the old noble entered the Pavilion and was greeted uproariously by an uproarious host.

Dignity and our Prince were unknown to each other, and there were some who saw the wink which passed between him and his brother of York.

But the Duke was not thinking of plots or traps in the presence of the First Gentleman of Europe. He was delighted with his reception and the banquet which followed.

An honoured guest indeed! As his age and station demanded.

Jockey of Norfolk smiled, bowing over his glass at the ring of familiar faces, whilst George, grinning, winked again at his portly brother.

So many friends! and all of one mind. Drink must each one with His Grace. He did not refuse, though, from under bushy brows, the still piercing eyes looked round, noting the snigger on this face and the scoff on that.

It was a conspiracy then.

Honour was to be dishonour for the Howard. Yet he did not refuse the challenges, his reputation with the bottle being almost as great as his standing.

Many a less seasoned head lay low round that merry table. Last toasts had been drunk here and there along the line, but Jockey of Norfolk sat erect, his lips smiling, his face stern.

Bumpers of brandy were suggested at last by that gallant Florizel, that First Gentleman himself,—bumpers of brandy to seal a plot as degrading as it was contemptible. York, with unsteady hand, filled a great glass with the spirits and gave it to his brother's guest.

The Duke stood up, and, raising the goblet, tossed off the contents at a draught.

A brave old toper! with something pathetic in this last defiance, for all its sordidness.

"And now," quoth he, aloud and very sternly, "I'll have my carriage and go home."

The Prince of Wales laid a detaining hand on the velvet sleeve of his outraged guest.

"No, no," he cried thickly. "I vow we'll make a night of it. You've promised to sleep here, Jockey. You'll not go against your Prin—Prince's commands. You can't complain ...

entertainment."

But the old man shook off the fat hand.

"I'll go," he growled, with an oath. "I see through such hospitality, Your Highness."

The thought of the trap made his blood boil. But the Howard honour was at stake. He would not sleep beneath the roof of the man who had wished to stain it.

Alas! they called the carriage, but, before it could drive to the Pavilion doors, the hoary head of England's premier Duke lay helpless on the table, with that chuckling, mocking throng around, glorying in their successful wit, and finding the sight of shamed grey hairs hugely entertaining.

It was the sort of jest Florizel delighted in, though historians clack so much of his good-nature and kindly heart.

Poor old Jockey of Norfolk! He managed somehow to stumble to his carriage, bidding the postillions drive him to Arundel. But the Prince was loath to part with his fun, and gave other orders.

So, for half an hour, they drove him round the Pavilion lawn, whilst in the porch stood a crowd of revellers laughing and mocking at the helpless old figure inside.

Presently they lifted him out and put him to bed in the Pavilion. He awoke to find himself there in the morning, and the bitterness of that awakening stayed with him to his dying day.

A goodly jest, indeed, for a Prince and gentleman! Yet Florizel, debauchee, gambler, libertine, has his admirers to this day. A rare, merry fellow indeed, this German princeling! A noble ruler for old England later on.

So thought Michael Berrington, bitterly enough, as he sat grim and disapproving at the table till he could bear the spectacle no longer.

Sir Stephen already lay half insensible on the floor—excuse enough for the son to carry an erring father home.

Lord Denningham had his sneers there. As for Morice Conyers and Monsieur Trouet, they were not present, though they had driven to Brighton on Denningham's coach.

Vaguely uneasy was Michael at the absence of those two, coupled with Mollie Cooling's story.

Some plot was stirring beneath the depths, and he remembered that Guy Barton, the kindly friend of his grandfather and now of his own, had told him how Morice Conyers had allowed himself to be mixed up with dangerous and seditious societies.

It is true that every right-minded Englishman cried out in horror when the terrible news of the September massacres in the Parisian prisons reached them. But yet Michael had heard also of the decision of these so-called sympathisers of freedom—the London Corresponding Society and others—to send deputies to the leaders of the Revolution, bearing their congratulations on deeds which were as brutal as they were inhuman.

And not only Morice Conyers, but his own father, were members of this Society.

Michael's eyes grew grimmer at the thought, recalling the solemn vow to his grandfather that he would do his best to save the Berrington honour from further stain, and wipe out—if possible—that dark debt which a Berrington owed a Conyers.

Yes, for that reason, as well as the knowledge that he was Gabrielle's brother, he had sought to win Morice's friendship. But ever between them loomed the dark figures of John Denningham and Marcel Trouet.

That both the latter hated him he was aware, returning their animosity with interest.

Left to himself, Morice Conyers had the making of an honourable gentleman, but a fatal weakness and vanity had drawn him down into dark paths of vice and intrigue.

It does not do to look deep into the lives of the town-bred beaux and bucks of that vicious period; but Michael, made of stronger and better stuff, had turned with loathing and disgust from the enjoyments and pastimes into which the necessary shadowing of his father led him.

After many years of privation Sir Stephen was tasting greedily of the pleasures of life.

And Marcel Trouet took care that these should not lack the delicate spice of political intrigue. There are men who court notoriety, clean or unclean. There are others who love their flatterers so much that they allow themselves to be drawn into affairs for which they have no taste, and against which their better instincts cry out lustily enough.

Of such were Sir Stephen Berrington and Morice Conyers.

No wonder Michael found his task a hard one, for the two, pitted against him in his work of rescue, were no fools.

The leaders of the glorious Revolution had the greatest confidence in Marcel Trouet.

Lord Denningham might lack morals, but brains he had in plenty.

Without scruples the latter gift is dangerous.

So Michael felt the uneasiness growing in him as he helped his father up the stairs of the lodging they had taken.

"Lesh drink an' b' jolly, an' drownsh melancholy,"

warbled Sir Stephen, rousing himself. "Ha, ha, Mike, boy, drownsh it, drownsh it."

Michael did not reply. He was thinking.

Sir Stephen sank back in an easy-chair, his handsome face flushed, his satin suit crumpled and stained with wine splashes, his wig awry. And over him stood his son, stern and commanding.

"Where is Morice Conyers?" he asked gravely and very slowly, whilst grey eyes dominated wavering blue ones.

Sir Stephen began chuckling.

"Morry! Wantsh to know where Morry is? Why, you knowsh better'n I. He's with Moosoo. Ha, ha! a pretty joke, split me if it ain't. We'll make them laugh at Almack's over it. Ha, ha! good old Morry. Fancy him turningsh politics! Red capsh, Marshellaise, too funny."

"He has gone with Marcel Trouet to France," said Michael, in even, quiet tones.

Sir Stephen looked slily up.

"Marcel Trouet? Ha! ha! He's the birdsh for Paris. Paris! I knowsh Paris. Course I do! Not going there now, though. Marcel may go alone. No redsh caps for me. Mightn't leave head to wear it on. No, no. I'm goingsh, Morry."

"And Morry is going to——?"

"Brittany. Thatsh it! Brittany. Never, never will be slaves. No, no, thatsh wrong. Morry's a Marquish. Gran' thing Marquish, but Morry's not proud. Red capsh for Morry, Marshellaise. Send all the demsh arist'crats to the guillotine. That's what Trouet wants. Goodsh fellow, Trouet. Those demsh Bretons such fools. Don't know where breadsh buttered. Morry'll teach 'em, an' the little Count can sit an' shing to Gabrielle. Pretty girl, Gabrielle, Morry's shishter. The little Count'll be waitingsh, an' waitingsh. Ha, ha! 'Have to wait,' says Marcel. Bumpers on that. Morry'll dosh own work to ownsh tune. Won't be dictated to by whipper-shnappers. I'm with Morry—Denningham an' I'sh with Morry. All goin' together. Good joke that. Right side too. No danger there. Quality, libertysh, fraternitish."

His head fell forward as he spoke, though he lay chuckling still.

And Michael, standing there in that mean room, with the helpless, drunken figure in a bunch before him, felt his pulses stir with something more wild and despairing than mere loathing.

The tale, which would have been incomprehensible enough but for Mollie Cooling, was plain now.

Urged to it by the subtle arguments of Marcel Trouet, Morice Conyers was evidently allowing himself to betray not only his own order, but his own kith and kin.

The simple Breton peasants, who awaited the word of their seigneur, were to hear it as young de Quernais had asked that they should.

But, alas! how different a word would it be to what was anticipated. Instead of sealing the hopes of that gallant enterprise led by la Rouerie and other noble gentlemen of Brittany, the doom of the Chouannerie would be pronounced, and the Republic would again triumph. The balances, trembling and uncertain, would sink under the weight of a traitor's blow.

All an Englishman's notions of honour and fair play rose in revolt against the hideous baldness of the facts.

Yet what could he do?

Doubtless, both Trouet and Conyers were already on their way, and the latter would soon be joined by his evil genii, Lord Denningham and Sir Stephen.

Against these what weight would his unsupported word carry?

A laugh, threats, *failure*—yes, that was all he minded,—that last; and it would be inevitable, seeing that he could not fight his own father,—and Trouet was no duellist.

What should he do? What should he do?

The question drummed ceaselessly in his ear, whilst honour's mournful ghost seemed to rise to his side, looking at him with Sir Henry's reproachful eyes.

Could he not, by some means, save them both,—these two, weak backsliders, from this same honour's roll,—and thus redeem his vow and wipe that dimmer blot from the scutcheon of his house?

Save Morice Conyers and his father! Pray Heaven to find a way for that!

An idea came to him, a swift flash, which carried but a half-germ of hope to his heart, as he stood listening to Sir Stephen's heavy breathing.

At least he could ride to Langton Hall and warn Count Jéhan that he was betrayed.

He shrank from proclaiming Gabrielle's brother traitor, yet better first than last, since truth and proof must out.

Yes, he would warn de Quernais, and then, perchance, Providence would show him the fashion of his next step.

With head erect, and pulses on fire, he turned, striding down the narrow stairway and out into the street below.

Their horses were at the inn-stable opposite, though mine host of the Flying Fish had had no accommodation for more guests.

On his way Michael passed merry bands of revellers, for the Prince had brought Brighton into considerable fashion; he also passed one solitary figure, wrapped in a long driving-coat over a rich suit of silk and satin. It was Lord Denningham, hurrying from the Pavilion to the lodging of Sir Stephen Berrington.

Sir Stephen's son set his jaw grimly. There was to be a fight of sorts between them, even though, at present, his sword lay idle in its scabbard.

## CHAPTER XIII

### A WOMAN'S WILL

Riding through the darkness of an autumn night with loose rein—a weary journey and dangerous too for the solitary traveller; but Michael Berrington recked nothing then of such danger, seeing he was set to fight a much greater.

A fetish, this honour, say many; but the few who guard her as a possession dearer than life smile, knowing that she is precious, with her songs of inspiration and lofty ideals.

So Michael rode, and found his heart first beating high with that fighting hope which deems failure impossible and the age of miracles not passed, and again enveloped in the pall of shame and doubt.

He spared neither spur nor whip that night. Thrice he changed horses and thrice felt the weary beasts stumbling beneath him ere he reached his destination, and by then the dawn was widening and spreading into the glory of morning light.

They were early risers at Langton Hall, and there was small delay in gaining admittance, whilst Giles, grinning a sly welcome, made haste to usher him into the sunny morning-room.

Count Jéhan was finding English customs as extraordinary as they were agreeable. French breakfasts of roll and chocolate were as little understood here as French pruderies and proprieties.

During the last two days he had found himself wondering what his mother would say could she see him sitting tête-à-tête at meals with this pretty and adorable little cousin. He had not altogether grasped the fact that Gabrielle, motherless and alone, had been brought up with a freedom wholly unknown to other English maidens.

A cousin—to Gabrielle—seemed to be a vastly superior sort of brother, one who never flouted, but was always kind and most considerate.

During those two days she had heard so much too of Madame her Aunt, and Cécile, that she was longing more than ever for the day to come when she might welcome them to England. And of course they would come—they would *have* to come.

Morry would bring them back with him, and Cousin Jéhan would follow when he and his hero Marquis had finally driven the Revolution into the sea.

In the intervals of such planning Gabrielle showed the new cousin her favourite haunts in the garden and orchard, whilst he taught her charming chansonettes to sing to the accompaniment of her guitar.

But she did not take him to the woods where the blackberries hung ripe and luscious amongst the brambles, for those were sacred to herself, and one other—the other who was no sort of a brother, but her dear knight for ever and ever.

She was telling Count Jéhan that they would walk to Berrington village that morning, when the door opened and the man of whom she thought stood before her.

And for the first moment Michael himself had no eyes save for the slender figure in its dainty morning wrapper of flowered chintz, with dark, unpowdered curls caught back by a pink ribbon, and cheeks flushing rosily as the sun-kissed clouds of dawn, as she smiled her welcome.

Count Jéhan had risen too, and the eyes of the two men met.

"You bring news, Monsieur?"

De Quernais' anxious tones were broken through by Gabrielle's glad cry.

"Of course Morry has come with you, Michael?"

But to her amaze he shook his head, scarcely turning towards her.

"I have come alone to see Monsieur le Comte," he replied with some emphasis.

But Gabrielle was in no mood to take the hint.

"Then it is about Morry," she said, leaping, woman-like, at a conclusion. "Tell it us quickly, Mr. Berrington."

She knew how to command.

And Michael, sore at heart, but desperate in his need, obeyed, telling the story without garnishings or surmisals, but with a blunt directness which left no shadow of doubt behind.

One little sob was the only answer he received at first, though, in the silence, a robin's cheerful song at the open window jarred almost as much as the glory of October sunshine flooding the room.

Count Jéhan's face was whiter than Gabrielle's, and his black eyes blazed.

It was a cruel wound—even more so than Michael could understand, for the young Breton's whole soul and enthusiasm had been kindled to fever-heat by the fascination of leader and cause.

La Rouerie and the Chouannerie were names written in letters of fire on his heart. And this visit to England was to have done so much for both.

Now he knew himself betrayed.

Worse! Instead of bringing a friend to raise men for the Royalist Cause, he had sent a firebrand to kindle the threatening blaze against it.

When Morice Conyers—Marquis de Varenac—sang the song of blood-stained liberty, there would be many voices to echo it as blindly as sheep which follow the tinkling of their leader's bell.

Ruined! Ruined! What would la Rouerie say? He had sworn to succeed in his mission, and had, till the last moment, deemed it an easy one.

And now?

Why! now the chasm yawned for those who pressed forward with such confidence.

A groan burst from his lips, whilst beads of perspiration stood on his brow.

It was Gabrielle who broke the silence.

"Thus Morry plays traitor," said she, very quietly and steadily. "But, gentlemen, it is not my brother that does it, but those whose influence has been his ruin—Lord Denningham and Marcel Trouet."

She was quivering with passion as she spoke, for the shame of such treachery was very bitter.

"Marcel Trouet," cried de Quernais sharply. "Trouet, the friend of Robespierre?—the——"

"Same," answered Michael. "And an agent from Republic France to stir up sedition in Royalist England, so that her hands being full, she will have neither time nor power to put straight or avenge the wrongs of French aristocrats."

"A—ah!"

"Morry! Morry!" moaned Gabrielle, her white hands knotted in agony.

Then slowly the girl's bowed head was raised. Erect she faced the two men opposite.

"The Marquis de Varenac rides home," said she. "Then his sister will join him. If I cannot persuade him ... and he listens sometimes when he has not been drinking or gambling heavily ... then I myself will speak to the men of Varenac. Yes, I think I know how to speak and make them listen."

"You, Mademoiselle?"

De Quernais had taken a step forward.

She faced him, pitying, reassuring, perfectly confident.

"Yes, I," she replied—"Mademoiselle de Varenac. You will see they will listen to me as well as to Morice, and if the worst came, and they made mock of a woman's command, I would don man's dress and proclaim myself the Marquis."

Wild words, but daring spirit.

How different to gentle, shy Cécile!

Yet the young Count had nothing but reverence and admiration in his heart as he looked into the beautiful face animated with that kindred courage which made of her sweet comrade as well as fair lady. But Michael Berrington's brow was knit in a frown of perplexity.

"It is impossible, Mistress Gabrielle," he said. "How could you journey thither alone and unattended, even if there were not a hundred other dangers?"

"Dangers!" she scoffed, flushing. "How can one talk of dangers after the news you bring?"

Her eyes challenged him.

"Did you not yourself tell me that honour is above everything?" she demanded.

"A man's honour——"

"You are scarcely complimentary, Mr. Berrington. I see you find that of a woman poor stuff which needs no defending."

"Mistress, indeed you wholly mistake——"

"Besides, I shall not go alone," she added, with a smile succeeding the frown. "You will both be with me."

She held out her hands.

It was here that her cousin interposed.

"Nay, Gabrielle," he said—and Michael, with a jealous pang, noted how his voice lingered over her name—"you yourself know well that we are not proper escort for you without another ——"

"Chaperon?" she asked quickly. "Oh, if that is all, I will take Nurse Bond. But go I *shall*, and at once."

"Mistress Gabrielle, think——"

She paused, her dark eyes raised to Michael's perplexed and shadowed face.

"I do think," she replied softly. "And that is why I am going. I may save Varenac, I may save a very noble cause; still, it is true I may fail in all that, yet I vow to succeed in one thing—I will save my brother."

Long he looked into the sweet, childish face, which had grown so inexpressibly dear to him, and, reading there the purpose of high resolve, bowed low and stood aside.

At least she had bidden him ride with her, and he would be at hand to protect her with his life against those dangers which before had been without reality.

But de Quernais, claiming the right of cousinship, must needs have the last word.

"Ma cousine," he whispered, catching at her hand, and raising it to his lips, "what shall I say? From despair springs hope, and you are the angel who brings it. Yes, yes. They will listen to you. My heart tells me so. They will listen to you, and Brittany will save not only herself but all France. We will save the King and our fair Queen too. Ah, ciel! could I think otherwise I should go mad. And la Rouerie will thank you himself for the noble part you play."

He spoke as though that last were reward enough for all.

But Gabrielle cared nothing for la Rouerie. It was her brother, her only brother, whom she went to save,—his honour which he, too weak to hold it, must give into her keeping.

Thus she would act as Michael himself acted, and he would approve.

Seeing that, shining through the trouble in his face, she herself could afford to smile.

They would save Morry together, save Varenac too, and come home as the heroes and heroines of gilded romance ever did, to live happily ever after.

No wonder that sweet seventeen, seeing dangers and difficulties *couleur de rose* under love's glamour, ran singing softly upstairs to acquaint Nurse Bond of the journey before her.

## CHAPTER XIV

### ON BRETON SOIL

A solitary traveller along a bleak and desolate road—solitary, that is, to all intents and purposes, since he could comprehend scarcely a word spoken by the sturdy Breton peasant who jogged along on foot by his horse's side.

Morice Conyers was in anything but good humour.

Away from the merry throng at Almack's and Arthur's, things in general presented a vastly different complexion.

In a certain set it had been fashionable to talk glibly of liberty, equality, and fraternity, and to drink bumpers to the health of those who strove for them across the Channel. The young bloods of the coffee-houses—though only that particular coterie, mind you—found it easy and amusing to toast such an upheaval of law and order.

And the Marseillaise was a demned catchy tune. Thus the pigeons prepared themselves for roasting.

And French chefs were not lacking.

That was how Morry Conyers became a member of the London Corresponding Society, a membership which consisted in talking very largely on a score of subjects of which he knew nothing, and vowing, by tremendous oaths, to assist the French Republic as far as lay in his power.

Empty phrases, emptier oaths. But the day of reckoning had most unexpectedly come. Marcel Trouet knew to a hair how to play his mouse.

Flattery and high-sounding jargon of binding vows had succeeded admirably, and Morice, reluctant at first, had begun to look upon himself as a fine hero, whose name would be spoken in every London coffee-house and club before history—and Marcel Trouet—had done with him. Twinges of conscience had been sternly repressed, drowned in the "flowing bowl," to whose honour every wit and poet sang.

But ghosts will rise at night, and they were rising now on every side—impalpable, shadowy creatures, less tangible than the brooding mists which floated over the desolate lande before him, like the fleeing spirits of a phantom army.—Ghosts of memories, ghost of honour, ghost of his better self, ghost of little Gabrielle, whom he loved well enough in his crooked, careless way,—all ready to taunt him and upbraid him as he rode onwards to Varenac.

How oppressive the silence was! How wild and dreary the scene around him!

Half Breton himself by birth, his mother's native land was calling to him with that strange,

mysterious voice which can be heard only by Celtic ears.

A strange, indefinable longing had stirred within him as he strode through the narrow streets of St. Malo; it was quickening now into stronger life as he listened to the moaning of the wind as it swept across from the coast and over the purple moorland.

A minor note it struck; yet who shall deny that truest sweetness lingers in that key?

Nature calling to her child, not through the beautiful but the sorrowful.

Grey crags, heather-crowned landes, lines of yellow sand-dunes, the fading light of an autumn evening, and through all, above all, the melancholy charm which allures rather than repels, crying aloud of sorrow, yet singing its wild music as melodiously as any Lorelei on charmed rock.

Not that Morice Conyers heard it all; only vaguely it struck his heart, reproaching him in that he, a son of Brittany, came, as a thief in the night, to betray his land and add to her burden of lament.

And he was alone.

That was the reason why such foolish ghosts pursued him. Jack Denningham would have killed them with a sneer, Trouet would have stabbed them with a mocking witticism, Berrington have drowned them with a jolly laugh and long pull at his brandy-flask.

Wise fellows, those comrades of his; but why had they left him thus in the lurch?

True, Denningham and Sir Stephen had promised to follow, after the former had had time to deal with a little private business of his which concerned a lady and needed delicate handling.

Ha, ha! A bit of a rake, old Jack, but a demned good fellow! Not such a convivial spirit as Steenie, though.

Good old Steenie! He was the chap needed on such an occasion as the present, to troll out a song, and brew a bowl of punch when they arrived at this confounded Manor of his, which was probably as mouldy and rat-run as it was aristocratic.

And little Marcel? What in the world did he want tearing off to Paris instead of accompanying him?

Going to bring a horde of red-caps with him, was he?

The tune of "Ça ira" would sound strangely foreign to English lips, but they were good fellows, these, from all accounts. Rough, perhaps, in their pulling down, but equally ready to build up that new altar to liberty and fraternity.

All the same a picture of these same shouting, sweating Parisians with red hands, red hearts, red death as well as caps to be brought along with them, was scarcely to the taste of a gentleman.

Marcel should not have gone to Paris. There would be men enough to sing to Goddess Liberty in Brittany after the Marquis de Varenac had given the lead.

The Marquis de Varenac!

A vastly imposing title.

Plain Morice Conyers grew by proportion—in his own estimation. A leader of men! Good that! A leader of men! And Jack Denningham to stand in the background and cry "Well done."

It was a pleasant reverie.

But the ghosts would rise again.

One stern of face, too, at last.

His father!

Twisted, crippled Ralph Conyers, the man who had been ready to give all for a lost cause. What would he say to his son now?

Ralph Conyers' son preferred not to think, remembering that boon companion of his, Steenie Berrington, whose name his father had cursed to his dying day.

The Breton guide had paused, panting, and stood with one lean, bared arm, pointing towards the coast. Over the horizon had gathered a pall too black to be mistaken for the shadows of approaching night—a sinister cloud where storm-furies brooded loweringly over a sinister land.

The shrill cries of the ospreys mingled with the weary sighing of waves which beat restlessly

against the barren coast-line of white, angular rocks, tossing hither and thither in their rising anger the fetid shoals of rotting seaweed which bordered the narrow strip of shingle.

The storm was coming, not stealthily, with warning couriers of shadowed gloom, but swift as those vultures which winged their way across the low ridges of sand-dunes, where the golden heads of the sea-poppies lay low.

The sturdy little Breton horse which Morice bestrode, snorted, shaking its head as it faced the purple moor before it.

Purple heather, purple heather! Surely those grim dwellers of a grim land should thank thee for thy touch of softening splendour and beauty amidst grey barrenness,—the carpet of a king amongst briers and rock, thistle and waste.

On came the storm, sweeping inland with a fury which gathered force with every moment.

The mist-clouds had disappeared, rent and twisted by the gale which struck the travellers with sharp buffetings.

Not a hut nor a cottage near for shelter, nothing to protect them against the rising blast.

A flash of lightning, a deafening crash of thunder, and down came the rain, tempest-driven and stinging, like the lash of a thousand fairy whips.

The man, Pierre Dusac, was talking.

It was unfortunate, but the noble Marquis de Varenac understood not a single word. It was evident, however, that the guide was anxious to end the journey as speedily as possible, and, finding it no easy task to run in face of a hurricane, was demanding to ride on Morice's steed.

It is no use quarrelling with one's bread-and-butter.

If the worthy Pierre forsook him the forlorn Englishman would find himself in an evil plight. Yet he acquiesced with sorry grace, surprised, however, to find that the sturdy beast made nothing of the double weight, but went steadily on, encouraged by the familiar cries of her new rider.

Oh, for Almack's! Oh, for Arthur's, or White's! Oh, for the comfort of warm fire and pleasant punch-bowl!

Again and again the champion of Revolutionary enthusiasm cursed himself for a fool, and vowed that he would return to England with all speed, heedless of renown.

Wet to the skin, cold and wretched in every sense of the word, he rode on, whilst overhead the storm raged in full force.

Crash after crash of thunder deafened him as it broke, rolling away like the roar of a mighty battle towards the distant forests. Flash after flash showed the same desolate scene which evening light had displayed—nothing but that dreary stretch of barren lande, with its scattered rocks and clumps of gorse here and there amongst the heather, whilst the dark fringe of forest-trees bound the landscape to westwards.

"Òla! Òla!" screamed the guide in his ear. "Kérnak, Kérnak."

Morice growled out an oath. Wet, cold, and anxious as to his probable fate, his usually easy temper was sour and crabbed.

"Kérnak, Kérnak!" cried the man again, pointing to a slope to their right, on the top of which stood outlined a dark mass.

Kérnak? A habitation of sorts, at any rate, as the next blue flash told Morice.

A château of considerable size, with a fringe of forest-trees clustered round the foot of the hill, like rows of guarding sentinels. Through the blinding mist of rain the travellers could see lights burning. Refuge at last!

Morice did not even stop to inquire as to whether Varenac were far or near. Escape from the battle of striving elements was all he asked.

Pierre was plainly of the same mind, for, seizing the rough bridle, he sprang to the ground, urging the pony on at a fresh trot towards their goal.

Morice drew a deep sigh of relief as they reached the shelter of the trees and hastened up the narrow road which led, through an avenue of wind-swept oaks, to the château gates.

## CHAPTER XV

### CÉCILE DE QUERNAIS

A low hall heavily raftered with black oak, and walls hung with tapestry and armour; a huge fire blazing on the open hearth, and two ladies seated near, in carved oaken seats, one busy with her embroidery, the other with the spinning-wheel.

An old-fashioned, stereotyped picture enough, yet that was what Morice Conyers saw as he stood, dripping and bedraggled, in the doorway, demanding, somewhat peremptorily at first, for a night's lodging of the old major-domo who had opened the gate.

But the masterful key was lowered as, from her seat by the fire, the elder lady arose.

"Welcome, Monsieur," she said—speaking with that clear enunciation and purity of accent which proclaimed the aristocrat—"as any stranger would be, on such a night, in the home of Louise de Quernais."

It was the graceful introduction which showed that, for all his sodden garments and dishevelled appearance, she had recognised an equal in the suppliant whom Guillaume eyed so dubiously.

Morice stepped hastily forward, bowing as well as he might under the circumstances, but with a shamed flush on his cheeks.

"I thank you, Madame," he replied in French, "and a kindly Fate which—which has guided me to your doors. My name is Morice Conyers, and, if I mistake not, it was Count Jéhan, your son, who, but a few days since, announced to me that I am now Marquis de Varenac as well."

He spoke haltingly, aware that his night's lodging would be hardly earned without the aid of some lying, yet thinking—on the spur of the moment—that it was best to assume the role of frankness.

She would, in any case, know him by his title soon, and, in the meantime, he could use it now by way of introduction.

It made all the difference to the present, and Morice Conyers was not the man to look much farther than the ease of the moment.

At any rate if they scorned and loathed him to-morrow these hostesses would make him very welcome to-night.

There was no doubt of that, for, at his words, Madame's face lighted up with a smile of rare sweetness, whilst the girl, who had remained near the fire, sprang to her feet, heedless of fallen embroidery.

"Ah! Madame Maman," she cried eagerly, "it is the good English cousin."

Morice turned at the cry, looking beyond the stately figure of the elder lady towards the dainty little maiden in her white gown, with crimson ribbons knotted at breast and throat and nestling amidst the dark coils of her hair.

For all her eighteen years Cécile de Quernais looked nothing more than a child, possessing a slim, round figure, tiny, delicate features, with great black eyes which seemed almost out of proportion in that small baby-face.

A child to love and protect, appealing mutely to the manhood of a man, and showing nothing of a resolute will and courage hidden away in the young heart.

Somehow, as he looked at her, Morice Conyers felt ashamed and guilty.

He had come to Brittany to cry "Death to the aristocrats!"

The thought was as ugly as it was persistent, so that he only half heard the cordial welcome of Madame de Quernais herself.

Madame was of the old régime, yet, if her language savoured of a bygone generation, the sentiments were none the less sincere.

She was glad, most glad, to welcome her nephew—the son of her dear sister, Marie. But it is not wise for a man to stand, even to receive a welcome—if it be a long one—in dripping clothes.

Monsieur le Marquis de Varenac was conducted in all haste to the room of Count Jéhan, whither Guillaume accompanied him to offer his services as valet.

A suit of the young Count's fitted the new-comer admirably. He looked a different being,

when, an hour later, he descended the grand staircase into the salon.

In the picturesque costume of the eighteenth century a man must needs be singularly unendowed to appear ugly.

Nature had been kind to Morice Conyers. If there were lines of weakness about the sensitive mouth, and a wavering expression in the fine blue eyes, he nevertheless presented a handsome figure as he bowed over the hands of his aunt and cousin.

He could talk, too, for that was an accomplishment necessitous to the friends and satellites of Prince Florizel, who hated nothing so much as being bored.

And it was no hard matter to talk to such gracious hostesses.

Madame was ready to smile, and be interested in everything he said, whilst little Cécile, seated demurely in the background with her embroidery, raised great eyes of wondering admiration to his again and again, though she would drop them quickly, with a dawning blush, when she found his gaze ever fixed upon her. As for Morice, he was living in a new world for the moment, and could hardly have fathomed his own feelings had he tried.

Were there two personalities within—one of which had but newly sprung to life?

He did not deem it possible at present, though he was vaguely conscious of the desire to be indeed Monsieur le Marquis de Varenac, and not Morice Conyers, member of a certain London Corresponding Society, friend of one Marcel Trouet, and burning advocate of the glorious and blood-thirsty Revolution.

Perhaps this faint stabbing of a drugged conscience was what made him so eager to talk of everything but the object that brought him to Brittany.

It was of England that he talked, of Gabrielle, of the long-dead mother, whom he but vaguely remembered. Of everything, indeed, excepting Breton woes and Breton hopes.

It was not till later, when the hour for retiring drew near, that Madame leant forward a little in her chair, laying a gentle, almost motherly, touch on his twitching fingers.

"Tell me, my nephew," she asked, "why is it that Jéhan did not return with you?"

A brief silence followed, in which Morice could hear the faint click of the needle drawn through the stiff satin of Mademoiselle Cécile's work.

"Why Jéhan did not return?" he answered vaguely. "He was indisposed, Madame—nothing of consequence, but he was obliged to remain at Langton for a day or two longer."

"And you could not delay? Ah, my nephew, you are Breton at heart. You have enthusiasm in our cause. Brittany will thank you one day,—not far distant,—I pray the Holy Virgin. But Jéhan? It is not like him to remain behind for a trifling ailment."

Maternal concern rose to the fore at the moment. Jéhan was her only son.

"It was not serious, Madame, but the fever would have been increased by travelling. He will not be long."

She smiled, yet wistfully, being more anxious than she liked to admit in face of his assurances.

"He will not take sufficient care of himself," she said. "He has a delicacy of the throat. But he laughs at me. With him it is all la Rouerie, la Rouerie. He has doubtless told you of our Marquis, my nephew?"

"Yes, Madame. A very noble gentleman."

The words seemed to stick in the speaker's throat as he looked once more across into Mademoiselle's black eyes and saw them ashine with enthusiasm and devotion.

What would she say when she knew his real opinion of this great Chouan leader who dominated the hearts of every one of his followers?

"A very noble gentleman," repeated Madame, nodding her head. "He will thank you, my nephew, for your prompt response to our appeal. There was always the fear that you might have forgotten the good Breton blood in you, and refused to accept your obligations as Seigneur de Varenac."

"I have come with as small delay as possible," he replied shortly; and this time he dared not look towards Cécile.

"And you have come in time," she smiled. "The Terror has not arrived here yet. We have no tree of liberty planted at Kérnak or Varenac, though we hear that at St. Malo——"

She shuddered, crossing herself.

"But the Marquis de la Rouerie will save us—and France too," she added. "You, who are a Varenac at heart, will adore him like the rest of us. As for your tenants——"

She smiled, thoughtfully.

"They await your coming," said she softly.

But Maurice Conyers did not reply; he was thinking how Marcel Trouet would be already marching from Paris with his red-capped murderers, singing the song he himself had been so ready to join in over the wine-cups as they toasted the Red Revolution and the cause of Liberty at club and coffee-house.

Somehow things were beginning to wear a different complexion on this side of the Channel, and fear crept knocking vaguely at his heart when he thought of the part a certain noble Marquis had come to play in his mother's land and amongst his mother's kin.

But Cécile sang softly to herself that night as she stood, later on, looking out towards the wild coast-line.

The storm had passed, the stars were shining, and, as she watched the glittering lights so far above her, it seemed to the young girl that they were eyes looking down and down and down into her heart.

And she blushed rosy red with a thought but half-conceived, turning away lest those twinkling stars should read it—yet unformed.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A MORNING ADVENTURE

A morning of sunshine, Nature's atonement for past cruelties.

And Morice Conyers was ready enough to accept it, seeing that the storm itself had been something less than an enemy in bringing him to Kérnak.

However, he must leave to-day and ride for Varenac. Steenie would be on his way there, and Denningham too, not to mention Marcel Trouet, whose coming would not be delayed more than a week at most. And yet he could do nothing till Trouet came. The temper of his people was too uncertain to dare announce his policy with none to back him up.

"Ça ira" might possibly stick in Breton throats, and then what would happen if Marcel were not by to teach them another tune?

All this was food for thought as Morice strode moodily along the uneven path bordered by heather and gorse.

He had risen early, and, being in restless mood, had gone out.

It would be easier to think with the morning sunshine around, and the cool autumn breezes to clear his brain.

Yet he walked aimlessly, filled with doubts which tore him first one way and then another.

He must go to Varenac. He could not fail his friends.

As member of the London Corresponding Society, and sympathizer with these leaders of the great cause of Liberty, he had his part to play.

Of course all revolutions had their black side.

Yet they were necessities.

The cry of the people must be heard.

It was justice, not revenge, they took in their hands.

All the old claptraps which he had heard so often of late, and which he took care to rehearse over and over again!

But somehow they seemed strangely hollow now as he paced between the purple and the

gold of this new land of his, and heard that dumb, mysterious voice of Nature crying to him in strange, alluring chant, reminding him that he was something more than Morice Conyers the Englishman—namely, a Varenac of Varenac, a noble of this Brittany which already fascinated as much as it repelled him.

Marquis of Varenac, scion of an ancient race, noble of the noble, as well as Breton of the Breton.

Was he to cast aside these newly forged bonds of honour as though they were useless shackles?

He had been ready enough to do so twenty-four hours ago; but that was before he had seen Cécile de Quernais.

A pair of lustrous black eyes, a small, innocent face, sweet and pure as child's or nun's, and a heart which, shining through those wonderful eyes, proclaimed her trust and admiration in this cousin who had come to save Brittany.

Many a fair lady had smiled upon Morice Conyers at St. James's, many a woman, far more beautiful than this little Bretonne girl, had shown him her favour. Yet they had never stirred his heart as this simple child had done.

They had known him for what he was, being ready to accept him at his current valuation and ask no more.

But Cécile did not know him. He knew that as well as the fact that she was quite ready to regard him as some new knight, willing to give his life for country and honour.

It is no easy task to tumble off a pedestal of one's own accord, even when one has not put oneself there.

Should he? Should he?——

Pish! Of course he must go to Varenac. He would go at once. He would not return to the Château of Kérnak. He would reach Varenac and forget the episode of a night's lodging.

A wooded knoll, bordering on the forest he had noted the night before, stood on his left. Surely that was a hut amongst the trees? That of a woodsman perhaps.

At any rate, he would go and make inquiries as to the road to Varenac.

But, half-way there, a strange interruption befell—a girl's scream and a burst of rough laughter.

"Hola! hola! my pretty one. You had forgotten Bertrand. Malédiction; but I had not forgotten you. Madame was hard. Ha, ha! It does not do for the seigneurs to be too hard nowadays. By the bones of St. Efflam! How she can struggle! But I will explain, Mademoiselle. Bertrand has a grudge. V'là! v'là! It shall be repaid. Come, a kiss, my little cabbage. You are so pretty that I shall steal many, and then it may be that I shall take you with me to St. Quinton, where they have ideas about the aristos. Yes, ideas more sensible than the thickheads about here can conceive. And from St. Quinton to Paris is a pleasant journey. Té! Té! it is then that Bertrand will be amused. Click, click go the *tricoteuses*. Click, click, answers the 'widow.' And Sanson makes his bow to perfection. Mille diables! but it is a little fiend."

The high-pitched, chanting voice broke into a snarl over the last words.

It was evident that Mademoiselle did not allow herself to be easily captured.

But, alas! One may struggle, one may even bite in extremis, but a man's strength must surely conquer in the end.

Thus Cécile de Quernais, crying aloud in terror, had given herself up as lost, when, through the trees, came a figure, racing up the slope in hot haste.

"Ah! ah!"

"Ah! ah!"

They were pitched in different keys, those simple exclamations.

As for Bertrand, he had breath for no more, since the oaths which rose hot to his lips were choked back by that firm grip on his throat.

Morice Conyers had learnt boxing in England from Richmond himself.

Cécile de Quernais sat on a mossy bank close by, sobbing piteously, from sheer exhaustion and the shock of that desperate struggle.

The sounds of her distress tempted Morice to choke not only oaths, but life too, out of his

fallen adversary.

But to murder one of the people might lead to consequences now, though five years ago it would have been no matter at all. So Bertrand was allowed to live.

Mademoiselle Cécile, wiping pretty eyes with a tiny piece of cambric, implored this between gasping breaths.

It was more than he deserved, however, Morice explained in a few words of execrable Breton, enforcing each syllable with a kick.

Bertrand crouched, whining as cur under the whip. But his eyes were vicious.

"Go to your kennel, dog and pig," commanded his opponent, with a last blow. "And next time you use ugly words about your masters, your tongue shall be cut out."

Bertrand rose, groaning. He was very sore; but the inward bruises were the worst, though he rubbed the outer ones dolefully as he limped away.

Morice did not catch the glint in his eyes as he went, or hear the vows and curses growled low in the husky throat.

He was bending over Cécile.

"My poor little cousin, he has hurt you—the brute. You should have let me kill him. Such vermin are dangerous."

"To—to their slayers, Monsieur."

Her English was almost as adorable as her eyes, over which tear-laden lashes drooped piteously.

A sudden desire to kiss away those heavy drops seized the man beside her.

Yet he forbore, fearing to frighten her afresh; but his pulses were throbbing as he made answer:

"They need an example. I did not know such dangers were so near you here, Mademoiselle."

"Nor I, Monsieur. Till now our people have been so good and kind. We owe much to the influence of our good curé, Père Mouet. They love him as he deserves, and it is he who keeps the Terror from our villages as much as the memory of my uncle the Marquis."

"They loved him!"

"As they will love you, Monsieur."

He had succeeded in drawing her thoughts from Bertrand, and the tears were drying on her cheeks.

But he lacked tact.

"And this fellow?"

Her eyes grew troubled again, whilst she shuddered a little.

"He was our gardener. Madame Maman dismissed him because he stole, and sang the Marseillaise. He has a brother in Paris who has a bad influence over him."

She spoke with the air of a matron.

"It would have been better to kill him."

"Oh no, no. I ... I do not think he will come near again. Our people would have no sympathy with him."

"He deserves none—the brute! See how he has hurt you."

The blue weals were clearly visible on the slender wrists which Morice raised for inspection.

"I was afraid," she confessed, her eyes filling again. "But, Monsieur, you saved me."

"I would that I had come sooner. I did not guess who I should meet on my walk."

"I often come here," she said simply, "to visit old Nanette Leroc, who used to be our nurse. She is blind, and lonely too, although her niece lives with her. But Marie cannot read, and that is what Nanette likes."

She stooped, as she spoke, to pick up the little velvet-covered Book of Hours which had fallen

from her grasp in the struggle.

"You, too, were up early, Monsieur," she added shyly.

"Yes."

His voice was hesitant.

"We should be returning to the château," she continued, not noticing his confusion. "Madame Maman will be wondering what has become of us. She—she does not altogether approve of my journeys to Nanette's cottage all alone. But what would you? Guillaume could not always be spared to come with me, and till to-day I had trusted in our people."

"They are not to be trusted, Mademoiselle."

A tiny furrow wrinkled her white brow and she shuddered.

"Oh yes, yes," she whispered. "I will not believe that the Terror can come to Kérnak and Varenac."

"It is already at St. Malo."

He did not mean to frighten her, and noted with self-reproach and admiration how, whilst her cheeks paled, her eyes shone bravely.

"Yes," she replied, "Louise told me. They have a guillotine there which they call the 'widow,' and make terrible jests. Oh yes! I know that the Terror has come to St. Malo and to our dear Brittany—but not to us. Our people love us, and we are so safely hidden away here, with the forest on one side and the landes on the other. We are not near a town, and, excepting for Bertrand, the people of the villages are loyal. And you yourself, Monsieur, will strengthen their loyalty."

She held out her hands as she spoke, smiling gladly.

"Yes," she added, "that is what la Rouerie says. The spark is needed—an example. In the towns the men listen to the Revolutionaries from Paris. They are ready to cry 'À bas' to everything. But those are not the heart of Brittany; that waits—it wants impulse, quickening. Yet the inspiration cannot come from the nobles. Just now they will not listen to them—so Jéhan tells me. It must be the cry of the people to the people. It will be the cry of Varenac to Brittany. You smile, Monsieur Cousin? Ah! you do not know like Jéhan and our Marquis. True, our villages may be very small, very secluded; but see how a spark caught by a strong wind may become a great blaze.

"That will be the work of the nobles, of the Marquis, of Jéhan, of you too, Monsieur. You will let the voice of Varenac echo over the landes till others hear and listen. It is then the true heart of Brittany will awake and beat with life till her people rise to save themselves and France,—from the monster who devours her."

Her words, rehearsed from the lips of enthusiasts, were spoken with a conviction and spirit which stirred the listener's wavering pulses.

What would she have said had she known that he had been on the road to Varenac with a vastly different purpose in his heart?

But an hour had changed his resolves. The brief struggle with the cur who would wreak a paltry revenge on an innocent girl had helped to show him what underlay the gaudy picture which Marcel Trouet had painted so often for him and his comrades in England.

He could read the writing on the wall in another language this side of the Channel.

With a low bow he offered the little Royalist champion his hand.

"As you say, Mademoiselle," he answered softly, "we must return to Kérnak. Afterwards I will go to my people."

"Yes," she smiled, "when Jéhan comes. I think he would bid us wait for him, Monsieur. He knows the men of Varenac, and it would be easier did you go together."

But Morice Conyers was thinking too deeply to reply to those last words.

Was it that the shadow of the "widow" was already on his heart?—the cry of the Terror's victims already ringing in his ears?

# CHAPTER XVII

## FAITH AND UNFAITH

The next day found Morice Conyers at the Château de Kérnak—and the next.

He was learning Breton.

That, of course, was necessary, especially as Jéhan delayed his coming. When would the latter be here?

There were two at Kérnak who declared they longed for his arrival, and yet secretly prayed for his delay.

Mademoiselle Cécile found the role of instructress to her new cousin decidedly attractive, although the countless proprieties hedging in a high-born demoiselle of Brittany somewhat spoilt the amusement.

But there were compensations, begotten of that unlooked-for attack near old Nanette's cottage.

Madame de Quernais had become liable to nerves. Cécile could no longer be permitted to roam at will over the country.

St. Malo was too near, and tales were afloat of the work that the "widow" was busy with there. It was as though some terrible wolf prowled in the forests around.

However, Cécile could not remain indoors all the time: she would pine after the freedom of her life.

It was therefore agreed that the stricter proprieties should be laid aside a little, and Mademoiselle de Quernais be allowed to accept the escort of Monsieur le Marquis de Varenac on her walks.

Morice was quite ready to accept the task of acting cavalier to such a dainty little lady. As I have said, he was one to live in the present.

For those two days life was bounded only by a pair of black eyes, which looked deeper and deeper into his heart every moment.

Past and future were banished. He was dreaming, and the dream was sweet.

He put the moment of awakening from him with the resolution of an epicure.

As for Cécile, the English cousin continued to be the hero come to save her country. And the black eyes caught the trick of dreaming with wonderful rapidity.

If Madame de Quernais noticed, she stifled old-fashioned self-reprovings with the thought that the days were evil, and that her little Cécile needed a stronger and closer protector than herself or Jéhan, who was too bound up in his work to think much or seriously even of the welfare of a dearly-loved sister.

And the Marquis de Varenac would be in every way a suitable protector.

Her dear Marie's boy! Of course that was a link already between them.

Thus Morice Conyers, instead of riding to Varenac to welcome Steenie Berrington and Jack Denningham, sat on a rocky ledge with a slim, little grey-clad figure beside him, listening to her chatter of Jéhan and la Rouerie, of the Terror and her dear Brittany.

The last was the subject Cécile lingered over longest. It was necessary that the English cousin should understand the meaning of his Breton birthright.

"If you were a sailor, Monsieur," she was saying now, pointing across the bay, "you might see strange things."

"Strange things?" he echoed. "Nay, cousin, what kind of things mean you?"

She crossed herself devoutly.

"One does not speak of them, but they are there—the spirits of those whom the sea has taken. On winter nights we may hear them wailing and imploring for Christian burial; but only a sailor may see their forms."

"Then I am glad to be no sailor. I confess the sea has no attractions for me."

"It is cruel, cruel," she answered, gazing wistfully out over the grey waste of waters. "Sometimes it makes me afraid, when I see the great waves dashing and roaring over the rocks.

Jéhan laughs at me and says I am no Bretonne to feel so, for we are a people of the sea. Yet I cannot help it, sometimes, when I think of those poor women and children who have waited and waited in vain for the husbands who never came back."

"And yet you come here to watch the waves you fear?"

Morice's smile was faintly quizzical.

"Oh yes," she replied naïvely, "I come here often to make my dreams. I like to picture what it must have been like long, long ago before the cruel sea swallowed up so much of our Brittany."

"The sea?"

"But certainly. Yonder, do you not see in the sand, those ruins? Ah! there is not much left to-day, but many, many years ago those were happy villages, with green fields stretching beyond, and the oak-trees of Scissy sheltering the valleys."

"Is it a fairy story you are telling me, Mademoiselle Cécile?"

She did not heed his raillery, but replied with sober earnestness:

"No, no; it is quite true. That was before the Deluge."

"Before the Deluge?"

He could hardly hide his laughter.

"It is so called in Armorica, Monsieur. It was a terrible flood. There is a legend about it which some say is quite true."

"Tell it to me."'

He was not greatly interested—this trifler who was in danger of being in such deadly earnest himself; but he liked to see the animation on the pretty, childish face and the quaint seriousness with which she told her story.

"It is the tale of Amel and Penhor," she said gravely. "They lived at Sant Vinol, and Amel was a shepherd. He was also a brave man. In the forest near, wandered the striped wolf of Cheza. It was a fearful animal, and the terror of the whole land. It was bigger than a six-weeks' foal, and no arrow could pierce its hide. As for fear of man, it had none. It was Amel who vowed to kill this creature, which had devoured his nephew.

"Before he went to the conflict he hung a distaff of fine linen by the altar of the Virgin. Afterwards he fought and strangled the striped wolf.

"Amel and Penhor had no children, but now the Virgin was pleased with them, and gave them their hearts' desire. Their little son they called Paol, and dedicated him to the Holy Mother of God. In her honour he always wore a blue dress.

"Then one night the river Couesnon rose rapidly, the wind howled, and the earth shook. In the morning the sea had risen over the barriers.

"All the inhabitants of the land fled to the church, which stood on a hill; but Amel and Penhor came too late.

"Then Amel lifted Penhor high in his arms, and she in turn raised her child above the cruel waves. It was at this moment that the Virgin left her niche in the church to fly heavenwards, and, in passing, she saw Paol's blue frock, and remembered he was hers.

"So she raised him in her arms, but found he was very heavy. Then, as she lifted him higher to her breast, she saw his mother held him, and that Amel, the father, held both; so, with a smile, she gathered them all in her arms, and they awoke in heaven."

"A pretty legend," said Morice absently, for he had heard but little of the tale, his eyes being on the speaker's face.

"It is the land of legend," she replied—"the land of romance and poetry."

"And of sorrow, too."

"Ah! you feel that? It is because you are also Breton. Yes, we have our sorrow—it is in the voice of the sea. Not only the lament of the crierien,* but the warning that always at our doors there waits an enemy as cruel as it is remorseless. Yet to-day——"

* Unburied dead, drowned at sea.

"To-day we will not think of the sighings of ghosts or the weepings of widows to be. I prefer your romance."

"And I. But the sorrow is there, and now——"

She was thinking of the tales Louise had told her that morning.

The shadow of the Terror eclipsed the possible sunshine of the present.

But Morice was not one to see coming shadows. The present for him; and his pulses were stirring as they never had before.

"You are teaching me," he said suddenly.

She smiled.

"Yes; and you are clever. But Père Mouet would do it better than I."

"I was not speaking of your Breton lessons."

"No!"

She looked up in surprise, and, meeting his gaze, felt the warm blood surge in her cheeks.

"I would like to teach you of our Brittany," she said falteringly, "because—well—is it not your country too?"

"I never counted it such till I knew you."

"You have never been here before?"

"I vow I shall never wish to leave it, *if*——"

"If——"

Her face was half turned from him, so that he should not see the blushes which might betray the fact that she had read a secret in his eyes.

But he was leaning forward, half across the rocky ledge on which they sat, his blue eyes aflame with sudden passion.

"If you will go on teaching me—always—always—Cécile."

She was no coquette, this child of a grim and yet tender land, where all are in earnest with the battle and stress of life.

And yet her lashes drooped over her eyes as though she dared not meet his glance.

"Teach you, Monsieur, I who know nothing? What could I teach, save only——"

"Save only what love is," quoth he, with new-born boldness, for the magic of the moment was with him, transforming him into something stronger, deeper, truer than his old self.

No need for veiling lashes now. He had caught her two little hands, slender, sun-burnt hands which seemed too soft for resistance, and bent his face to the level of hers.

It was a new mode of wooing, as startling as bewildering; yet there was sweetness in it, too.

"Love?" she whispered, and drew one long, wondering breath as she looked into those blue eyes so near her own.

"*My* love. *Our* love, Cécile—Cécile."

His voice was hoarse with suppressed emotion. She was trembling, too, but a smile broke on her lips.

"Morice," she whispered, and her heart beat in echo of the name as he bent to kiss her.

Over the grey waters came the sighing of the autumn breeze, presaging a storm. Aloft, circling round broken crags and high, gaunt rocks, wheeled the ospreys, uttering their shrill, weird cries.

But dirge of rolling waves and wailing winds mattered nothing to those two who sat sheltered in the rocky cleft, for they were dreaming the golden dream of youth, which may come but once in a lifetime, yet leaves a trail of glory on its path for ever.

Side by side they sat, man and maid, with never a thought of anything beyond that dream, and the knowledge that love had bound them thus together.

But what Eden is long without its serpent? Morice Conyers, basking in present sunshine,

suddenly felt a quick chill strike his heart. It was the Marquis de Varenac, noble of Brittany, come purposely to save his country, whom the little Cécile loved.

And the day of reckoning drew near.

But Love is nothing if he be not at his purest and best a reformer.

All the latent manhood, all the better feelings, which ill-training and ill comrades had kept dormant, were stirred to life by this innocent child, whose great eyes shone into his with an expression of perfect trust and love. She called for the highest in him, and that highest, neglected, scarcely acknowledged before, rose in response to the appeal.

He would be what she thought him to be, whatever the cost.

In presence of that dominant passion now stirring and animating him, the past shrank into pitiful insignificance.

What were Marcel Trouet and the London Corresponding Society to him now but traps to rob him of that newly cherished honour and love?

As for Steenie Berrington and Jack Denningham, he should tell them his mind plainly, and if they would not stomach his change of opinion, they might go to the devil for all he cared.

Of one thing he was resolved, and that was to ride to Varenac at once and proclaim himself for what he was—the Marquis—not citizen—Varenac, who had come to bid his people cry "Vive le roi Bourbon" rather than "À bas les aristocrats."

Fire ran in his veins, urging him to be up and doing. No time should be lost. When Jéhan came he should not be able to point to him as traitor.

The last thought caused him a perfect fever of anxiety. He must waste no time. Proof must come first ere denunciation.

But Cécile was loath to go. Might they not dream a little longer?

That was the question she would have asked, but shy diffidence withheld her.

Besides, the shadows fell, and she was no peasant lass—to be courted as Marie or Yvette might be,—but a demoiselle of Brittany.

Even as it was she feared her mother's disapproval, recalling the oft-told story of how demoiselles of thirty years ago very often never saw their future husbands till the day of *fiançailles*. Truly the world was going topsy-turvy now; but, in this particular respect, Cécile felt that the change was for the better.

Through the twilight they walked home together, whispering, from time to time, those foolish absurdities which make old grey-beards smile. Yet who, thus smiling, has not sighed too, remembering days when they themselves found foolishness the sweetest thing on earth!

Under the leafy shade of sheltering oaks Morice paused, holding the little hands which lay so warm and passive in his own.

"You love me, Cécile?" he asked wistfully; "you love me?"

He lingered over the repetition.

Stars could have shone no less brightly than the eyes she raised to his.

"I love you, Morice," she answered, and then, blushing rosy-red at such temerity, hid her small face against his shoulder.

For a long moment they stood thus, his arm around her slender little figure, holding her closely, as though he could not bear the thought of letting her go.

"Cécile, Cécile," he groaned, his voice sounding odd and strangled with conflicting fears and love, "pray Heaven you may say it always—always."

She smiled, looking up at him with the boldness bred by the knowledge that he needed all that love and sympathy.

"Always—always, Morice, my dearly-loved," she whispered back.

And the night-wind, sweeping up from the coast, seemed to catch the words and bear them mockingly across the barren landes.

Always—always—always.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### MY LORD AWAITS HIS HOST

"A fine host," sneered my Lord Denningham, with an oath,—"a right jovial and noble host, eh, Steenie? Demme it, man! I didn't come to this old rat-trap to look at you, and be poisoned with ragouts au Bourbon and cold shoulders à Varenac. What in the world is friend Morice up to?"

"Split me if I know," growled Sir Stephen, who was far from being in the most amiable of moods himself.

"He and Marcel started the day before we did, and we should have found him here on arrival. Something must have befallen him."

"The devil flown away with him en route? Hardly likely, my friend, when you consider everything."

"He may have gone to Paris with Trouet."

"That's not Trouet's game—no, no, no. More likely a saucy pair of eyes or a neat waist. Some of these little Bretonnes are worth kissing; I've honoured more than one already. But kissing should not be taken seriously when there is work on hand, and the orders of the London Corresponding Society should be obeyed."

"Orders?"

"What you will, Steenie! We've taken the hand of Madame Republic, and we've got to grip hard—mutual obligations, you know. They may be able to serve us in the same way, later on, when our own business is advanced."

Sir Stephen yawned.

"England ain't France. You'll find that 'à la lanterne' won't fit English throats, any more than 'Ça ira.' Besides, Pitt has his eye on us."

"And we have our eye on Pitt. Rot me, Steenie, you've not got the heart of a mouse. The Society is spreading its nets *and* papers pretty far afield. However, to return to our baa-lambs—or rather that woolly-headed sheep, friend Morice. What the deuce is *he* doing, hiding away and never turning up at the ancestral mansion? Old Goaty seemed to know nothing at all, but gabbled on about Monsieur le Marquis Gilles de Varenac. We ain't come to dig up corpses."

"Or look for them, either, eh, Jack? Stap me, but I've had enough serious conversation. Swearin' won't bring Morry along a step quicker. Let's have a turn with the dice to kill time."

The suggestion was agreed on, and soon nothing was heard but the rattle of the dice-box, and an occasional lusty oath over an unlucky throw.

The Manor of Varenac was an ancient building surrounded by trees and built in a hollow. The rooms were low and dark, the passages innumerable, with many an intricate winding and turn, sufficient to confuse any new-comer.

The salon, in which the two uninvited guests sat playing, was exceptionally low, with heavy beams of black oak across the ceiling, and a deep wainscotting, which added to the gloom of the long, narrow apartment. Candles in heavy silver and brass sconces had been lighted by the ancient major-domo, Pierre Koustak, who had eyed the strange Messieurs with strongly disapproving eye.

It was true that M'nsieur Jéhan had told him that the new M'nsieur le Marquis was more English than Breton, although he was the son of Mademoiselle Marie. Pierre's ideas of the English were vague and a good deal prejudiced. His opinion of the new master had not been raised when these English friends put in an appearance before M'nsieur le Marquis himself, and announced that they were here by his invitation.

You may be sure that Pierre Koustak paid many a visit to the keyhole to be assured that the strangers were still there, and did not appear to have any burglarious intentions on the treasures of the Manor of Varenac.

Sir Stephen's luck was in that evening. The pile of gold crowns grew by his side. The wine in these dusty cellars, too, was excellent, though old Goaty evidently found it a difficult task to bring bottle after bottle in.

Sir Stephen, therefore, considering all things, was merry.

My Lord Denningham, on the other hand, considering all things, was very sour of mood.

To begin with, the latter's luck was abominable. The dice were certainly bewitched—or cursed. To go on with, he was angry at not finding Morice Conyers here.

He had come to France to win for himself a name for zeal in the cause of liberty, which would raise him to prominence amongst his fellow-members in that London Corresponding Society which had for its object the stirring up of the English people into a sister Revolution.

This zeal fell decidedly flat in a tête-à-tête gamble with Sir Stephen Berrington.

The latter's fatuous laugh irritated him, as did his noisy triumph over his winnings. The jingling of lost gold jarred on my lord's delicate nerves.

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... carriage without in the avenue; it stops. Our friend Morice, no doubt."

He turned, with a sneer, to meet the expected host whom they had forestalled.

But it was not Morice Conyers who stood in the doorway, but his sister Gabrielle, her hood flung back from her dark hair, cheeks flushed, and hazel eyes defiant.

She scarcely deigned to bestow a glance at the man before her, but looked past him eagerly.

"Morice!" she cried. "Morice!"

Then swiftly she turned to Denningham.

"Where is my brother?" she asked peremptorily.

## CHAPTER XIX

### AND WELCOMES A HOSTESS

Perhaps for the first time in his life Lord Denningham was taken aback.

The vision was so wholly unexpected, so welcome, and yet most unwelcome, for behind the slim, girlish figure, muffled in its long travelling-coat, stood Michael Berrington and the young Breton, de Quernais, whom Denningham had met and strongly disapproved at that jolly hostel the Goat and Compasses.

Behind this triple apparition lurked a mystery calling for explanation.

However, at the moment, an impatient lady awaited an answer.

"Where is Morice?" she repeated, glancing from Denningham to Sir Stephen, who stood leaning against the wall laughing softly to himself in maudlin enjoyment.

"I fear, Mistress Gabrielle, that that is the question we have been asking ourselves for the last thirty-six hours."

My lord's tones were slightly mocking, and his glance into the pretty, flushed face over-bold.

Michael made a step forward.

"Mr. Conyers is here," he said quietly.

"Indeed, Mr. Berrington, you are vastly astute. On my honour, I am glad, however, to hear your news. Your father and I came here at Mr. Conyers' own invitation, but at present he appears to be absent—perhaps a Breton fashion of treating guests."

Lord Denningham's bow included de Quernais deftly enough in the gibe; but, to his surprise, the young Breton noble paid no heed to the sly hint.

"My brother not here?" echoed Gabrielle, in perplexity. "But he must have been here?"

A shrug of the shoulders was her only answer.

"You appear to have doubts as to my word, Mistress. Would it not be better to apply to old grey-beard without! He will tell you that, till you came, we have been the only guests beneath this

ancestral roof."

She took no heed of his sneer, but turned instinctively to Michael.

"What does it mean?" she asked. "What shall I do?"

It was indeed a perplexing situation,—after so hot a chase, and then to draw a blank.

But the news, which so discomfited her, was well enough to the taste of Count Jéhan.

"The saints be praised, ma cousine," he cried, taking her cold hand. "It is evident that he has been delayed. We are in time to save Varenac from dishonour."

Her face lighted with answering enthusiasm.

"Yes," she said; "what you say is true, Jéhan. If Morice is not here, his ill-work is yet to do and I"—she nodded her head emphatically—"I can do something, seeing that I am as much Varenac as he."

"Bravely spoken, Gabrielle. You are an angel. Ciel! and a heroine too. But——"

Even boyish enthusiasm perceived difficulties ahead, as he thought of this young girl here, unattended, save for an old nurse, at the Manor of Varenac with these others.

"Perhaps," he added slowly, "as your brother is not here, it were better did I take you to Kérnak. The post-chaise is still at the door."

But this suggestion did not find favour in the sight of little Mistress Gabrielle.

"My place is at Varenac," she observed, with an air of amusing self-importance. "I thank you, cousin, but I must stay here."

"Alone?"

His faintly murmured expostulation met with wide-eyed surprise.

"Certainly not. These gentlemen will be here to ... to protect me. And I have Nurse Bond."

He dared say no more, though conscious that his mother would regard such an arrangement with horror.

"Perhaps to-morrow my sister Cécile will ride over with me," he said, "to stay with you as companion."

"Yes, yes. Do bring her, Cousin Jéhan. I am longing to see her. There, I shall be looking forward so eagerly now for the morrow. And you are returning to Kérnak to-night?"

"Unless I can be of service to you here?"

"I thank you heartily; but there is nothing to be done at present. I am very weary and shall go to bed. To-morrow——"

To-morrow! How each heart echoed the word with strangely mingled anticipation.

"To-morrow," replied Count Jéhan, gravely bowing over his cousin's outstretched hand, "I will bring Cécile to Varenac."

"I shall welcome her gladly. And Morice will be here to-morrow?"

"Most probably."

"And then we will persuade him. Yes, I am sure we shall do that—persuade him that he is the Marquis de Varenac."

Her voice rang proudly over those last words. But Michael Berrington was watching the face of Lord Denningham as he stood, with folded arms, surveying the little champion of Royalty, whilst she spoke her happy, confident words.

Would Morice listen if he came? And, if he came not, where was he?

Michael alone remembered—at that moment—Marcel Trouet, the astute exponent of liberty, equality, and fraternity on both sides of the Channel.

## CHAPTER XX

### MORRY EXPLAINS

"I had thought it too late for roses, fair mistress. Permit me to compliment you upon my mistake."

Gabrielle started, blushing, as Lord Denningham, in a morning-suit of brown cloth, embroidered with gold thread, and with rich lace ruffles at neck and wrists, stood bowing before her, having approached unseen from behind a clump of bushes.

Her curtsey was severely formal as she made her reply.

"I see no roses, sir, nor did I come to look for them, but rather to make a first acquaintance with my mother's native land."

He did not take the hint that she would prefer her own company, but turned to pace slowly down the garden path by her side.

"A bleak and doleful country," he observed, pointing to the long vista of moors stretching northwards. "No wonder its people are sour of face and surly of temper."

"You speak from experience, I doubt not?" she retorted, quickening her steps.

"Nay, this also is my first visit."

"I should have thought that you needed some strong attraction then, my lord, to remain, seeing that you find Brittany so little to your taste."

"I have found the attraction already, fair mistress."

A low bow pointed the compliment and further ruffled her temper.

But discretion bade her ignore his words.

"You have friends in Brittany, sir?" she asked, and wished that she had not come so far on a morning ramble.

"If I could count one fair lady such, I should ask no more of life," he replied, with exaggerated humility.

Again she crimsoned, not from coyness but hot anger.

"I prefer straight answers," she said coldly.

"Alas! Mistress, I should offend did I speak more plainly."

He had contrived to move a little in advance, so that he could look back into the pretty face only half concealed by the lace hood she had flung over her curls.

Her eyes certainly did not invite tender speeches.

"You mock me, my lord," she retorted, her chin tilted aggressively. "Your purpose in coming to Brittany concerned—concerned——"

He did not attempt to help her, but watched, with insolently admiring gaze, the hotly flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

"Concerned?"

"My brother Morice."

"Indeed!"

Passion brought her to a halt for all her haste to reach the house.

"Do you think I know *nothing*, sir, of your wicked plots?"

"You wrong me, fairest. Of what plots can I think but how to steal the citadel of your heart?"

"You may try to turn aside my thoughts with empty phrases, but I have heard of your fine Corresponding Society, and of your proposed deputation to the liberty-loving *heroes* of Paris after their wholesale massacre of defenceless men and women."

"Your pardon, most gracious lady. But, an' I dared, I would warn you that pretty ears are made to listen only to pretty speeches and not to harken to matters of which they know nothing."

He spoke as one might to a petulant child, so that she could have cried for very chagrin and anger.

It was bitter after the heroics of that mad journey. But she would teach him that women are to be reckoned with.

"We shall see when Morice comes," she retorted. "He will listen to his true friends, and—and his conscience."

The last words forced the smile to mocking lips. It was humorous indeed to associate a conscience with one of the gayest young bucks of Carlton House.

What lengths the argument might have led to is uncertain. My Lord Denningham, I fear, was finding that beauty in a passion bade fair to be irresistible, and rosy lips the more tempting in a pout, when a diversion was called by Mistress Gabrielle herself.

Wide-eyed she stood, turning from her tormentor, whilst anger died away into pleased welcome on her face.

"Morry!" she cried, and pushed past the man who would have hindered her, running lightly down the path and across a tangled stretch of neglected lawn, straight into the arms of her brother, who came at great strides to meet her.

"Gabrielle!"

"Oh, Morry! I am so glad."

He bent to kiss her with an affection that augured well for his temper, whilst she smiled up at him, half-curious, half-defiant, wondering when the scolding would begin.

Morice seemed in no hurry to commence, though he looked down doubtfully into his sister's eager face.

"Did the good fairies bring you, Gay?" he asked, giving her the pet name of long years ago, with a wistfulness she did not fail to note. "Tell me, child, what brought you hither?"

She faced him straightly, with a tiny wrinkle now between her brows.

"The honour of Varenac and Conyers," she replied, with the air of some grizzled veteran rather than a maid in her teens. "It seems that these poor, ignorant peasants, who are now to call you Seigneur, wanted a leader in crying 'Vive le roi.' And so I came to help them, hearing that you had forgotten how to be a leader of men, and were ready to echo new tunes with foul meaning."

She paused, out of breath, and fully expecting a torrent of angry words in reply.

To her surprise there was silence for one of those long minutes in which one hears the twittering of birds and the drowsy hum of Nature's myriad voices.

Then Morice spoke, not angrily, but with humility and steadfast purpose.

"It is true, Gay," he said. "I had forgotten many things, of which you do well and bravely to remind me. Yet Brittany had taught me those neglected lessons already. I came from Kérnak hither to meet my people and cry with them 'Vive le roi'."

"You?"

She was too amazed to speak another word.

"Yes, I. Do not fear that I lie to you, child. I come *now* as Marquis, not citizen, to my own."

Still she was incredulous.

"But Michael said you had come to bid the peasants of your villages join the patriots—become Revolutionaries."

"I did so come."

"With Marcel Trouet!"

"He went first to Paris; but he will be coming to Varenac."

"And he——"

"Will meet a different reception to what he anticipated."

"I don't understand."

Her cry was one of perplexity.

"I cannot tell you all, Gay; only see, sister mine, I found a teacher in Brittany worth a hundred Trouets and Denninghams."

The last word took her mind momentarily from the vital subject.

"Lord Denningham!" she echoed. "Did you know he was here, and Sir Stephen Berrington too? Lord Denningham was with me but now——"

She turned from her brother, as she spoke, to glance behind.

But the garden path was empty. There was no sign of the tall figure which had stood barring her way ten minutes previously.

"He must have returned to the house," she went on. "They were angry that you were not here."

"When did you arrive?"

"Last night. Mr. Berrington and Cousin Jéhan brought me, with Nurse Bond for chaperon. Poor nurse! She's a mighty poor traveller, and cried 'lack-a-day' every moment she could spare from her groanings."

But Morice had no thought for the sufferings of Nurse Bond.

"De Quernais!" he repeated. "He is here?"

"Oh, no. He returned to Kérnak last night. He wanted me to go too, but I waited for you. He promised to ride over this morning with Cécile."

The colour burned suddenly in Morice's cheeks.

"Cécile?"

The speaking of a name may betray one.

Gabrielle, looking up sharply, understood at once who the teacher of Varenac honour had been.

A dimple deepened in her cheeks.

"You have met Cousin Cécile?"

"Yes."

"Jéhan tells me she is pretty."

"It ... it is true."

"You do not appear very certain, sir."

"It is because I am too certain. She is as lovely as she is good."

"Then it is she who called you M. le Marquis?"

What woman could have resisted the touch of raillery?

But Morice was very serious in his reply.

"It is for that reason that I *am* Marquis de Varenac, and cry 'Vive le roi,'" he answered. "She showed me what loyalty meant. I have been fool and knave, Gay, but pray Heaven she may not know it, till I have proved my honour."

Another pause.

"Jéhan!" whispered Gabrielle. "Oh! if only he had not returned last night to Kérnak! But how did you miss him?"

"I should have been here myself ere midnight, but lost my way in the stretch of forest which lies between. I should have had a sorry night had it not been for the hospitality of a charcoal burner, who allowed me to sleep in his hut."

"And now——"

"We must not delay, sister. There is work to be done, and at once, though ... though I fear that Cécile will not come over to-day."

Instinct of sympathy bade Gabrielle put loving arms about his neck.

"But to-morrow we will go to her," she whispered. "And Jéhan will see then that you are indeed the Marquis."

"I would that Jéhan were here now," he answered. "I tell you, Gay, we should not wait an instant. Trouet and his red-cap orators from Paris may be here at any time now to do their devil's

work. Let's to the house and see what steps we must take first to make sure of our hearing; my Breton is too halting to face an assembly of tenants unaided."

"There is Pierre," Gabrielle replied. "He was butler and valet for forty years to the old Marquis Gilles. Last night he wept for joy to see me. His daughter Olérie told me he would do anything for a Varenac. If all are like him our task is easy."

"Good. But did you not say that Denningham and Steenie were here?"

"Yes, they are both here."

"If I could see Pierre first, it would be better."

Gabrielle nodded brightly.

"Stay here," she commanded, "and I will bring both him and Michael. Then we can arrange."

"Michael Berrington? What is he doing here?"

She frowned and blushed at the same time.

"I told you—he accompanied Jéhan and me."

Their eyes met, and it was Morice's turn to smile. It appeared that little Cécile had taught him how to be observant, amongst other things.

"So, so, my Gay. Is that the reason you flout my lord?"

The lashes drooped over tell-tale eyes, but rosy lips were scornful.

"I *hate* Lord Denningham."

"And you do not hate Michael? Aha! Gay, though I will not tease you now, but only wish you happiness when you seek it. Now run away and bring those two to me. We'll hold a Royalist Council between us which shall quash the designs of Trouet and his brood for ever."

So spoke Morice, lightly enough, yet with a deeper note vibrating in his voice—a note that had not been there before Cécile touched and set it throbbing with her little hand.

Gabrielle was laughing softly to herself as she sped away back over the lawns, and across the pretty rustic bridge, which led by way of the avenue to the house.

She did not notice how a man stood crouching amongst the shrubs to her left as she passed—so near that the hem of her white gown touched his foot.

But Lord Denningham smiled.

## CHAPTER XXI

### A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

"He has gone!"

Gabrielle looked round in wondering perplexity, repeating the words again.

"He has gone!"

Old Pierre's eager face lengthened.

"Mademoiselle?" he faltered.

Gabrielle stood still, her hands clasped together, eyes deepening with anxiety.

"I can't understand it," she cried. "It was *here*, just here; and he promised to await your coming."

"Perhaps he wearied at the delay," suggested Michael Berrington, "and has wandered farther down the path."

"I do not think he would, and we have not been very long. Still, we can look. Where does the path lead, Pierre?"

"Only to the wicket, Mamselle, and then out on to the moor."

"We can go to the wicket then. He would not have strayed beyond."

Together they hurried down the path, Gabrielle calling her brother's name again and again.

No answer.

And the wicket-gate was closed.

Nothing was to be seen beyond saving a narrow stretch of moorland broken by forest growth, which bordered a valley.

"Morice! Morice! Oh, Michael, where can he be?"

She had called him Mr. Berrington yesterday, and the man's heart stirred with quick throbbing at the sound of his name, and the appeal in her tones.

"Do not be afraid," he replied. "No harm can have befallen him; none knew of his coming."

"Excepting my Lord Denningham."

"But he had no speech with him. You say he went away at once."

"At once."

"Probably to tell my father of his coming. You remember it was arranged that they should meet."

"Yes, yes; and of course they do not know that he—has changed."

"Impossible. Do not be afraid. Your brother will join us in a few minutes."

"He may have gone towards the house by some other way."

"Of course. Shall I send Pierre in to see?"

She nodded.

At the moment Pierre was certainly a superfluity.

Pierre, disappointment written large on his face, trotted off obediently. He was more than eager to welcome his new master, the nephew of his adored Monsieur Gilles de Varenac.

"You think he will return with him?" asked Gabrielle anxiously, as the old man's steps died away in the distance.

Michael smiled.

"Certainly. These are not the days of fairies and hobgoblins. He can't have been spirited away."

She gave a little sigh of relief.

"I hope he will be here soon. Oh, Michael, I am so happy now that *he* has learnt his lesson before it is too late, and will break with all those wicked friends."

A pause. Gabrielle, with a swift side-glance, suddenly coloured hotly.

"I—I meant Lord Denningham and Marcel Trouet," she faltered.

Michael sighed heavily.

"Yes," he muttered, "and—my father."

"Your father is different. He is not bad, only weak, like Morice."

"Weakness, such as his, is wickedness. See how it has marred his life and ruined his friends."

She laid her hand on his where it gripped the topmost bar of the wicket-gate.

"Do not talk so," she answered. "Sir Stephen has a—a kind heart; and I think—one day—he will atone."

Michael did not reply, only he raised the comforting hand, kissing it reverently.

With woman's wisdom, she made haste to change a painful subject.

"I should be so afraid if you were not here," she said, with child-like frankness—"so very afraid."

"Of what, little one?"

He still held her hand very closely.

"Lord Denningham. Oh! I hate him, and yet he frightens me. His eyes are horrible."

Her cheeks flushed as she remembered the insolent boldness of my lord's stare when he met her not two hours since in the garden.

"He shall not hurt you, Gabrielle."

She smiled at the assurance in happy trustfulness.

"I know he would not if you were near. Only, when I am alone——"

"Would God you never were alone."

She looked up with shy, startled eyes, for the cry had come from a man's heart.

"I am used to being alone at Langton," she answered simply.

"Alone!" he answered, bending his dark head closer to hers. "Why should you be, my darling, my darling, when I need you so sorely at Berrington?"

The blushes on her cheeks were not angry ones this time, and her eyes were smiling into his.

"You ... need ... me?"

"Always and for ever, Gabrielle."

"And I need you," she answered, with a happy sigh, as she allowed him to take her in his strong arms, laying her head on his shoulder with the content of a child who is tired of battling alone with life.

Autumn winds may moan, and shadows of coming sorrows may lie deep across life's pathway, but where love's glory sheds its golden light the eyes are too dazzled to look beyond.

So they dreamt of love, finding it the sweeter after past loneliness and troubles, and strengthener, too, for those that lay before. And the melancholy of that grey land touched them not at all, though Celtic blood ran in the veins of both.

But it was the romance of youth's fairest dream, the springtime of love, that was with them now, and they were blind to falling leaves and the dirge of coming gloom after summer sunshine.

It was Pierre who broke the spell of an enchanted hour,—Pierre, who came hurrying back along the path with furrowed brow and anxious eyes.

Monsieur le Marquis was not at the Manor. No one had seen him. In fact, the two Messieurs, who said before that they were his friends, had laughed at him.

But now M'nsieur le Comte had ridden over from Kérnak, and desired to see both M. le Marquis and Mademoiselle. He was in haste, M'nsieur le Comte.

The sunshine was fading in Gabrielle's eyes. Shadows were stealing back into hazel depths as she looked up at Michael Berrington.

"What does it mean?" she asked, and turned quickly to Pierre.

"He has not brought Mademoiselle Cécile?"

"No, Mademoiselle; Monsieur le Comte is alone. His business seems to be very urgent. He is eager to see M'nsieur le Marquis and you."

"I will come. But—but——"

Her lips trembled for all her bravery as she looked again at Michael.

"What *has* happened to Morice?" she whispered piteously.

But Michael, much as he longed to comfort her, could find no answer to the question.

## CHAPTER XXII

### COUNT JEHAN IS NOT CONVINCED

Monsieur de Quernais was certainly in a hurry; so much so that he had lost his temper, and been in too great a haste to recover it again.

There had been reasons enough to disturb a less irritable nature.

To begin with, the failure of his mission had been bitter. Most bitter of all, seeing the trickery played on him by his own cousin, a Varenac and a traitor!

The English blood must be held accountable, of course, but even then he could not bear to think of it.

During that headlong journey from Langton Hall to the Manor of Varenac he had been brooding over it.

What would la Rouerie say? A last hope gone through the betrayal of one who should have been heart and soul on their side.

The collapse of a golden castle in the air had caused Monsieur le Comte to despair.

He was very young and very enthusiastic. Besides, his adoration of la Rouerie amounted almost to an absurdity. The Chouan leader had inspired such affection a score of times in man and woman.

And la Rouerie must be told, not only of failure on his follower's part, but the shame of a noble Breton name. It was terrible.

But Monsieur le Comte could not feel as murderous as he chose since Morice Conyers' sister had so nobly stepped into the breach.

Here was a kindred spirit, here a true Varenac with Breton blood running unsullied in her veins.

Love for the sister almost counterbalanced hatred for the brother in the heart of Jéhan de Quernais.

In such a turmoil of emotion he had ridden to Varenac and found that the new Marquis had failed to arrive.

The news inspired that hope which is twin comrade to youth.

He rode to Kérnak building fresh castles, and reached his home to find that the man who had been so much in his thoughts had but now left it.

The story was told by Madame his mother, with Cécile standing by, a smile hovering around her pretty lips.

But, alas! the smile had died all too soon, frozen out of being by her brother's answering words.

A traitor, double-dyed in hue,—a traitor to his country, to his people, to his own kith and kin!

Liar and dishonoured he seemed to stand before her, as Jéhan poured forth his tale in the first fury of his wrath.

What! Had the vaurien hound *dared* shelter under his roof? *dared* to tell his lying tale to them?

The young Count paced the hall to and fro in his anger.

He would have forgotten that Morice Conyers was Gabrielle's brother had he met him at that moment.

It ended by Cécile suddenly bursting into a tempest of tears, and running out of the room. This had been the last straw to an overfull cup.

Mother and son looked at each other for a full minute, and then Madame de Quernais held out trembling hands.

"Do nothing rash," she faltered. "Remember he is my sister's son."

Had he been less a gentleman Jéhan would have thundered out an oath and ridden forth, hot-haste, in search of his enemy. As it was, a higher instinct prevailed. He bowed, with old-fashioned formality, over his mother's hand, though his lips were livid and his eyes ablaze.

"I will remember, Madame," he replied, and dared not trust himself to say more.

* * * * *

A sleepless night for those at Kérnak, and now, with morning, Count Jéhan had ridden over to

Varenac.

But still Monsieur le Marquis was absent. It was inexplicable.

Was the fellow such a coward that he trumped up this excuse not to see him?

De Quernais felt his fingers itching at his sword-hilt; though what use to storm when one's foe is absent?

And if Morice were not here Gabrielle was. The door opened suddenly on the Count's meditations, and she stood there on the threshold.

"Oh, Jéhan!" she cried, running to him eagerly, "I am so glad you have come, so glad."

And, at sight of her fair face, the young noble felt his bitterness vanish as the grey shadows must before the sunshine.

How he had learnt to love her, this brave little cousin, who was Breton to her finger-tips!

When the emotions are stirred in a hot, impetuous nature it is a quick leap from love to hate.

Yet he did not blind himself with the belief that love here was returned.

He had seen the light grow in hazel eyes on a day when Michael Berrington appeared suddenly in the morning-room at Langton Hall.

Since then he had known that Cousin Jéhan meant brother Jéhan to Gabrielle. And, being a man of honour as well as Breton noble, he accepted Fate's decree without murmur or strife. But it could not kill love, since that was of immortal birth, and so he hid his eyes from hers, lingering, as he bent over her hand, till he should regain the mastery over himself which he had been in danger of losing.

But Gabrielle had no thought for possible embarrassment. From the first moment she had accepted the new cousin as brother, and never dreamt of shyness or diffidence.

"I am so glad you have come," she repeated. "You will help us to find Morice."

"To find Morice?"

The echo of her words reminded him of past anger, of la Rouerie, of Cécile; and his mouth hardened.

"He came hither this morning," Gabrielle continued,—and told her tale.

De Quernais listened, with knitted brow and incredulity in his eyes.

"And he has gone again?" he concluded, when Gabrielle had finished.

"Yes. We have searched everywhere."

"And Marcel Trouet comes from Paris with his Revolutionaries?"

"Yes, yes. That is what makes me afraid. If they meet——"

"They will probably meet."

"And Morice may be—killed."

"I do not think you need alarm yourself."

She was quick to catch the note of sarcasm, and faced him, a little indignantly.

"You do not believe that—that he is changed?"

"To be honest, ma cousine, I find it difficult."

Gabrielle turned impulsively towards the man who had entered and stood apart near the window behind her.

"Michael believes me," she cried.

The eyes of Breton and Englishman met.

"Does Monsieur Berrington believe in him?" asked Jéhan slowly.

"In Morice Conyers?" demanded Michael quietly. "Yes, Monsieur le Comte, I do—until he disproves such belief."

De Quernais shrugged his shoulders, spreading out his hands with an impatient gesture.

"I ask your reasons, Monsieur," he said. "I too am ready to believe, if possible, but you see the case. My cousin is a friend of the Revolution, a member of the Society which congratulates murderers. He is so enthusiastic in their cause that he plays a trick, which,—your pardon, Gabrielle,—is not in accordance with honour, and comes to Brittany for the purpose of stirring up his people to join what he is pleased to call the Cause of Liberty.

"He comes—with Marcel Trouet, a spy, Revolutionary, murderer, liar,—and arrives at Kérnak, where he—again your pardon, ma cousine—continues the policy of his friends, and calls himself a Royalist and *my friend*. Then, suddenly leaving Kérnak, he comes to Varenac, where comrades of his and Trouet's already await him. He sees his sister, tells her a tale—a wonderful tale of conversion—and disappears. What do you think of this story?"

Michael leant his dark head against the window-frame, facing the flushed and trembling Count Jéhan, whose eyes were ablaze with hot anger and excitement.

"It sounds as though Morice Conyers were a traitor," quoth he. "Yet I'll still believe in the miraculous. You have a sister, Monsieur, and a fair woman has been known to make as many conversions as a saint."

"Yes, yes, that is it," cried Gabrielle eagerly. "Jéhan, you don't know Morry. He—he is not wicked as you think. It is true that he has been very foolish, and done many things that are wrong —very wrong. But he has had bad friends, and he has been weak and vain, allowing himself to be led by them. Oh! I do not excuse him, but I believe—yes, I do believe—that he might change and be a very honourable gentleman. He told me that in Brittany he had found a teacher worth a hundred Marcel Trouets."

"But why did he disappear?" demanded the Count fiercely. "Ciel! if he had not, and he had his eyes opened indeed to his duty, we should yet win Varenac, aye, and Brittany too, for la Rouerie and the Cause. But where is he?"

It was the question on the lips of each. Where could he be? What could he be doing if ha were not on the road to meet Marcel Trouet?

Gabrielle covered her face with her hands, moaning. "Oh, Morry, Morry," she sobbed, "where are you? If only——"

An opening door made her break off sharply, whilst tear-dimmed, eager eyes watched for the entering figure. But it was only my Lord Denningham, smiling, debonair, handsome as ever, who stood looking in on the little trio.

He paid not the least attention to Monsieur le Comte, who drew himself up stiffly at sight of him, but made his bow to Gabrielle with the exaggerated homage he so well knew annoyed her.

"Ah, Mistress," he murmured plaintively, "you have punished me cruelly. Isn't it enough that Morry's left Steenie and me in the lurch without you scorning us into the bargain? Lud', me lady, it's hardly the work of so dainty a hostess. You'd not treat us so at Langton. You'll be merciful now, and join us at the card-table, or sing us a song of Brittany to your guitar?—though, stap me! I believe I'd rather it were an English one. I've no love for this cheerless land."

He accentuated the last words with a grimace.

"I have no taste for cards, and no humour for song," retorted Gabrielle, her eyes alight with the indignation Lord Denningham ever kindled within her. "And, if I had, my song would scarcely please *your* ears, my lord, since it would be loyal and royal both."

Her overstrained nerves showed in a gusty little fit of passion, which brought a wider smile to Jack Denningham's mocking lips.

"Loyal and royal," he murmured. "And you are Morry's sister!"

The last words beneath his breath had bitter sting in them.

It goaded Gabrielle to indiscretion.

"Yes," she replied hotly, "I am Morry's sister,—sister to the Marquis de Varenac, I would have you remember, and mistress here in his absence."

A low bow was her answer, but Lord Denningham's eyes were malicious.

"I congratulate you, with all my heart," he said softly, "on your new mistress-ship." And he smiled as he glanced towards Michael Berrington.

The latter was standing erect, and his eyes were ready to flash their reply and challenge.

But Gabrielle interrupted—she had not caught the drift of his subtle insult.

"Ere the day is over Morry will be here himself," she cried. "I think you will find the room cramped at the Manor of Varenac when he returns."

The smile broadened on the sneering features.

"I am prepared to remain *till then*," retorted my lord suavely. "I do not think I need look for another lodging at present."

Count Jéhan stepped suddenly forward.

"Your lace is soiled, Monsieur," he observed, with meaning in his tones, whilst, stretching out his hand, he touched the ruffle of Mechlin lace which fell back from Lord Denningham's wrist.

"Soiled?"

The owner of the ruffle looked down with a careless laugh.

The whole of the under-portion of the lace was stiff with blood.

Gabrielle gave a low cry.

"What is it?" she gasped. "What is it?"

Lord Denningham forced another laugh, not quite so careless and mocking as the first.

"A mere scratch," he replied, with would-be lightness—"nothing of any consequence."

But impulse had already brought Gabrielle to his side.

"If you are hurt," she said, very gravely, "you shall let me bind it for you. I—I have some slight skill in such work. Nurse Bond taught me."

She made as though to touch the wounded wrist, but he drew it back sharply.

"Tush! a scratch!" he growled. "Half healed already. I want no bandages."

Count Jéhan was yawning, as he helped himself to snuff.

"An excellent flavour," he murmured, half to himself. "Bought from a friend who has traded much in the East. Permit me, Monsieur."

He offered the dainty little box with a graceful bow.

Lord Denningham stretched out a ready hand. In doing so the lace ruffle fell back, disclosing an arm too white for manhood, though muscular and hardened by sword-play. Count Jéhan looked from arm to owner.

His glance was significant.

"Have you by chance met my cousin, the Marquis de Varenac, this morning, Monsieur?" he questioned smoothly.

Lord Denningham forgot to inhale the delicate aroma of the snuff as he turned scowling away —a curse on his lips.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE MEETING IN THE FOREST

Morice Conyers stood leaning against the gnarled trunk of a mulberry-tree.

It mattered nothing to him that his view was bounded by a cluster of shrubs and a stone wall; he was gazing at neither.

What was Cécile thinking of him now? What was she saying? What doing?

Each question was a torture.

Jéhan had returned to Kérnak.

If only he could have seen the young Count first, if only there had been time to prove that repentance had come in time to save his honour!

And now *she* would believe in neither the one nor the other.

He groaned at the thought, passing a trembling hand across his forehead. Oh! he must prove

himself—must prove himself, even if he died in doing it.

"Cécile, Cécile, Cécile."

The breeze overhead chanted the name again and again, now sadly, now sweetly, alluringly, distractingly.

"Cécile, Cécile, Cécile."

His heart echoed the cry, going out with wild longing to her who had won it and transformed it at one magic touch.

"Slit me! if it's not Morry himself. You sly dog! What demned mischief have you been up to now, my friend, leaving Steenie and me to cool our heels in that old rat-trap of yours?"

Jack Denningham's voice broke in sharply on a day-dream of love. It was no more welcome interruption than the sight of my lord himself, cool, suave, smiling, with a hearty clap on the shoulder to add to his upbraiding words of welcome.

But there was no response in Morice Conyers' eyes.

Since Denningham was here he might as well understand at once that there was a vast difference between the Marquis de Varenac and Beau Conyers of Carlton House fame.

"I have been attending to business," he replied coldly, "and there's more that needs looking after badly. If you take my advice, Denningham, you and Steenie will be returning to England without asking too many questions."

Seeing that a certain laurel-clump was well within earshot of the mulberry-tree, my lord was singularly obtuse.

"Business? Return to England?" he cried, with a merry chuckle. "Why, we've all come on business, and when we're tired of teaching these surly beggars of yours their Marseillaise, I'll warrant we'll all be ready enough for town, and some good jests for our Florizel, to boot. Ha! ha! Yes, we'll all return together *afterwards*."

But Morice was facing him squarely, and there were no signs of irresolution round the corners of his mouth now.

"As for returning to England, that depends on events," he retorted. "But one thing is certain, Jack,—I'll not be teaching my tenants any of your demned songs of liberty or murder either. I've come to cry: 'God save King Louis, and confound the Red Revolution and all its leaders.'"

He drew himself to his fullest height as he spoke, and looked his quondam friend in the face.

Lord Denningham was neither smiling nor sneering now, but his blue eyes had an ugly expression in them.

"Brittany has evidently had a depressing effect on you," he observed drily. "Come, don't be a fool, Morry. Let's to the house. Steenie is brewing a bowl of punch which will clear your addle-pate. We haven't come here to listen to any demned heroics, but to do business as members of the Corresponding Society."

The words were fuel to smouldering flame.

Morice Conyers forgot caution and wisdom both.

With a curse he sprang forward, dashing his hand into the other's face.

"Fools for the punch-bowl," he shouted. "You may drown your coward whines in it if you're afraid to be a man. But I tell you I've done with your traitor Societies, and the rest of 'em. I've been knave and villain long enough. Heaven knows I was both, with my fool's eyes shut to what I was doing. You brought me here to whistle to your tunes; you'll find I have one of my own to sing—a song that won't sully the lips of a Marquis de Varenac, nor those of an honest Englishman."

Denningham's face was very white—save where the mark of Morice's fingers had brought a red patch to his cheek.

"Honest Englishman!" he gibed. "Mongrel cur is the better title. Where have you been hiding, noble night-bird? Too-whoo—too-whoo,—the owl should keep to forest-shade in the daylight, lest the hunter might shoot her as too noisy a pest."

"You shall give me——"

"Satisfaction? Come, come, Mr. Forest-skulker, be not too valiant; it is dangerous. Still, if you will,—what time like the present?"

"I'll not wait longer."

Morice's fury was at fever-pitch, his passion blinding him to all discretion.

He did not realize that he had fallen at once into the trap my lord had prepared for him.

"Come, then," observed his smiling adversary, helping himself to a pinch of snuff with a languid air. "If you *will* have it so, your forest lair will be the best scene for your lesson. You will be more at home there; though, if you prefer it, nearer to your Manor, and within call of your servants——."

"I am ready," broke in Morice, sternly. "Let it be where you will, and with what weapons you will, so it be at once."

Lord Denningham did not hesitate.

"The forest, by all means, then," he yawned. "and pistols will be more appropriate than swords. Stap me! It's the first time I'll have been owl-shooting since I was a boy."

Morice did not reply, though he strode quickly enough on the heels of the other as he led the way down the path, through the wicket, and across the heather-crowned strip of moorland towards the outskirts of the forest.

The cool breeze blowing in his face seemed to restore the young man to his senses. He was going to fight a duel with Lord Denningham.

Honour demanded it now.

But he was remembering tales which had often been the subject of Carlton House gossip—tales of this man's skill with the pistols, his unerring aim, his callous disregard of life.

"You are going to death, you are going to death," moaned the autumn wind in his ear; and the voice seemed like the voice of Cécile crying its sad farewell.

Yet he could not go back; it was too late. If death awaited him, there in the grim forest, he must meet the grisly foe as a man, not a puling coward.

A man! Yes, a man whom Cécile, in years to come, might think of not wholly in shame, but with a great pity, as of one who, after many sins, many failures, many mistakes, had tried to redeem the past and expiate his faults—for her sake. If only he could have sent a message!

But that, too, was impossible.

"I think, with your permission, we have gone far enough," observed Lord Denningham affably, as he halted near a small clearing in the wood.

Morice nodded.

He knew not if he had walked one mile or ten, so deep had been his reverie.

And now death stood at his side.

"It is a matter of regret that there is no time to procure seconds," smiled my lord, as he proceeded to divest himself of his coat and walk slowly across the clearing, carefully measuring his paces.

"But I do not think there will be any dispute—afterwards."

"No," replied Morice dully.

He understood the gist of the remark.

"The light might be worse," went on Denningham. "If we are careful where we stand,—so—there is too deep a shadow there. You have a good weapon, sir? If not, permit me to offer you the choice of mine."

He opened a leather case as he spoke, holding it towards Morice with a mocking bow.

A pair of gold-mounted pistols lay within.

But Morice shook his head.

"I thank you, my lord, but I prefer using my own," he replied shortly.

Lord Denningham raised his eyebrows.

"As you like. But you will surely remove your coat?"

"Thank you. No."

"Again—as you will, though I warn you those gilt buttons of yours make a pretty target."

"I am ready."

They were facing each other—Morice Conyers grim and pale, yet with eyes stern of purpose and undaunted enough, though he knew death looked him in the face.

Denningham was white too, but his blue eyes were scornful, and his thin lips twisted in a cold smile.

He never doubted for a second the issue of that duel.

And his pistol was levelled point-blank at the other's heart.

It was by far the simplest method of dealing with a crazy fool.

Two shots rang out in the silent wood. A dull thud, a faint cracking of dried twigs, as a heavy body fell backward; then silence again.

Lord Denningham was carefully replacing a smoking pistol within its case, wiping it first with his silk handkerchief.

Inwardly he was experiencing that acute satisfaction of having fulfilled his purpose neatly and expeditiously.

A pistol was far more satisfactory in every way than a sword. The latter bungled at times, the former, never.

A wounded opponent would have been a demned difficulty.

Having put on his coat, and replaced his case of weapons, he approached the figure which lay, half hidden, amongst the dense undergrowth.

He would make certain of his work.

Faugh!

In haste he withdrew a searching hand. It was dripping with blood.

The contact was distasteful. It even went so far as to shake his nerves.

Wiping the red stains again and again on the grass, he rose to his feet.

He would wash his hand in the stream they had passed on their way, and then no time must be lost in returning to the Manor and seeking Sir Stephen.

It must not be suspected that he had ever left the card-table that morning.

Steenie would be too fuddled to contradict if questions were asked.

Besides, it was unlikely there *would* be questions.

Murder was too everyday an occurrence just now. And, though the Terror had not yet come to Varenac, it would be no great matter of surprise that a noble landlord returning to his own should be found with a bullet in his heart in the woods near his home.

So Jack Denningham argued as he hurried back along the forest path, only stopping to wash the blood once more from his hand, and with scarcely a thought to bestow on a quondam friend who lay with eyes fast closed and white face upturned to greet the sunbeams which stole down, half shyly, through leafy shade, to peep, as it were, at that which lay so still amongst the fading bracken.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE HUT OF NANETTE LEROC

But my Lord Denningham had for once been out-witted by a fate more merciful than himself.

A strangely perverse fate, too, for here she had changed destruction to salvation. The bullet, winging its way straight to the heart of Morice Conyers, had glanced aside on the brass button of his heavy travelling-coat and entered the body several inches to the right of the spot intended. True, the victim had fallen instantly, his own shot having gone wide of its mark amongst the trees, and there he lay, bleeding and unconscious.

But Death had stepped aside—its grey form slipping away through the misty shadows to pursue other prey.

And thus, in time, Morice opened his eyes once more and found himself, not in Paradise or Purgatory, but lying still on his bracken couch, his white shirt stiff with blood, and a feeling of cold faintness which kept his thoughts slipping from him like ghosts of a fleeting vision. But presently the misty haze swimming before his eyes cleared a little, and he became conscious that some one was talking near him.

The voice was as unfamiliar as the little dark face that peered into his, yet he smiled, muttering faintly that all was well—or would be if he might have a draught of brandy.

His request evidently fell on deaf ears. But presently a flask was put to his lips. Not brandy, or anything like it, yet the long drink of milk, which he swallowed thirstily, revived him, and he sat up.

A little peasant-girl, in picturesque Breton dress, stood by his side, surveying him with mingled curiosity and awe.

Cécile's lessons might have stood him in good stead had his brain been less confused. As it was, he was content to let this sympathetic friend guide him along the path.

Feeble, staggering steps, with frequent halts when the giddiness overpowered him; but the girl, though small, was stronger than might have been expected, and helped him bravely, till together they reached a little hut close to the pathway.

What followed was but a confused dream to Morice Conyers. He remembered vaguely that an old, white-capped woman came to his side, and that somehow he reached a bed. Then the dream darkened till all became a blank, in which surging waves and roaring winds alone were heard, whilst he drifted helpless and feeble before the tempest.

But morning light told a different tale. Youth, a vigorous constitution, old Nanette's balsam of herbs, or Providence,—*which* it was Morice did not trouble to consider. All he knew was that he was alive, and thanked God for it, remembering Cécile. Afterwards he recollected that he was hungry.

The white-capped old woman, who had been but a wraith figure the night before, came to his side with a bowl of chestnut soup and black bread.

Coarse fare—but our dainty beau had never tasted a more delicious meal.

Ah! It was good to be alive.

In halting Breton he thanked the good mother, and vainly tried to follow an avalanche of chatter.

All he could gather was that this was the hut of Nanette Leroc, and that the little one, who found him, was her niece, Marie, who had been returning from a fête.

Of course the good saints had directed her feet that way, and had shown her where he lay.

Marie, busy shelling chestnuts in the background, must have blushed at this last, seeing that the saints had apparently less to do with the direction of her steps than a certain Meloir Duvaine, who had promised to meet her on her return from Cervenais, but who had failed to keep tryst.

But Morice cared little whether saint or lover, or both, had had finger in the pie. It was sufficient that Marie *had* found him, and that he lay here with the warm life-blood flowing freely in his veins.

He would have risen from his humble couch had not Nanette and common sense withheld him.

Loss of blood had weakened him, even though the wound was not serious in itself.

The brass button on his coat was twisted and bent beyond recognition.

When he saw it, Morice Conyers thanked God again.

The sight sobered him.

Nanette and Marie chattered incessantly when they were in the hut. Fortunately their work kept them a good deal without.

Later, Morice fell asleep to the whirring of the spinning-wheel. It was more soothing than unintelligible Breton.

For two days he remained in the hut of old Nanette. On the third he was strong enough to rise. Weak though he was, he could return now to Varenac.

He still had his work to do; and what might not be happening if the story of his death had got abroad?

At first Nanette refused the gold he offered her with halting but heartfelt thanks.

It was le bon Dieu who had sent him, she said. But the sight of the glittering coins was too much for her thrifty soul to withstand; and folk said the winter was likely to be a hard one.

So she took money and thanks, bidding her patient a voluble farewell, and invoking many blessings on his head.

Morice was already half across a forest glade before she had come to the end of them.

It was past mid-day, but, though the autumn sunshine warmed the purple landes beyond, it was chilly in the shade. More than once Morice paused, shivering a little; but whether from cold, weakness, or the excitement of what he knew must lie before him, he could not tell.

A step on the path, a bend in the road, the flutter of a crimson cloak—and there before him stood Cécile herself.

For a moment trees, path, figure, swam giddily before the young man's eyes. Then, as the mists cleared, he looked into a face pale as his own.

The basket she carried had slipped from her grasp, and she stood, hands clasped together, leaning against a tree.

"Morice!"

It was a faint whisper coming from white lips, but he heard it.

"Cécile!"

Did the pinched cheeks and hollow eyes tell their own tale?

It must have been so, for she was at his side the next moment.

"You are not dead?" she faltered, and touched his hand, half fearfully, as though she fancied the apparition would slip out of sight as she approached.

But he caught and held her fingers in no ghost-like touch.

"You are not dead?"

A hundred questions were in her eyes.

"No, I am not dead, dear love, dear love."

He spoke the last words hungrily, wistfully, longing for response, yet scarcely daring to hope for it.

The colour had not come to her cheeks at his words; she was still staring up in that same wonder.

Yet he saw another thought dawning behind it.

"If you are alive, what does it mean?" she asked, then shuddered violently. "They told me you were a traitor," she said.

"A traitor? And so I was, Cécile—a black and dishonoured traitor. But I repented."

"Repented!"

Her voice rang harshly.

"Ay. God grant before too late."

"When—when you rode to Varenac——"

"I went as its Marquis, to cry 'Long live the King.'"

"And yet——"

"I never reached Varenac."

"You—turned back?"

How her eyes accused him.

"Cécile! Cécile! Yet I deserve it. No, I did not turn back. I met my sister——"

"She has told me all that, and how you disappeared before she could return."

"Lord Denningham found me awaiting her. A quarrel was forced. He sneered at me for a Chouan. I lost my temper, and gave him his desire. We fought near here, and I think he left me for dead. Old Nanette nursed me back to life—it was a miracle that saved me. I am on my way to Varenac."

He spoke breathlessly, almost incoherently. Yet each word carried truth with it. And she believed him, though, by reason of her very love and fear, she hesitated.

"You go to Varenac?"

"At once, Mademoiselle."

"Your enemies are there."

"They will be kinder than my friends—or those I dared to hope might be my friends. But I understand——"

"You understand?"

"That it is too late—there is no forgiveness for sin meditated."

"No forgiveness?"

Her lips were quivering, her eyes full of tears. All the hardness had gone from the little face which was raised to his.

Morice was trembling, less from weakness now than the hope with which those eyes inspired him.

"You believe me?"

"I do."

"Cécile!"

She was in his arms, sobbing out all the despair and horror of those three days. His shame had been hers, and more bitter to hear of than his death. But Gabrielle's story had helped to clear a name she held so dear, yet left her doubtful, and utterly miserable.

Dead without proof that penitence had been sincere! Mother of God! it had seemed to break her heart.

And now, why! now she wept—wept tears of joy and thankfulness which swept aside despair.

He was alive—alive, and on his way to Varenac.

That last thought sent a chill through throbbing pulses.

To Varenac!

She remembered how Jéhan had brought Gabrielle to Kérnak, and how grim he had looked when rumours of the approaching Terror reached them. It was not only at St. Malo that the "widow" claimed her victims.

And at Varenac Lord Denningham, the avowed friend of Marcel Trouet, still remained. She shivered at the thought.

Gabrielle had told her much of this man, and her belief that he could, if he chose, explain the reason of Morice's disappearance.

Yes, she feared Lord Denningham almost as much as the Terror.

Yet it was true that Morice must go to Varenac.

It might not be too late even now to do something for the Cause.

But he should not go alone.

"You must return with me to Kérnak," she whispered. "Jéhan is there. He will go with you. You—you must prove to him, too, that you are Monsieur le Marquis."

The faintest smile parted her trembling lips.

"Prove it—to Jéhan?"

"Yes."

Morice raised his head proudly.

"I will prove it to the whole world," said he.

"And you will come to Kérnak?"

"If you will. But my heart burns to reach Varenac. You—you do not know all, perhaps. I tell you every moment is precious, the danger nearer."

He spoke feverishly, thinking of Marcel Trouet.

But she could bring reasons for her importunity.

"You may fail if you go alone. The people do not know you. They might refuse to believe that you are their Marquis; but they will believe Jéhan."

He saw that the argument was good.

"Then let us go to Kérnak," he cried, turning back along the path, with a sudden gesture of impatience.

Cécile smiled.

"Yes, to Kérnak," she echoed, with a happy sob.

Even their love, born in autumn sunlight, and wellnigh killed by autumn blasts, took no first place at that moment in their hearts, when a man's honour and a country's hopes were at stake; though Cécile, being a woman, felt her heart beat gladly when she remembered that she had turned her lover from the road to Varenac—and death.

## CHAPTER XXV

### BERTRAND TELLS A TALE

The wine at the sign of Le Bon Camarade was abominable.

Marcel Trouet, trusted servant and officer of the Committee of Public Safety in Paris, evinced his disapprobation by flinging the contents of his glass on the floor and bellowing for the landlord.

Jean Gouicket came in haste. He knew who were the great ones now, this burly Breton. Aha! the cunning one! At the first whisper of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, he had taken down his signboard, and the Duchesse Anne, with its ermines and arms, had been quickly painted out and replaced by a fine red cap and the name of Le Bon Camarade.

But just in time! Ohé! Jean Gouicket could only gasp out a thanksgiving and promise of many candles to Monseigneur St. Jean—beneath his breath, of course—when Trouet and his party arrived.

That party! It was a grim one enough at first sight—a rabble of idlers with four or five of those other great ones whom Marcel Trouet had brought from Paris.

Not that they were Parisians—nothing of the sort: they were Bretons, every one—dark-skinned, gloomy-faced fellows, with crafty, downcast eyes and scowling lips.

These were men, though, who had seen life beyond the dreary landes, and faced more than the fierce, monotonous battling between sea and shore, such as engrossed their fellows.

And they had learnt to talk in Paris.

Loud, snarling talk of their precious liberty and the way in which they meant to earn it.

Ha, ha! They were beginning to find that out in Brittany too.

They had heard, even in Paris, how the aristocrats of St. Malo and Vannes—ay, and Nantes too—were learning that their day was done. And so, being Bretons themselves, they had come home to join in the fun, and teach their comrades and brothers how the work went in Paris.

Click! click! click! But there were plenty of ways to exterminate vermin besides taking them to the arms of the "widow."

Jean Gouicket and his friends listened agape, not sure whether to applaud or shiver, the former sweating in sudden fear when the great Trouet bellowed for more wine of a better flavour.

A threat underlay the command, and the trembling Gouicket made haste to obey, though it was gall and wormwood to the worthy man to bring to these vaurien comrades the wine which Monsieur le Comte, or M'nsieur l'Abbé would pay a big price for.

Before he returned Marcel had been joined by a stranger—a heavy-faced, ill-looking fellow with a tangle of rough hair, and wearing the sleeveless coat and plaited trousers of a Breton peasant.

But Marcel evidently found him amusing, for he did not even fill his glass with the wine Gouicket placed, with reverent fingers and very great reluctance, by his side.

"Your name, my friend?" he was asking.

"Bertrand Manseau. A good Republican."

"Ça, ça. And you come from Kérnak?"

The man spat and cursed the name before acquiescing.

"It is the place of aristos?"

"Yes, citoyen. But not for long I hope."

His cunning little black eyes blinked with satisfaction.

"All in good time, all in good time. You know Varenac?"

"Si. How could it be otherwise? I have lived between Kérnak and Varenac all my life."

"And what have you to say of Varenac?"

"It is a place of fools."

"Ha, ha! Does that mean also of aristos?"

"There is one; that is sufficient."

"But the old aristo died. He who has now come is a good citizen."

Bertrand's face was livid with rage.

"A good citizen! Mille diables! A *good citizen*. What! the new Marquis who came last week from England? Nom d'un chien, Citoyen Marcel, he is the worst of the lot—a cursed aristo to his finger-tips."

It was Trouet's turn to stare.

"Bah! comrade, you do not know him. I tell you he is my friend. It is I who brought him from England on purpose to teach those fools at Varenac to cry 'Vive la Revolution.'"

"I do not care what you say. He is a cursed aristo; I have seen him."

Bertrand rubbed his back, scowling darkly over a sore memory.

"You have seen him?"

Marcel poured out a glass of wine and tossed it down at a gulp, indifferent just now as to flavour. He was getting excited.

"Yes, certainly. He would have killed me if it had not been for the girl. I tell you he is the most cursed aristo of them all."

"Where was this? What girl? Quickly then, idiot! I will know what you say."

Bertrand told his story. Alas! it was not only the story of Mademoiselle Cécile's rescue, but more also that he had learnt by spying and close tracking of his enemy.

All was soon clear to Monsieur Trouet.

This fool of an Englishman had fallen in love—with an aristo. He was judge enough of men to guess the rest.

"And he has gone to Varenac?"

"Certainly!"

"And the people?"

"Will be as ready to cry 'Vive le roi,' as 'Vive la nation,' when he bids them."

"He has already——"

"No, no! There has been some delay. I do not altogether understand, for old Pierre Koustak at the Manor is a fool too; but I believe M'nsieur le Marquis is there alone. He waits for a friend."

"Nom d'un chien! a friend will arrive. Mille diables! a friend will arrive."

Marcel tossed off another glass of wine thirstily—it might have been the commonest vintage—and Jean Gouicket, watching, was filled with exquisite pain at the sight.

"En avant!" screamed Marcel, springing to his feet.

Instantly the parlour of Le Bon Camarade was in confusion.

All talked at once, and none knew what they talked of, saving that it was in the cause of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Poor Jean Gouicket wished devoutly that there would be less of the latter and more honesty in payment; but he dared not ask for his money, recalling the fate of a parsimonious landlord at Vannes.

All things, especially wine, were common in this great bond of brotherhood.

At last Marcel made himself heard.

His good comrades and friends were to divide into five sections, and hasten at once to Varenac, Kérnak, and other villages around.

In all these villages the tree of liberty was to be planted, and death to the aristos proclaimed.

For himself he had a little business of importance to undertake, but would join them at Varenac shortly.

They would soon have plenty of amusement.

A burst of enthusiasm greeted these orders. The Marseillaise, started in a shrill falsetto, was echoed by fifty lusty throats.

It was in the midst of the din that Marcel Trouet, with Bertrand at his side, hurried off in the direction of the Manor of Varenac.

The trusted agent of the Committee of Public Safety had something to say to a ci-devant Marquis and member of a certain London Corresponding Club.

The thought of the meeting appeared to cause the little man the liveliest excitement and anger.

But never mind! never mind!

The Terror was coming to Varenac in spite of turncoats.

"Ça ira!"

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A BLIND ATONEMENT

Sir Stephen Berrington sat alone in the library at the Manor of Varenac.

Not that he was fond of his own company. Peste! He hated it. But there was no alternative just now.

Morry's sister had gone to Kérnak with that young fool Michael to keep her company, and Morry himself had not arrived.

Too bad that! If it had not been for Morry's over-persuasion he would never have left town.

He was none too fond of my Lord Denningham's company. The fellow was all right at the card-table, but otherwise he was a demned wet blanket.

Yes; a demned wet blanket!

Sir Stephen yawned, helped himself to another glass of punch from the bowl at his elbow,

and continued to bewail his lot.

Where was Denningham? Wet blanket or no, even he would be better than no one in this old barn.

It was beginning to grow dusk, and Steenie was not fond of moping in the twilight.

Memory and he were ill friends.

Yet memory, unbidden, came and perched herself beside him.

A small fire of logs crackled on the hearth. Autumn winds were cold, and he was not so young as he used to be.

It is wonderful how old a fit of loneliness can make one.

At that moment the light-hearted Steenie Berrington of Carlton House was an old man.

The hand that carried the glass to trembling lips shook.

An old man!

It must be so since he had taken to looking back.

He had been young once.

Lost youth stood mocking him in the shadows. Laughter, love, hope, and strength,—all had been his.

A mother's hand seemed stretching out from the past years to smooth the fair hair from his forehead, whilst mother-eyes looked into his own laughing ones.

Those mother eyes! Had they ever looked anything but tenderly into his, though they had often been tear-dimmed in pain?

Pain he had inflicted carelessly enough, and, as carelessly, turned away.

Memory had bitter stabs for an old man sitting alone in the twilight.

Sir Stephen gulped down his punch and tried to hum a line of his favourite rhyme.

> "Let's drink and be jolly, and drown melancholy;
> So merrily, then, let us joy, too, and sing,
> So fill up your bowls, all ye loyal——"

The song broke off, snapped by another of memory's shafts.

Where had he heard that song first?

At Dublin town.

Ah! Dublin held memories too.

A gay ballroom. A girl's sweet face. A kiss, passionate and long.

Norah, Norah—smiling, merry Norah.

He had loved her, too, for a short time—all too short for Norah.

And the boy?

Well! he had not been cut out for domesticity, and after a time Norah's tears bored him far more than Norah's smiles had ever charmed him.

Yet he had felt a pang of remorse when he heard she was dead. He might even have sought out his son had not the old man, his father, adopted him. It was better for Michael to be brought up at Berrington.

And, meantime, Steenie was finding that when one has a handsome face and jolly humour, it is easy to live by one's wits, even though honour be in the mire.

So the years rolled by. He watched them go as the wood spattered and burnt on the hearth, spurting out little jets of flame or leaping up the chimney in long, red tongues of fiery heat.

Michael, his son! *His son*. His father, it seemed at times, for here was Sir Henry over again, save for sudden fits of wild, rollicking devilry, which came of an Irish birthright, and delighted Sir Stephen hugely.

Mike and he might have been the jolliest of comrades were it not for the young fool's absurd ideas of honour.

Again Sir Stephen filled up his glass. He would at least drown melancholy and memory too.

After all, he hoped spoil-sport Mike would stay at Kérnak. The lad took life like an old man, and left his father behind in the merry ranks of youth.

Yes! of youth. He was not old—*would* not be old. He was young—merry. Laughter on his lips—in his heart, now the ghosts of the past were laid.

Confusion to memory! Con——

How darkly the shadows fell.

And behind him one was moving forward, nearer—nearer—nearer.

A stooping shadow, with a cap—blood-red in the dying light—on its head, and a face twisted and mocking.

But Sir Stephen was looking into the embers and seeing long years of laughter and song therein.

Oh, that stooping shadow! How stealthily it advanced.

Confusion to memory! Con——

An arm raised swiftly, and as swiftly descending.

Confusion——!

What followed? What followed?

A sudden, terrible pain, a suffocating sense of agony, a blinding rush of memories, of fear, of terror; and then a figure lurched forward, slipping sideways from the chair across the hearth, overturning a half-filled bowl of punch in its fall.

But Marcel Trouet stood cursing volubly in hot anger and dismay, for the features, upturned to his, were not those of Morice Conyers after all.

* * * * *

The moments crept by leaden-footed. But Marcel Trouet stood still—very still—looking down at that white face, those stiffening lips.

He had killed the wrong man.

It was a matter of regret.

Hardened in crime though he was, murder in cold blood had never come his way before, and the horror of a useless deed held him there, actually trembling a little as he watched the slowly oozing blood trickle across the white hearth.

And the twilight was deepening in the silent room.

The hasty opening of a door startled the watcher into uttering a low cry of terror. But the terror passed at sight of Lord Denningham.

These two understood each other.

"Ah!"

"Unluckily I made a little mistake, mon ami. It was Morice Conyers—the citizen Varenac—I came to find."

"Aha! I understand. A little unfortunate for Steenie! Poor devil! But how go the affairs of State, friend Trouet?"

"It is I who should ask that. I hear that our good Moreece has become indeed a Marquis."

"One born out of time then, though it is true that Conyers was ready to play the fool. However, there is no reason to be anxious; I have already settled matters with him."

"You——?"

"He will not trouble us again any more than poor Steenie here."

Lord Denningham was smiling, but Marcel Trouet wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Bon, bon. You are a patriot, my friend."

"And now——?"

"Well, it will be clear sailing, as you call it in England. The men of Varenac did not see the dear Moreece?"

"Not a glimpse. They are waiting still."

"Excellent. Ah, ciel! what an idea! We shall have no trouble with these blockheads, who are sometimes difficult. You, my dear milord, will be Marquis, or—still better—the Citizen Varenac."

Jack Denningham stared for a moment. But he was not slow to catch the drift of the other's meaning.

"The Citizen Varenac?" he echoed. "A charming idea, Marcel, only a trifle difficult to practise."

"Difficult?"

"You forget I have been living here as Lord Denningham. The old curmudgeon, Pierre Koustak, would give me away. He is Royalist and Varenac to the backbone, and a gentleman of influence in these parts, if I mistake not."

Trouet shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, my friend, that is all easy enough. Where is this Pierre Koustak?"

"Below, no doubt, in the pantry, or poking his nose where it is not wanted."

"Let him come here. We will deal with him according to justice."

"Justice!"

"Eh bien! There is a man lying murdered in the library of the Manor of Varenac. We find him here, you and I. Who can be suspected but the only man in the house? It is without doubt the work of a villain. We will name that villain Pierre Koustak. You understand?"

"Perfectly. I will fetch him."

Pierre Koustak was not far away.

The last few days had made him anxious—very anxious. There were things happening he could not understand, and Monsieur le Marquis had not arrived at Varenac.

So he was ready enough to obey the summons to the library, even though he did not like the fair-haired milord with the blue eyes which were cold and hard as granite stones.

Yet perhaps he would hear something.

The worthy Pierre was not mistaken. He did hear something,—but not at all what he expected.

Murder! Ah! how terrible.

The sight of the huddled figure on the hearth made his knees tremble in very horror. But he knew nothing of it, had heard nothing. What did it mean?

In utter bewilderment, he stared from one grim-faced accuser to the other.

*He* murdered the Englishman who laughed and drank all day?

Mother of Heaven! such a thought, such a suggestion, was impossible, absurd.

But, where the prisoner is prejudged, argument is useless.

They refused to listen to the poor man's protestations, cries, and vows of innocency. Sir Stephen Berrington lay here, lately murdered; he, Pierre Koustak, was the only man in the Manor at the time, therefore Pierre must have done the deed.

That was the summing up. Afterwards Pierre, still pleading and imploring against such injustice, was bound, gagged, and carried to a little room at the back of the house.

"He will be safe there," observed Jack Denningham, with a grin, as he withdrew the key from the lock, placing it in his pocket. "And now for the comedy, Citizen Marcel, since tragedy is done with—for the present."

Marcel Trouet seemed thoroughly to appreciate the jest, for his sly face—a little paler perhaps than usual—was twisted into a satisfied grimace.

"You will wait here now, milord," he observed with a grand bow, "and I will bring your

obedient and altogether adoring people to listen to the fatherly advice and counsel of the Citoyen Morice Varenac, ci-devant Marquis and aristocrat, but now the friend of liberty and the great and glorious Revolution."

He waved his red cap excitedly over his head as he spoke, laughing uproariously.

One is merry when one's plans succeed beyond—if contrary to—expectation. But it might have been observed that the Revolutionary leader took care to avoid re-entering the library where a dead man lay by a dying fire.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### WHO MICHAEL MET ON THE ROAD TO VARENAC

Michael Berrington rode to Varenac.

Grey gloom around suited well with his mood, for therein strove counter forces as fiercely as storm-lashed waves against the jagged rocks of a forbidding coast.

Behind lay Kérnak—and love. Before him was Varenac—and duty.

He dared not leave his father in the unscrupulous hands of such men as Denningham and Trouet.

Had he not promised his grandfather to preserve Berrington honour with his life?

So he set his face sternly, never once glancing back, though his heart cried aloud, bidding him return to the woman he loved.

Gabrielle might be in danger, for already rumour was busy, telling of the ferment in the towns around, and the growing cries of "Vive la nation," "À bas les aristocrats!" Yet he must go on—on—on, leaving Gabrielle behind.

It was getting dark; purple moorland and purple sky blending together in a misty haze. Hooting of owl and barking of fox came from the forest on his right, whilst far away to the left the waves broke dully against the cliffs.

A ghost? Was it a ghost?

Surely something akin to it.

A flutter of white, a shadowy figure looming large in the mist, then gradually resolving itself into a woman's form.

A woman, alone on the moorland, at this hour—in these times?

A peasant girl come to meet her lover, perhaps, but brave even then, since Breton superstitions are manifold concerning these bleak landes at the witching hour of twilight.

But this woman came in haste. Surely it was to no love-tryst!

Michael was soon convinced of that.

Stumbling, panting, tripping, over the rough, uneven ground she came, pausing, with a shrill cry, half-fear, half-welcome, at sight of the man who had leapt from his horse and stood ready to greet her.

It was Olérie Koustak, the fair-haired daughter of the old major-domo at Varenac. Michael had recognised her at once, and guessed that she ran thus for some purpose.

"M'nsieur, M'nsieur," she cried, even before she reached his side. "Oh, M'nsieur, help!"

"Olérie," he exclaimed, catching her hand as she swayed, white to the lips with a sudden faintness. "Why! what has chanced? Has the Terror come already to Varenac?"

She looked at him, her great blue eyes beseeching him dumbly, even before she could regain breath for speech.

But presently she told her tale.

Murder at Varenac?

Murder of one of the English m'nsieurs who said they were friends of M'nsieur le Marquis who never came?

Michael found it difficult to put the next question, and it came short and harsh enough at last.

"Which one?"

"The elder, M'nsieur—the one who laughed all day, and who sang and drank much wine!"

"And he is dead?"

Was it Michael's own voice that asked the question? He could hardly believe it.

"Yes, yes. He is dead—murdered. But it was not my father who did it. By all the blessed saints I swear it, M'nsieur. It was impossible. Only two minutes had he left me to go to the pantry when the English milord called him."

"And then?"

Olérie clasped her hands tightly.

"Oh, M'sieur, I was afraid, and—and I hid—whilst I listened. I—heard all. They told my father it—it was he who committed the murder, and locked him in an upper room. Afterwards they—they laughed and talked together. I—I do not altogether—comprehend, for it was not Breton tongue they talked; but it seemed that the—English milord will stay and—call himself M'nsieur le Marquis, whilst the other goes—to tell our people."

"And how know you this if they did not speak the Breton tongue?"

"M'nsieur, I went to an aunt in Paris when I was little. I stayed three—four years. I talked French."

"And it was French these others talked? How many were there?"

"Two, M'nsieur. One was the English milord. I did not see the face of the other."

"But he was French?"

"Yes, M'nsieur. Oh, M'nsieur, they will kill my father."

Her tears flowed fast at the thought.

"They have already killed mine."

Michael's face was very stern.

Olérie looked up in startled wonder.

"*Your* father, M'nsieur?—the English M'nsieur who laughed and sang always?"

"Yes."

He turned his face away, afraid to read pity in her eyes. It was not pity he needed just then.

His father was dead.

The thought filled him with infinite horror and infinite relief.

The Berrington honour was safe.

Yet filial affection was not wholly dead. Weak, vacillating, utterly unscrupulous though he was, Steenie Berrington had not been without a certain lovableness—a kindly, merry humour which, even if insincere and selfish, was fascinating after its kind.

And now he was dead!

Heaven have mercy on his soul!

But there were the living to think of—and justice to be done.

Michael was not one to lose opportunity in vain reveries and regrets.

He must ride with the hotter haste to Varenac, even though only his enemies awaited him there.

He told Olérie this briefly, promising that, if the dealing of justice lay in his hands, the innocent should not suffer for the guilty.

She thanked him tearfully, allowing him to lift her upon his horse; and thus, together, the strange companions rode, as quickly as they might in the gathering dusk, to Varenac.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### LORD DENNINGHAM FIGHTS ONCE TOO OFTEN

Lord Denningham was waiting, not patiently—that virtue had never been his—but with a growing irritation.

After all this was a fool's game.

Notoriety was cheap, and he could—if he had willed—have sought and found it in far more amusing paths than those of political intrigue.

He had a good mind to throw up the whole business and return to England by the next boat.

A fit of indigestion—or was it spleen? Perhaps the latter, for he was thinking of pretty Gabrielle Conyers.

If he went to England she should go with him. Yes! he had sworn that, and she might think herself a lucky woman that he would take her as Lady Denningham. He smiled over the thought, and then set his lips in a thin, tight line.

My Lady Denningham! Yes; he would teach the chit who was master, and she would love him the more for it.

As for this business of Trouet's, it was the means to an end.

He would masquerade as a converted marquis, teach a crowd of loutish peasants the tune of the Marseillaise, consign a few of these mock-heroic aristos to the devil, and take home his bride by way of reward, with the substantial thanks of the Committee of Public Safety and France in general.

It was a perfectly satisfactory picture. In the meantime he was more than ready for the first act of the little comedy wherein the ci-devant Marquis de Varenac would make his bow to good patriots as the Citizen Morice.

Involuntarily he chuckled as he thought of one morning, a few days since, when he had put a superfluous Morice de Varenac safely out of the way.

Confound that fellow Trouet! was he never coming?

My lord was getting restless.

A passing curiosity led him to the library.

Pity old Steenie had met such a paltry fate; he might have helped wile away a heavy hour with the cards.

Poor Steenie!

Jack Denningham slowly took a pinch of snuff as he looked down at the still figure at his feet.

A sight to point a moral.

The handsome but bloated face, the rich dress, helpless hands, and the broken bowl, with the sickening smell of punch-fumes mingling with the close atmosphere of the room.

Faugh! My lord turned to throw open a window, and came face to face with the dead man's son.

It might have been an embarrassing situation for most, but Jack Denningham was noted for his sang-froid.

"In good time," quoth he. "My condolences and congratulations, Sir Michael. The loss of a father is not always a bereavement his heir finds it hard to bear."

One swift glance towards the hearth, then back at the sneering, smiling face before him.

"I await explanations," said Michael sternly.

Denningham burst into a loud laugh.

"Stap me, sir, but you take it coolly," quoth he. "One would almost have thought you were

prepared for the blow."

"As I am to find the striker," replied Michael coldly.

"Ha, ha! You do me the honour of suspecting my hand in the matter? A pretty compliment, my young friend. May I repay it?"

The speaker's tone was yet more insolent. Michael looked his adversary full in the face. Perhaps he guessed why my lord was so ready to pick a quarrel.

Denningham was still smiling mockingly.

"Berrington Manor needed a new master—*and mistress*!" he questioned. "But you must be careful, my friend, in your daydreams, or there will be an unexpected awakening."

"You will explain your words, my lord, or give me satisfaction."

"Ha, ha! You have been a frequenter of the King's Theatre. I grant you John Parkington is superb; but I prefer melodrama *only* on the stage. I am too prosaic for you, Sir Michael."

"Your prose should be readable then."

"Have I not made it so already? But I assure you, sir, that you must be careful which way you look. Mistress Gabrielle will have the honour of being Lady Denningham one day soon."

"You lie!"

"Tut, tut! ugly words, ugly words, my Irish mongrel. You will do well to be discreet, seeing ——"

He nodded towards the hearth.

"You dare——"

Lord Denningham had succeeded admirably; his adversary was ablaze with unrestrainable anger.

"Ah! you will prove your innocence. Of course, of course. Do not lose your temper, I implore you, sir. Only you will not deny that your father's murder was a matter of no surprise to you. And as your father's heir——"

"You will answer me for your insults, my lord—and at once."

"I am always at the service of a gentleman. Would you prefer swords or pistols?"

"Swords. On guard, my lord."

"As hot at fighting as in love-making. Aha! this mongrel blood! Come, if you will have it so; but I shall teach you a lesson, my friend. Afterwards——"

"Afterwards——?"

"I shall marry pretty Gabrielle Conyers and take to writing poems."

Mockery and laughter, meant to goad on his adversary to mad indiscretion.

But Michael Berrington was sobered already.

If he fell in the duel, Gabrielle would be at this man's mercy.

Fool that he had been to be so trapped!

But it was too late now, and there was murder sure enough in Denningham's half-veiled blue eyes.

A duel a l'outrance.

They did not speak after the swords had once crossed.

It was for a woman they fought, and each knew it, whatever the reason given.

A mad fight in a dying light, traitor shadows to baulk each thrust.

Yes, it would be more luck than skill which should proclaim the winner.

Not a flicker of an eyelid, not a smile to part stern lips. A cruel fight, with Death to guide the quick thrusts which each parried in turn.

To and fro, to and fro. As near the window as possible to gain the advantage of every glimmer of light.

And by the hearth the gloom deepened into darkness.

The breathing of the antagonists was getting more laboured now. But the eyes were hard and unflinching as ever beneath sweating brows.

To and fro, to and fro, till they were shadows amongst shadows.

And then, whilst victory hung in the balance, and Death stood back to await his victim, the door opened.

It was Denningham who faced it—Denningham who, for the briefest second, looked up and saw a figure standing there, watching the scene with curious, wondering eyes.

A brief second and yet it was enough.

A look of horror swept over the mocking face, which became ghastly in its pallor. With a scream of fear, he lurched forward, almost falling upon Michael Berrington's sword.

"Conyers! My God! Conyers!" he sobbed, sinking to the ground—and never spoke again.

It had all been the work of an instant, too brief for realization. No time for Michael, indeed, to have lowered his sword before that fatal stagger.

And the duel was over.

Not skill, not luck, but fate itself decided it, and Jack Denningham lay dead. It was a fate he had so often meted out to others, and the day of reckoning must come at last.

It had come now.

But it was no ghost who knelt by the dead man's side, looking down into the grey, horror-stricken face, but Morice Conyers in the flesh—a little paler, a little thinner, but himself for all that.

"He is dead," he said, looking up into Michael's face. "It was just that he should die. The fellow was rogue and villain."

"Rogue and villain I grant," replied Michael slowly, "but I would that the duel had ended before you entered."

Morice shrugged his shoulders.

"Witnesses are always useful," he said. "And there was no shadow of blame to you."

"Even so, I would——"

"Tush, tush! there's no time for discussing the nicety of a thrust now, as de Quernais will tell you."

"De Quernais?"

Michael looked with surprise towards the young Count, who stood beside his cousin.

It was bewildering to find these two together after the happenings of the past three days.

"What mean you?"' he asked briefly.

Morice Conyers straightened himself.

"I come hither as Marquis de Varenac," he replied.

"As Marquis de Varenac? And Trouet——"

The latter question was involuntary.

"Is as much my enemy as that of my cousin here."

His eyes sought Count Jéhan's.

"Yes, yes," answered the latter quickly. "All is explained. My good friend and cousin is here with me to do what he can to save his people from themselves—and Marcel Trouet."

"If it be not too late," murmured Morice bitterly.

Michael held out his hand.

"At least we are comrades together," he replied, with one of those winning smiles which transformed the dark grimness of his face. "And Trouet is not here yet."

"But he is on his way."

"Yes, and I do not think he is far off. Denningham"—he glanced down at the dead man—"was to have played the Marquis."

"Was that his own idea?"

"Ah! I wonder. It did not occur to me. Perhaps——"

"It is possible that Trouet has already been here."

"The girl Olérie told me there were two."

"Denningham—and Sir Stephen."

"Nay; *after* my father had—had been murdered."

Both listeners started.

"Murdered!"

They had not seen what lay in the shadows beyond the window.

"Yes," said Michael grimly, "murdered." And he pointed to where a dim outline was visible, huddled together on the hearth.

Morice sprang forward with a cry of dismay. He had been fond of Steenie Berrington.

"How did it happen? Who did it? Ah! Steenie, poor Steenie!"

It was pitiful sight enough on which he gazed down.

"That is what I asked Denningham here. He suggested that it was a case of parricide."

"He would have picked a quarrel. But had he done it himself?"

"I hardly think so. My father was no one's enemy but his own. And it was foul murder."

It was Count Jéhan who spoke next.

"Did you not say a girl brought the news?" he questioned abruptly.

Michael nodded.

"Olérie Koustak. I was forgetting. She told me some tale of her father being in danger of his life—accused of the deed."

He flung open the door as he spoke, stepping out into the passage.

"Olérie, Olérie," he cried.

The girl was not long in responding. Crouched in a corner behind the salon door, she had been awaiting developments in an agony of fear.

"Where is your father, child?" rapped out Morice peremptorily.

"Ah! Monsieur, in the room above."

"He is locked in?"

"Si, si! The English milord has the key."

She crossed herself as though speaking of the devil.

"The English lord? I will bring it."

Count Jéhan spoke quietly. He had no fear or passing pity for the dead in that darkened room behind them.

He was not long absent. But Olérie was the only one who smiled on his return.

Together they hastened to the room above.

On their way Michael found tongue to ask what happened at Kérnak.

Again it was the Count who answered.

"They are safe," he said. "Our servants are faithful, and Père Mouet is with them. They know that danger threatens. If it draws too near they will not await us, but escape across the landes to the coast."

"To the coast?"

"Yes, yes. There is a cave. It has the name of the Cave of Lost Souls. Our peasants are superstitious, Monsieur Berrington. They declare that the souls of unshriven mariners lodge there, and that to hear their wailing cries strikes madness into the hearts of listeners. They would not enter it after sundown if they thought that King Louis himself were hidden there."

"And then——"

"There are boats there. It will be easy to escape to Jersey and thence to England."

The last words were warm with comfort.

But, alas! England was some way from the Manor of Varenac, and evidently the Terror was near.

It was an affecting sight to see the joy of old Pierre Koustak when they liberated him, telling him that at last M'nsieur le Marquis had come to his own.

He wept and sobbed over Morice's hand, kissing it again and again, calling him his dear, dear master.

But it was not the moment for sentiment. The tale of poor Pierre's false accusation and imprisonment was told with some preamble, mingled with many explanations of his whereabouts prior to the crime.

"There were two men in the library," interrupted Michael shortly. "Describe the one who was not the English lord."

"A little man, M'nsieur, with a villainous face and villainous red cap. He had the air of a Republican leader, and there was a scar, very red, across his forehead."

"Marcel Trouet!"

The three looked at each other.

Michael's face was very grim.

"It was he who murdered my father."

"But why?"

Morice's voice faltered a little over the question.

"I cannot tell. But there can be no second possibility. He may have mistaken him for another."

"For——"

Count Jéhan shrugged his shoulders.

"For you yourself, my cousin. He may have heard too much talk of the Marquis and too little of the Citizen. It is wonderful how news spreads. Meantime——"

"Meantime," Michael replied slowly, "the men of Varenac will come hither to greet their new lord."

"Their new lord?"

"Denningham told me of a proposed masquerade."

"Ah!"

They were understanding now.

It was time.

A scream from Olérie, who stood at the window, was echoed by a dull roar from without as she threw the casement open. Instinctively the four men ran to her side. Up the avenue of stately oaks—the pride of many a generation of Varenacs—came a crowd of men and women. Uncertainly at first, but with growing strength, rose the sounds of the familiar tune:

> "Aux armes, citoyens!
> Le jour de gloire est arrivé."

Then a pause.

"Citoyen Varenac! Citoyen Varenac! Citoyen!"

The cry went up from hundreds of throats, a deep, exultant roar of welcome and anticipation.

Morice moved forward.

A tiny balcony without would give him the opportunity he desired.

"Citoyen Varenac! Citoyen!"

Bareheaded he stepped out.

"I am the Marquis de Varenac," he cried.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### "I AM THE MARQUIS DE VARENAC"

A moment's hush, then again the mighty cry:

"Citoyen Varenac! Citoyen!"

Morice leant forward into the darkness. Behind him lights gleamed, from below a few torches lit up the surrounding gloom.

Yellow light flaring on pale, eager faces, turning curiously upwards.

"No, my people," he cried in clear, ringing tones, that could be heard even on the outskirts of the crowd. "I am no Citoyen, but your Marquis, the heir of your well-loved Marquis Gilles de Varenac, come to you from England with Breton blood in my veins, Breton love in my heart, to cry 'Vive le roi. Vive la reine. Vive Bretagne.'"

A murmur broke his words, a murmur which grew, battling as it were with two elements, uncertain and faltering.

That last cry had stirred their blood—and yet the poison, so cunningly distilled amongst them, was busy at work.

And, whilst they still wavered, some crying one thing, and some another, a shrill voice rose, dominating and stilling the growing outcry.

"À bas les aristos," it yelled. "Down with traitors and liars. Hein! men of Brittany, are you such fools? That is no Citoyen Varenac, he is an impostor. The Citoyen has another voice. He cries 'Vive la nation,' 'Vive liberté.' As for that fellow, he is no Varenac but a liar. Come, let us find the Citoyen before his enemies murder him. Let us——"

"I am the Marquis de Varenac," cried Morice, "as Heaven is above. Men of Varenac, listen to me. Will you believe one who knows? Pierre Koustak will tell you I speak truth."

But the temper of the mob was uncertain.

"Vive la nation," cried many voices, and a woman in shrill tones began once more screaming out the first lines of the Marseillaise.

"Vive la nation. Death to the aristos. Where is the Citoyen Varenac?"

The cries were threatening.

A shot was fired towards the balcony, but Morice stood unmoved whilst old Koustak stepped from the window to his side.

"Friends, friends," he shouted. "Ah! you are all mad. It is Monsieur le Marquis, our M'nsieur le Marquis."

But the words, which would have been magic a week ago, fell now on deaf ears.

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé."

The echo of the song rang out from the crowd.

They were in no listening and obedient mood just now.

Marcel Trouet's friends knew how to speak—and fever is infectious.

"Friends—ah! ah! foolish ones, listen——"

It was once more the piteous voice of old Koustak, but none heeded it.

They were crowding around the outer door.

"If they will but listen," groaned Jéhan de Quernais—"if only for a minute."

Michael nodded.

"They may do so yet."

"Not if they succeed in entering the Manor. Their mood is dangerous—and—if Trouet declares that Denningham is Varenac——"

"We shall not live long to prove the contrary."

"And there are the women."

Michael's eyes flashed.

"I had not forgotten."

"If they will but listen. Hark! Morice is trying again. With Koustak beside him it is possible that they may be persuaded."

"If he has time."

"We must make time. There is the courtyard."

"And the outer gate is strong. The Manor was not built yesterday."

"Shall we come?"

"Immediately."

Without another word the two young men turned and hurried downstairs.

There was a chance still for the Cause.

It was Gabrielle's brother who stood in peril; also Gabrielle herself.

Thus each thought, and drew their pistols as they ran.

The men of Varenac had not expected resistance.

The firing of pistols as two of the most enthusiastic of their number scaled the wall was something of a shock. Who were these new enemies?

Marcel Trouet did not answer the question, but, from a safer distance, screamed to good citizens to advance.

Once more the double report of firearms rang out from behind the ivy.

There was some heavy cursing amongst the crowd.

Aha! They were cunning, those two on the other side, but they did not know Varenac as Meldroc Tirais did. That crumbling corner near where the wood was stacked was unknown to them.

"Aux armes, citoyens."

But the shout of triumph came too soon. Back from the gate ran Michael Berrington, swift as sleuth-hound on its prey, with sword drawn.

There was fighting now, at gate and breach, rare fighting too, enough to warm the heart of any man.

And Michael was in fighting vein—the Irish blood in him saw to that—and the grimmer the work the merrier grew his mood.

Hotspur Mike he had been called at college, and Hotspur Mike was he, in very truth, that night.

A Breton peasant is no coward when the humour is on him, and his temper roused for the combat, so work there was in plenty for Michael's blade.

Surely the fairies must have kissed his eyelids—so his enemies swore, as they drew back for a moment—for this man seemed to see as well in the darkness as by day.

But the breach in the wall was growing—and Gabrielle was at Kérnak.

It was therefore no time for throwing away life, just because the fire of the fight ran lustily in his veins.

"Back! back!" cried Michael, in English, and, sword in hand, ran back himself across the courtyard, even as a dozen sturdy peasants flung themselves at a scramble over the wall.

Count Jéhan was not slow to obey the command, though he too had fought as la Rouerie's follower should fight.

"Fire! fire!" screamed Marcel Trouet, emptying his barrels into the darkness.

"Kill them—kill the vermin, before they run to ground. Mille diables! Kill them, vile aristos."

But pistols were few amongst his followers, and, though men started quickly enough in pursuit, Michael and his companion had reached the porch first, and made haste to slip heavy bars across the oaken door before their adversaries flung themselves, cursing and yelling, against it from without. The situation promised to be a desperate one.

All hope that the mob would listen to their new lord was gone.

Monsieur le Marquis had come too late. What therefore remained?

Little enough, save to die, crying, "Vive le roi," "Vive Bretagne" in the face of these murderers of king and country. So Count Jéhan thought.

But Michael found not the smallest consolation in such a prospect.

Life was strong in his veins,—life and love. It was not only for his own sake that that life was precious.

Gabrielle must be saved—and those other poor ladies of Kérnak.

But how could they be reached? How were they to save themselves?

Already the great crowd was surging about the door. Ere long they would be in the Manor itself,—and after that——? Michael did not look further.

He was half way up the stairs when he met Morice hurrying down with Pierre Koustak at his side.

The old man was crying bitterly, but Morice was calm. The reckless idler of Carlton House, with head crammed by fopperies and vanities, had been transformed into a man—and a Marquis de Varenac.

"We must escape," he said, pausing for a moment. "They will not listen. And ... and we should reach Kérnak without delay."

"But how?" Michael's voice sounded harsh enough.

A roar from without and the sound of cracking timber answered him.

"Dieu de Dieu!" moaned Koustak. "Hasten, Messieurs, or it will be too late."

He clung to Morice's hand as he spoke.

"Koustak knows of a secret passage which leads to the stables," explained Morice hurriedly. "We can ride to Kérnak."

"To Kérnak."

The relief in Michael's voice rang high.

"They will be in before we can reach it," muttered Count Jéhan. "Already——"

A crash completed the sentence.

But they were running now, all together.

"This way—this way, Messieurs," sobbed their guide, and tore aside a curtain.

A panel in the wall slipped back easily enough—one did not allow hinges to rust in the Brittany of those days—and soon they were groping their way down a dark, narrow passage.

Morice's heart beat fast. He was returning to Kérnak without shame. Even failure could not keep him from exulting over that thought.

He would be able to look little Cécile in the eyes,—to take her brother's hand.

Above them rose shouts and cries. The mob was searching the Manor. Afterwards they would swarm out again into the gardens—the stables.

At present they were occupied.

Click. Click.

A trap-door creaked, and the restless stamping of horse-hoofs proved welcome sound enough.

They had reached the stables of Varenac. But no moment must be lost, for they had a Trouet to reckon with besides these addle-pated peasants.

Already they were leading out the horses. Three of them,—for Koustak had declared that he must remain—his daughter Olérie was here, and he could never leave Varenac.

Shouts and yells told of fury and disappointment in the Manor close by.

Had they found their Citoyen yet?

A faint moonlight showed the fugitives a wild stretch of desolate moor and forest. Yonder lay Kérnak.

What was happening there?

It was the fearful question of each heart.

"Le jour de gloire est arrivé."

Dark forms were already seen hurrying from the house. Trouet had bethought himself of the stables.

It was time to be going.

Pierre Koustak was the first to urge it, even whilst he clung to the hand of a master whom he had been so ready to serve and love even before he knew him. But the Terror had come to Varenac, and there was no room there now for noble Marquises.

"Farewell—farewell."

It was a sad leave-taking for all; but those who rode away had less regret than he who stayed.

A flame of fire rose, leaping high in the air from an upper window of the old building.

Pierre Koustak's arms were around his daughter, but it was she who upheld him.

He had vowed never to leave Varenac, and soon there would be no Varenac left. Then it was time for him to be going too.

"Jesu, Maria, mercy! Monsieur le Marquis—farewell. Ah! he is already gone. Jesu! Maria!"

The grey head sank forward.

It was too heavy for Olérie to support. Gently she laid him on the ground, close to a clump of laurels. Trembling and weeping, she knelt over him.

Yes, she might well weep, but the tears should all be for herself.

The old man was smiling, his eyes closed; but no breath issued through the parted lips. Pierre Koustak would never leave Varenac now.

## CHAPTER XXX

### THE TERROR COMES TO KÉRNAK

"I love him. Oh, Gabrielle, I love him. And—and yet I bade him go to Varenac."

"You love Morice?"

Gabrielle's arm was round her cousin's slender waist as they sat together in the deep embrasure of a window overlooking the clustering heads of the oak-trees, which grew around the foot of the hillock on which the château stood, and away over the purple landes where the mist-wraiths of evening gathered.

"You love Morice?"

A pair of big, troubled eyes were raised to hers at the repetition of the words.

"Oh, yes, I love him, with all my heart, Gabrielle."

"With all your heart? But you have only known him these few short days."

Cécile sighed.

"Yet it is there," she whispered, laying her little hand over her heart. "I do not understand, for I have never loved before, but I think I loved him from the first moment he stood in the hall and told us that he was my cousin."

"And then you found——"

"Ah, yes—yes, the great cloud came, just when the sun was beginning to shine. But, though I despaired, love did not die, Gabrielle."

"Love cannot die, little cousin. It is for always."

"But it became bitter. Mother of Heaven! how bitter! You do not know the tears I shed—and the shame, when Jéhan told the story."

"And yet you loved him, even though he were a traitor?"

"Yes. But after all, he is no traitor, Gabrielle. He has gone to Varenac to prove it."

"Thank God for that."

"Thank God. Yes, that is easy to say; but supposing—supposing——"

"I will suppose nothing, dear Cécile. We are asking all the time that the good God will take care of those we love, and He will hear us."

"Holy Virgin, grant He may. Let us go on praying all the time. But you, Gabrielle, for you it is different. A brother——"

"He is my only one."

"So is Jéhan to me, and yet I do not think of him now."

The colour came rosily to Gabrielle's cheeks.

"There is one at Varenac who is more than brother to me," she whispered, plucking at the end of her fichu.

"A—a lover? Oh, Gabrielle, forgive me. I understand. It is the tall Monsieur with the dark face and grey eyes, which can look two things at once. And he——"

"He is at Varenac. Cécile, Cécile, God grant they may all come back in safety. I am afraid."

The two girls clung to each other, finding comfort in this new bond of sympathy.

"We will not be afraid," Cécile murmured in her cousin's ear. "We will ask le bon Dieu to guard them. See, it is getting dark—perhaps they will soon be back now. It is certain that the men of Varenac will listen to Morice and cry, 'Vive le roi,' and then others will take example and do the same, and Monsieur de la Rouerie will march at the head of his army into France to save the poor King and Queen, and put an end to the dreadful Revolution. Afterwards we shall all be happy."

It was the summing up of a child who knows nothing of the world, and even Gabrielle smiled at such a rose-coloured picture.

"That is a very charming dream," she replied, "and I would that we could see Michael and Morice riding over the heath to tell us that the first part is accomplished."

"Yes, and Jéhan. Poor Jéhan! I fear we forget him."

Gabrielle sighed.

"Poor Jéhan! Yes, and yet I think he will be quite happy if he can carry good news to this great hero of yours, the Marquis de la Rouerie."

"Ciel! It is true he is a hero. And so handsome. All the demoiselles of Brittany are in love with him; but Jéhan says his head is too full of the Royalist cause to think of women. Ah, Gabrielle, look! I believe it is a messenger."

As she spoke Cécile pushed open the casement, peering out into the gathering darkness.

Certainly it was some one who came in haste. Clattering steps in the courtyard and a panting cry told that.

"It is——?" murmured Gabrielle.

The two girls looked at each other.

"Jean Marie, one of the shepherds. He is a good boy, and—and promised to bring warning."

"Warning?"

"Of danger."

They were standing now, the cool evening air blowing in on them, setting stray curls fluttering.

Perhaps it was the snap of autumn chill that sent a shudder through Cécile's slender frame.

"Come," she said, holding out an impulsive hand to her cousin. "Let us go down and see what Madame Maman and the good father are talking about."

Lights were already kindled in the salon below. Madame de Quernais, seated near the fire, was conversing gravely with a little man in the brown habit of a Benedictine.

A little man with a round and kindly face, which reminded one of a russet apple long gathered.

He nodded smilingly to the two girls as they curtsied, whilst Madame bade them come nearer the fire, as they looked cold.

"It is certainly chilly," replied Père Mouet. "Henri Joustoc says it will be a winter of great severity. But I do not heed the croakers. Always take the days as they come, and leave the future to the bon Dieu. That is the secret of happiness."

The salon door was flung open most unceremoniously as he spoke, and in rushed Guillaume, the butler.

It was evident that the poor man was too excited to remember the ceremonies, on which both he and his mistress set such store.

"Ah! ah! M'd'me," he gasped. "Ah! ah! It is Jean Marie who brings news."

Madame de Quernais had risen—not hurriedly, but with all the grave dignity which was her birthright.

As for Père Mouet, he had already advanced to Guillaume's side.

"Peace, my son," he commanded gently. "You will alarm Mesdames. If there is news, it will be told more quickly if you compose yourself."

The quiet words certainly had a soothing effect on poor Guillaume, though his eyes continued to roll wildly.

"It is the Terror," he groaned. "Jean M'rie brought the news. There are men from Paris, men of Brittany, who come with evil tongues to bid our people rise and murder their masters. Ohé, they are very clever, clever as Monsieur Satan himself, and the fools listen to them. Already they cry, 'Vive la nation,' 'Vive la guillotine!' 'Vive liberté!'"

"Tsch, tsch," smiled Père Mouet, "their throats will soon get hoarse, and then they will drink and go to sleep. To-morrow, when they awake, I will talk to them."

"Ah, mon père," cried Guillaume, "they will not wait till to-morrow. That is why Jean M'rie came running at once with the news. Already they cry, 'À Varenac! À Kérnak!' They will be here to-night and will do the same as they did at Baud and Villerais."

Père Mouet glanced across towards Madame de Quernais.

If indeed the Terror were here it would be wise not to delay.

Madame still stood erect, her hand clasping the back of the chair, her powdered head held high.

If she had been alone she would certainly have defied these canaille with her last breath.

But there were the children.

Her proud lips quivered a little as she looked at Cécile, who stood near, with Gabrielle's hand locked in her own.

Yes, there must be no defiance.

"Take Jean Marie to the kitchen, Guillaume," she said, speaking very slowly and decidedly. "Give him some supper; also"—she drew a ring from her finger—"this souvenir of his mistress, with her best thanks. Perhaps one day I shall have opportunity of thanking and rewarding him

more befittingly."

The old butler bowed, took the ring in silence, and withdrew.

Instantly Madame turned to the others.

"We must lose no time; is that what you would say, father?" she asked abruptly.

Père Mouet nodded.

"Not a moment more than necessary, Madame," he replied. "It is quite likely that Count Jéhan may be at the cave before us. We must certainly not delay—for sake of these children."

He murmured the last words in a lower key.

"Make haste and put your cloaks on, mes enfants," Madame de Quernais said. "And the little bags are packed as I ordered? That is good. As we cannot take the servants we must be content with few things."

She stifled a sigh as she spoke, whilst only Père Mouet noted how her hands clenched and unclenched.

"There are many, daughter," he replied gently, "who can never sufficiently thank the good God if they escape with nothing but their lives."

"It is true, father. I will do penance for such rebellion. Nor will I tempt Providence with my complainings. Thank you, Cécile. At any rate I shall be warm. Come, we are all ready now."

She drew more closely round her the heavy, fur-lined cloak Cécile had brought, and herself opened the casement which led to the terrace and avenue.

In silence Père Mouet and the two girls followed her.

At that moment danger was too pressing—for Cécile at least—to feel acute pain at leaving her home.

The darkness without would have been intense had it not been for the moonlight, which but partially succeeded in piercing the misty gloom of the lande which stretched before them.

A long, weary walk it must be, though not one of the four who set out on it lacked courage. But what was happening at Varenac?

Who would they find awaiting them in the Cave of Lost Souls?

Those were the questions which stirred their pulses with growing dread.

It was well they had their cloaks, for it was cold enough here, facing the night wind across the bleak moors.

But they did not complain.

Keeping close together, they tramped on, Madame de Quernais walking out as bravely as any of them, disdaining proffered help over the uneven ground.

Presently a low exclamation from the priest brought them to a halt.

"Listen," he said in a whisper. "What is that?"

It was a question which grew easier to answer every second. There could be no mistaking the tramp, tramp of many feet, the shouts and cries of many voices.

The mob was on its way to the château.

"Allons, enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé,
Centre nous de la tyrannie
L'étendard sanglant est levé....
Aux armes, citoyens, formez vos bataillons;
Marchons, marchons!
Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons."

Nearer and clearer came the sounds, each word distinct as the song rose from many throats in growing tumult.

They learnt their lesson easily, after all, these Breton peasants.

"They are coming this way," said Madame de Quernais quietly.

"Alas! I fear it is true; but they may not see us. The mists protect us."

The wind is rising; it will blow the mists aside."

"Peace, my daughter. Have we not sought the protection of God? Have no fear."

"It is not for myself, father."

Madame's voice trembled a little.

"The lambs of the flock are in His special care. See, let us go forward—yonder."

As he spoke Père Mouet pointed to where, on a low hillock, a Calvary had been placed.

Over the head of the rugged rock, which had been hewn into a rough cross, hung a blackened crown of thorns.

Nearer and nearer came the trampling of feet, the sound of singing and shouting. The men of Kérnak had been drinking at the Golden Merman on their way hither.

It was the wine, quite as much as the words of Jean Floessel, which had made them red republicans that night.

Around the foot of the Calvary knelt the little group of fugitives—waiting.

"Aux armes, citoyens."

Torches flared, killing the white charm of the moonlight with their sickly rays.

"Aux armes——"

A burst of laughter, followed by fierce shouting, checked the song.

The men of Kérnak had come in sight of the Calvary, and those who now stood awaiting them there.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE CALVARY ON THE MOORS

"A cold night, Mesdames, for a walk. Your blood needs warming."

The mocking voice of their leader evoked another roar of laughter from the rest.

They were new to their role, those others, and Madame de Quernais had always been one to command much respect and awe as the great lady of the place. Now it was strange, and a little awe-inspiring, too, to see her standing there, facing them so quietly.

She did not seem afraid of the Terror, this Madame of theirs.

It was disappointing.

But Jean Floessel knew how to deal with vile aristos. He advanced with a swagger.

"Come," he jeered. "We're on our way to pay you a visit. It's a large party, but there's room enough at the château for all. It's absurd for three people to occupy so many apartments when we herd by the dozen in one. But there's an end to that now. Come, Citoyenne, you'll return with us, and we'll have a pleasant evening. If I mistake not, the little one there has a fine pair of eyes and a pretty mouth. Aha! we shall have amusement. And you'll be kind, my friends, if you're wise, or there's a citoyenne at St. Malo whose embrace is closer and colder than that of Jean Floessel, and less to your taste, I'll swear."

A hoarse shout of laughter greeted the sally.

After all, it was their day now, and, as Jean said, they would amuse themselves. There would be wine as well as dancing at the château.

It was at this moment that Père Mouet stepped forward.

A familiar little figure in brown habit, with a brown, kindly old face.

But, just now, the memories of the men of Kérnak were short.

"My children," he cried, raising his arm, "what is this? You would be led by this man into sin? I will not believe it of you. This is not Paris—it is not even France. It is Brittany—our Brittany. We of a good and noble land will not join hands with murderers; or what will le bon Dieu say to us,—He who guards and protects us in storm and gale, and who brings love and joy to our homes? Go back to those homes now, my children, and thank the blessed saints that you have been saved from crime."

A low murmur died away into silence.

Père Mouet spoke to his people's hearts.

A harsh laugh interrupted him.

"Be silent, old fool," shouted Jean Floessel, "or I will throttle your whinings in your throat. Malédiction! it's always the way of you priests to be greedy; but since there are three of them we can all have our share of the kisses."

He looked round, expecting the coarse jest to meet with applause. But none came. The men of Kérnak were thinking.

"Silence!" cried Père Mouet sternly, raising his hand again. "See you not where we stand, fellow? Beware lest Heaven shrivel your foul tongue in your throat in punishment. Repent you of your evil ways ere it is too late, and the fires of Purgatory chastise you for your sins."

Again the murmur rose from the crowd.

Religion and superstition were too deeply imbedded in these Breton peasants to be easily uprooted. Already fear of the Church's anathema was at work in their hearts.

But Jean Floessel had been in Paris. He had learnt things there—amongst others how to forget the early lessons his mother had taught him.

He was not afraid of curse or Purgatory. With a scream of rage he flung himself forward with hand outstretched to strike the old man standing there so fearlessly before him.

But one of the peasants—a brawny fisherman of the coast, caught him by the collar, dragging him back.

Père Mouet was ready to follow up his advantage.

"My children," he cried. "Ah, my children, you will listen to me. You will return to your homes and pray God and His dear saints to keep you in peace from all the madness and evil of these terrible days."

His voice broke off, quavering with emotion, but the crowd answered by a sigh—a long sigh as of waves receding from impregnable cliffs back into the deep.

Here and there a woman sobbed and a man muttered prayer or oath. They were remembering how this Père Mouet had indeed a right to call them his children; for had he not been a father to them these forty years and more?

One recalled how he sat up three nights with little Gaston when he had the fever, another of the prayers he offered without payment for the soul of the poor Louis who died unshriven last autumn. Then how good he had been when bad days came during the winter. Père Mouet had been the only one who had a cheery word then, always cheery, always helpful, always ready to nurse a sick one, or get food for a hungry one. As for the children, there was not one in Kérnak who did not adore him.

And now what were they doing?

That was the question many put to themselves, and hung their heads in very shame for answer. But Jean Floessel was quick to see the way in which the wind was blowing.

Nom d'un chien! Was he to have all his eloquence and exertions wasted because these fools were ready to listen to one old man?

Bah! they had also learnt how to deal with priests in Paris.

In an instant he had thrust his hand within his blouse.

Ah, ah! It was so sudden that not even great Gourmel Tenoit, who had him by the coat, could see what he was about.

A click, a flash, a loud report, followed by a shriek from the women.

But Père Mouet did not cry out, though the bullet winged its way straight enough to its mark. Only he staggered a little, threw up both arms, and then sank back upon the ground, at the very foot of the Calvary, his head resting against the rough rock.

It was a terrible silence that followed pistol-shot and screams.

Madame de Quernais was on her knees beside the fallen man; all eyes were upon her.

Presently she rose.

"He is dead," she said, and her voice, low and dull at first, became shrill as she repeated the words "He is dead."

A picture to be remembered, that, by more than one who stood there.

The desolate stretch of moor with its tangle of briar, thistle, and patches of purple heather; the mists broken and fleeing before the rising wind; the smoking glare of torches on the outskirts of the crowd, and the pale glory of moonlight streaming down unmarred upon the great rough-hewn cross, emblem of suffering and death, with its blackened crown of thorns telling its tale of love and victory immortal; whilst below, gathered round the little hillock, the three women, two girls clinging together, yet erect and dauntless, whilst the third knelt by the prostrate figure of the dead man.

Moonbeams fell on Madame's silver hair, from which the heavy wrap had slipped back; they fell too, on the wrinkled, kindly face of Père Mouet.

So small, so helpless he looked lying there, yet never had he been so powerful. No wonder that he was smiling—the glad, sweet smile of one who had gone straight from his life-task to meet the Bridegroom.

But the life-work was not over, even though the worn old hands, which had always been so ready for any labour of love, were stiffening now in death.

The great crowd, gathered round, was swaying first one way, then another. Père Mouet was dead! Père Mouet was dead! Yonder stood his murderer.

They were honest men, after all, these humble peasants of Brittany.

Père Mouet, and the relentless antagonism of the sea, had taught them to fear God. If they had forgotten, in a sudden burst of mad excitement and intoxication, they were remembering with quick and sharpened stabs of conscience.

And Père Mouet was dead!

Madame was telling them so, even now, whilst she stood like some accusing spirit before them. Alone, but fearless, telling them this dread news.

Père Mouet dead! They were realizing it—to the cost of Jean Floessel.

With a yell they would have flung themselves upon him, but Jean had already seen his danger.

If fools must be fools, it was time for wise men to escape.

Wrenching himself free from Gourmel's slackened grasp, he dived under the big man's arm and set off at full speed across the lande.

He must reach Varenac and Marcel Trouet. But the men of Kérnak were of another mind.

The tide had turned.

It was no longer "À bas les aristocrats," "Vive la nation!" but the howl of men who seek vengeance.

Floessel heard the howl, and it added wings to his feet.

The blockheads! the fools! All this outcry because one insignificant priest had been killed! Why! they died like flies in Paris. He himself had been a cursed idiot ever to leave that glorious city.

And behind him came the avengers of Père Mouet.

He ran well—-that Jean Floessel—for over a mile, stumbling, sweating, cursing, whilst anger gave way to growing fear.

And he had reason to fear, for behind him ran Gourmel Tenoit, whose little lad had been nursed back to life by the good priest of Kérnak, and beside him was Blaise Fermat, who owed wife and happiness to the same kindly influence.

They caught Jean Floessel just by the great rock where three brave Breton soldiers lie buried, and where the fairies visit the dead on moonlit nights and talk to them. Yes, they caught him there, and he had not even time to cry "Vive la nation!" ...

Those two were happier as they walked home together, leaving behind them a limp and hideous thing, face downwards amongst the heather.

But many wept that night in Kérnak as they whispered Père Mouet's name in their prayers.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### "MICHAEL! MICHAEL!"

They were alone.

Those three helpless women standing together under the shadow of the Calvary beside their dead. The crowd had gone. Some in pursuit of Floessel, others drifting away, shamed and frightened, as you have seen whipped curs creep back to their kennels.

Here and there a woman had stolen near to the little group, sobbing out a petition for pardon; but most of them had gone silently, with doubt and fear in their hearts.

Père Mouet had bidden them return to their homes, and, at this moment, Père Mouet's commands were powerful.

So they went—regretfully, perhaps,—when they thought of the château, and the fine night's plunder and amusement they had promised themselves, but hurriedly when they remembered the woman who stood, crying, scornfully and accusingly, to them that their good priest was dead—murdered.

But it was possible they would come back. Cowed they might be, but they were dangerous still.

None knew that better than Madame.

They had tasted the sweets of momentary power. They had cried "Vive la nation!"

They would cry it again at the bidding of another Floessel.

"We must not delay," she said, speaking very quietly, yet with a great effort; "it is still far to the cave."

"To the cave! You will leave the good father, Madame Maman?"

Cécile's voice was reproachful.

"He needs no more of our care, my child," replied her mother gravely. "Nor could we leave him in a more fitting resting-place."

She crossed herself reverently as she spoke, bending over the little figure in its brown habit; such a little shrunken figure it looked, but the smile transfigured a wrinkled, care-worn old face into a strangely majestic beauty.

Yes, Père Mouet would sleep well under the shadow of the cross.

They left him there, resting so peacefully after a very hard and lonely life, and the moonbeams, falling softly on his closed eyelids, seemed to kiss away the deep lines of care and sorrow, which he had borne so bravely, and leave only beauty behind. The night-wind sang his requiem as it swept wailing over the moors. It might rather have been the lament of many in Kérnak, who that night had lost a friend.

* * * * *

It was, indeed, a long and weary walk to the coast.

Yet none of the three travellers who wended their way across the moor complained.

It was the inevitable, which must be conquered by resignation.

Yet at last they paused to look around them and wonder, in but half-framed whispers, whether they were coming the right way.

Père Mouet was an unerring guide; without him difficulties presented themselves more forcibly every moment.

It was no easy task, indeed, to keep to a right track across that almost trackless lande.

Gorse-bushes made but poor landmarks, and there were neither trees nor hillocks near to guide them.

It was true that the coast lay before them, but this cave would be hard to find if they had gone out of their path in approaching it.

Had it not been for the moonlight they would have despaired. As it was, they gazed around in bewilderment and anxiety. Behind them lay the forest. Beyond that—Varenac.

Ah! what was happening at Varenac? Another question to torment them!

Again, it was possible that the others had already reached the cave. If so, in what apprehension they would be waiting!

At any rate they must press forward. Enemies might overtake them at any moment. The persuasions of Floessel or his fellows might again incite the peasants to pursue them, and they had walked but slowly.

Hark! Listen! The muffled thud, thud, of horse-hoofs coming from the left.

The wind had dropped and mists were gathering again. They could not pierce those dark shadows, strain their eyes as they might.

Yet horsemen were coming towards them across the moors.

Could it be those who had gone to Varenac?

It seemed impossible, since they came from the direction of Kérnak.

Who could it be then?

Marcel Trouet and Lord Denningham.

That was Gabrielle's instant thought as she clung to Cécile's hand.

Yes, it would be those two. They were pursuing them, they would find them.

Instinct had long since told Gabrielle what Lord Denningham's feelings towards her were. She already vaguely guessed his intentions.

But she would die sooner than marry him. Oh! it would be easy to die, rather than that.

And he had ridden to, and from, Kérnak now to find her.

She was convinced of it.

But what should they do?

Where hide?

Not even a gorse-bush near, and the horse-hoofs were approaching quickly. Through the mists she would soon see her enemy appear, and then what escape would be possible?

Her fears were the fears of her companions, though theirs were vaguer, wrought more from strained nerves than knowledge. Yet what could they do?

A block of granite rocks, leaning one against the other, formed the only shelter within sight.

It was thither they fled, Madame leaning heavily against them, for exhaustion had well-nigh conquered courage.

So they crouched, whilst Cécile whispered to Gabrielle that, if those who came were Breton born, they might be safe enough.

"Safe?" murmured Gabrielle, cowering low. "Nay, a little search and they must find us."

"They will not think of searching. These are the haunted stones of the Breton landes. Have you never heard? The fairies and dwarfs hide their treasures here—so the ignorant say—and if any approach they are destroyed. But hush, these—these perhaps are——"

"From Varenac."

"Nay, nay! not from Varenac."

"Not those we need? But I have enemies there."

"You——?"

Cécile broke off, slipping her arm round her mother. Madame de Quernais, weak with exhaustion, was battling against growing faintness.

"Mother of Heaven, pity," prayed the girl.

"Merciful God, hear us," moaned Gabrielle.

Through the mists loomed the outline of three horses and their riders.

Gigantic shadows at first, indefinable to those cowering behind the boulders. But they were plainer now; the moonlight, though waning, showed them more than mere outline.

The sound of voices, crying to each other, struck sharply on listening ears, and were answered in glad echoes.

"Michael, Michael!"

"Morice! Ah, ciel! it is they! it is they!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE CAVE OF LOST SOULS

If the riders paused to ask whence the cries came it was only for an instant. The next they were on the ground beside those who stood, laughing, sobbing, thanking Heaven, and crying welcome in a breath.

Was it possible? All safe. *All*.

Thank God for that! Again and again thank God.

At first it was Madame who required all their attention.

Joy, following the cruel strain of those past hours, had been too much for her, and she fainted with Jéhan's strong arms around her. But she revived shortly, for the hour of weakness must be put off yet again.

The danger was not over.

Marcel Trouet would see to that. By this time, doubtless, he had joined forces with some of his other friends from Paris, perhaps with Jean Floessel himself.

There had been delay in their ride from Varenac, since they had gone first to Kérnak, where Guillaume had kept them with a long-winded story of the flight.

And then they had passed the Calvary.

Michael's arm was close around Gabrielle, whilst Jéhan de Quernais' voice faltered as he spoke of their great fear and dread when they found the body of Père Mouet.

They had hesitated, indeed, as to whether they should not return to Kérnak at once, convinced that those they sought had been made prisoners.

Finally, however, they decided to ride quickly to the cave and return to the château if their search were in vain.

But it had not been in vain.

God be thanked for that!

It was a moment of emotion, not of convention.

That was why Cécile clung to Morice with no thought but that the man she loved had come back to her from the shadow of death.

And he could look down into her eyes without shame.

After all, Morice Conyers owed something to the Red Revolution. It had made a man of him.

The moment of a man's reward is sweet.

Yet he took it humbly, bending to kiss the small, upturned face with a reverence which no woman had ever inspired in him before.

And she smiled into his eyes with a frank avowal of love returned, unmarred by any veiled doubt.

In times less perilous he might have found his wooing as long by months as it had been short by days. But fear and danger had swept aside the hundred and one conventions which clustered burr-like around a demoiselle of the old school.

And Gabrielle?

She, too, had her lover, the lover she had chosen from childhood, her loyal knight for ever and ever.

Thus she had claimed and held him.

They belonged to each other, these two. She did not even question so old a fact. And her fears for him made her kinder even than she might have been, for Gabrielle was more woman than babe, and not averse—at times—to the kindling of jealous flame for the sake of listening to fresh vows of love.

But this was no time for jest. Love in such garb as theirs was too sacred a thing for sport or coquetry, though she could smile as she looked up at him.

"We are safe now," she whispered contentedly. "But, oh, Michael, I feared it was Lord Denningham."

"No," he answered gravely. "*He* at least will trouble you no more."

"Dead?"

Her tone was awe-struck.

"Yes. It was a duel. I killed him."

She drew a deep breath.

Even though she hated Lord Denningham she knew he had loved her—and a woman's hatred of a lover is ever a partial one.

"Yes, I was afraid of him," she mused, and shuddered. "I am afraid altogether," she cried piteously. "Oh, Michael, let us go home."

She stretched out her hands to him, and he took her tenderly enough in his arms. But it was a moment to be more practical than sentimental.

"They may reach the coast before us," he said, looking from her to Jéhan de Quernais. "We should not delay."

The Count nodded.

"It is true," said he. "We must not delay."

The waning moonlight was playing them false, even as he spoke.

Shadows, deepening around, would have confused clearer heads than theirs.

Yes, it was time they reached the coast. Had they not left it all too late already?

Shouts from the right, where Varenac village lay hidden by a downward sweep of the moor, told them that Marcel Trouet was not minded to be outwitted.

Trackers or spies might have guessed where they rode. At any rate, it was certain that the pursuit was being persevered in,—would be persevered in to the last.

But the shouts gave them warning.

A warning not to be disregarded.

Those who hastened towards the Cave of Lost Souls did not waste time in conversation.

A desolate and gloomy shelter. Well-named, indeed. Moaning winds whistled and sobbed through crevices in the great rocks which hemmed in the cave on each side.

No wonder that the peasantry, steeped in superstition, believed that this was fitting place for lost and wandering souls.

How vividly they could picture dead faces peering from out of the dark clefts, dead mouths uttering their unceasing cries against the fate which had closed for ever the gates of Paradise, dead eyes staring into each other's depths in startled horror, or away over the grey waste of waters ever roaring hungrily for more victims.

Even Cécile shuddered, crossing herself as she stood on the sandy shore, listening to the eerie sobbing of wind and waves, and watched how dying moonbeams shed ghostly patches of

light in dark, deserted corners.

But Morice's arm still encircled her, and there was no wavering or weakness in the blue eyes which looked down into hers.

She had cried to him for protection, and manhood, ready armed, had sprung to lusty life within him at the appeal.

"You will trust me, sweetheart?" he asked her, and his voice shook a little over the question in humble self-distrust.

Her smile destroyed all doubt.

What matter that she left home and country behind in the mists of night? Before her lay love and the dawn of a new day.

"With my life, Morice," she whispered, nestling close to his side with the confidence of a trustful child.

But Gabrielle stood nearer to the shore, the waves almost lapping her feet, whilst flaky fragments of spume fluttered against her cloak.

The boats rocked softly to and fro as the waters rose and fell beneath them. Madame de Quernais was already seated in the prow of the larger craft.

It was time to go.

Michael had taken the girl's hand in his, and, though it lay warm and restful there, she was stretching out the other to Count Jéhan, who stood apart.

"You are coming too, my cousin?" she said gently, for instinct told her of a lonely heart beating near hers that night.

The light fell on her fair face and uncovered head. Stray curls lay in pretty disorder in the arch of her neck and across a white forehead. Hazel eyes, sweet and true, looked kindly into the pale face opposite her own.

Count Jéhan drew himself up proudly.

None should ever know the pain which racked him as he looked at her.

She was not his—never would be his. Did not Michael Berrington hold her hand—her heart?

So love must be buried at birth, and, if he must rise again, it should be only as some tender, shadowy ghost, which, though sweet to gaze at, could never be held in mortal arms.

Yes, love must hide from sight.

But Brittany remained.

So Count Jéhan held his head high as he made answer, sternly and quietly, thinking—poor fool—that none guessed his secret, least of all the woman who looked so wistfully into his eyes.

"La Rouerie calls me his friend," said he, "and Brittany her son. As friend and son I remain on Breton soil.

"As for the Cause, it will never die till la Rouerie breathes his last. And so Heaven bless and hold you all in its fair keeping till we meet in happier times."

He smiled, making light of the parting as though he went to some merry fête.

Nor would he let his mother weep, or Cécile cling around his neck.

"For Brittany and the Cause," he cried, laughing gaily as the boats glided out at last into the deepest waters of the bay.

"For Brittany and the Cause—we'll cry that in Paris ere long."

He waved his handkerchief as he spoke, and, though the shadows fell around him, they could hear the glad ring of triumph in his voice.

But only Gabrielle, as she clung to Michael's side, in the great joy of reunion and hope, knew that Count Jéhan de Quernais went back with empty, aching heart to a lost cause.

Yet youth is selfish, and love is sweet.

"My true knight for ever and ever," she whispered, and laid a happy head on Michael's shoulder.

There was no room in her heart just then for aught but sweet content.

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