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HOUSE OF TORMENT

**A Tale of the Remarkable Adventures of
MR. JOHN COMMENDONE
Gentleman to King Philip II of Spain at the English Court**

By C. RANGER-GULL

Author of "The Serf," etc.

**NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1911**

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RAHWAY, N. J.**

DEDICATION TO DAVID WHITELAW

SOUVENIR OF A LONG FRIENDSHIP

My dear David,

Since I first met you, considerably more than a decade ago, in a little studio high up in a great London building, we have both seen much water flow under the bridges of our lives.

We have all sorts of memories, have we not?

Late midnights and famishing morrows, in the gay hard days when we were endeavouring to climb the ladder of our Art; a succession of faces, a welter of experiences. Some of us fell in the struggle; others failed and still haunt the reprobate purlieus of Fleet Street and the Strand! There was one who achieved a high and delicate glory before he died—"Tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se casse."

There is another who is slowly and surely finding his way to a certainty of fame.

And the rest of us have done something, if not—as yet—all we hoped to do. At any rate, the slopes of the first hills lie beneath us. We are in good courage and resolute for the mountains.

The mist eddies and is spiralled below in the valleys from which we have come, but already we are among the deep sweet billows of the mountain winds, and I think it is because we have both found our "Princess Galvas" that we have got this far upon the way.

We may never stand upon the summit and find that tempest of fire we call the Sun full upon us. But the pleasure of going on is ours still—there will always be that.

*Ever your friend,
C. RANGER-GULL.*

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[Pg 1]

CHAPTER I

IN THE QUEEN'S CLOSET; THE FOUR FACES

Sir Henry Commendone sat upon an oak box clamped with bands of iron and watched his son completing his morning toilette.

"And how like you this life of the Court, John?" he said.

The young man smoothed out the feather of his tall cone-shaped hat. "Truly, father," he answered, "in respect of itself it seems a very good life, but in respect that it is far from the fields and home it is naught. But I like it very well. And I think I am likely to rise high. I am now attached to the King Consort, by the Queen's pleasure. His Highness has spoken frequently with me, and I have my commission duly written out as *caballerizo*."

"I never could learn Spanish," the elder man replied, wagging his head. "Father Chilches tried to teach me often of an afternoon when you were hawking. What does the word mean in essence?"

"Groom of the body, father—equerry. It is doubtless because I speak Spanish that it hath been

given me."

"Very like, Johnnie. But since the Queen, God bless her, has come to the throne, and England is reconciled to Holy Church, thou wert bound to get a post at Court. They could not ignore our name. I wrote to the Bishop of London myself, he placed my request before the Queen's Grace, and hence thou art here and in high favour."

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The young man smiled. "Which I shall endeavour to keep," he answered. "And now I must soon go to the Queen's lodging. I am in attendance on King Philip."

"And I to horse with my men at noon and so home to Kent. I am glad to have seen thee, Johnnie, in thy new life, though I do not love London and the Court. But tell me of the Queen's husband. The neighbours will all want news of him. It's little enough they like the Spanish match in Kent. Give me a picture of him."

"I have been at Court a month," John Commendone answered, "and I have learned more than one good lesson. There is a Spanish saying that runs this way, '*Palabras y plumas viento las Heva*' (Words and feathers are carried far by the wind). I will tell you, father, but repeat nothing again. Kent is not far away, and I have ambition."

Sir Henry chuckled. "Prudent lad," he said; "thou art born to be about a palace. I'll say nothing."

"Well then, here is your man, a pedant and a fool, a stickler for little trifles, a very child for detail. Her Grace the Queen and all the nobles speak many languages. Every man is learned now. His Highness speaks but Spanish, though he has a little French. Never did I see a man with so small a mind, and yet he thinks he can see deep down into men's hearts and motives, and knows all private and public affairs."

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Sir John whistled. He plucked at one of the roses of burnt silver embroidered upon the doublet of green tissue he was wearing—the gala dress which he had put on for his visit to Court, a garment which was a good many years behind the fashion, but thought most elegant by his brother squires in Kent.

"So!" he said, "then this match will prove as bad for the country as all the neighbours are saying. Still, he is a good Catholic, and that is something."

John nodded carelessly. "More so," he replied, "than is thought becoming to his rank and age by many good Catholics about the Court. He is as regular at mass, sermons, and vespers as a monk—hath a leash of friars to preach for his instruction, and disputes in theology with others half the night till Her Grace hath to send one of her gentlemen to bid him come to bed."

"Early days for that," said the Kentish gentleman, "though, in faith, the Queen is thirty-eight and ___"

John started. "Whist!" he said. "I'm setting you an evil example, sir. Long ears abound in the Tower. I'll say no more."

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"I'm mum, Johnnie," Sir Henry replied. "I'll break in upon thee no more. Get on with thy tale."

"'Tis a bargain then, sir, and repeat nothing I tell you. I was saying about His Highness's religion. He consults Don Diego Deza, a Dominican who is his confessor, most minutely as to all the actions of life, inquiring most anxiously if this or that were likely to burden his conscience. And yet—though Her Grace suspects nothing—he is of a very gross and licentious temper. He hath issued forth at night into the city, disguised, and indulged himself in the common haunts of vice. I much fear me that he will command me to go with him on some such expedition, for he begins to notice me more than any others of the English gentlemen in his company, and to talk with me in the Spanish tongue...."

The elder man laughed tolerantly.

"Every man to his taste," he said; "and look you, Johnnie, a prince is wedded for state reasons, and not for love. The ox hath his bow, the falcon his bells, and as pigeon's bill man hath his desire and would be nibbling!"

John Commendone drew himself up to his full slim height and made a motion of disgust.

"'Tis not my way," he said. "Bachelor, I hunt no fardingales, nor would I do so wedded."

"God 'ild you, Johnnie. Hast ever taken a clean and commendable view of life, and I love thee for it. But have charity, get you charity as you grow older. His Highness is narrow, you tell me; be not so yourself. Thou art not a little pot and soon hot, but I think thou wilt find a fire that will thaw thee at Court. A young man must get experience. I would not have thee get through the streets with a bragging look nor frequent the stews of town. But young blood must have its May-day. Whilst can, have thy May-day, Johnnie. Have thy door shadowed with green birches, long fennel, St. John's wort, orphine, and white lilies. Wilt not be always young. But I babble; tell me more of King Philip."

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The tall youth had stood silent while his father spoke, his grave, oval face set in courteous attention. It was a coarse age. Henry the Eighth was not long dead, and the scandals of his court and life influenced all private conduct. That Queen Mary was rigid in her morals went for very little. The Lady Elizabeth, still a young girl, was already committing herself to a course of life which—despite the historians of the popular textbooks—made her court in after years as

licentious as ever her father's had been. Old Sir Henry spoke after his kind, and few young men in 1555 were so fastidious as John Commendone.

He welcomed the change in conversation. To hear his father—whom he dearly loved—speak thus, was most distasteful to him.

"His Highness is a glutton for work," the young man went on. "I see him daily, and he is ever busy with his pen. He hateth to converse upon affairs of state, but will write a letter eighteen pages long when his correspondent is in the next room, howbeit the subject is one which a man of sense would settle in six words of the tongue. Indeed, sir, he is truly of opinion that the world is to move upon protocols and apostilles. Events must not be born without a preparatory course of his obstetrical pedantry! Never will he learn that the world will not rest on its axis while he writeth directions of the way it is to turn."

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Sir Henry shook himself like a dog.

"And the Queen mad for such a husband as this!" he said.

"Aye, worships him as it were a saint in a niche. A skilled lutanist with a touch on the strings remarkable for its science, speaking many languages with fluency and grace, Latin in especial, Her Grace yet thinks His Highness a great statesman and of a polished easy wit."

"How blind is love, Johnnie! blinder still when it cometh late. A cap out of fashion and ill-worn. 'Tis like one of your French withered pears. It looks ill and eats dryly."

"I was in the Queen's closet two days gone, in waiting on His Highness. A letter had come from Paris, narrating how a member of the Spanish envoy's suit to that court had been assassinated. The letter ran that the manner in which he had been killed was that a Jacobin monk had given him a pistol-shot in the head—'*la façon que l'on dit qu'il a été tué, sa été par un Jacobin qui luy a donné d'un cou de pistolle dans la tayte.*' His Highness took up his pen and scrawled with it upon the margin. He drew a line under one word '*pistolle*'; 'this is perhaps some kind of knife,' quoth he; 'and as for "*tayte*," it can be nothing else but head, which is not *tayte*, but *tête* or *teyte*, as you very well know.' And, father, the Queen was all smiles and much pleased with this wonderful commentary!"

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Sir Henry rose.

"I will hear no more," he said. "It is time I went. You have given me much food for thought. Fare thee well, Johnnie. Write me letters with thy doings when thou canst. God bless thee."

The two men stood side by side, looking at each other in silence, one hale and hearty still, but with his life drawing to its close, the other in the first flush of early manhood, entering upon a career which promised a most brilliant future, with every natural and material advantage, either his already, or at hand.

They were like and yet unlike.

The father was big, burly, iron-grey of head and beard, with hooked nose and firm though simple eyes under thick, shaggy brows.

John was of his father's height, close on six feet. He was slim, but with the leanness of perfect training and condition. Supple as an eel, with a marked grace of carriage and bearing, he nevertheless suggested enormous physical strength. The face was a pure oval with an olive tinge in the skin, the nose hooked like his sire's, the lips curved into a bow, but with a singular graveness and strength overlying and informing their delicacy. The eyes, of a dark brown, were inscrutable. Steadfast in regard, with a hint of cynicism and mockery in them, they were at the same time instinct with alertness and a certain watchfulness. He seemed, as he stood in his little room in the old palace of the Tower, a singularly handsome, clever, and capable young man, but a man with reservations, with secrets of character which no one could plumb or divine.

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He was the only son of Sir Henry Commendone and a Spanish lady of high birth who had come to England in 1512 to take a position in the suite of Catherine of Arragon, three years after her marriage to Henry VIII. During the early part of Henry's reign Sir Henry Commendone was much at Windsor and a personal friend of the King. Those were days of great brilliancy. The King was young, courteous, and affable. His person was handsome, he was continually engaged in martial exercises and all forms of field sports. Sir Henry was one of the band of gay youths who tilted and hawked or hunted in the Great Park. He fell in love with the beautiful young Juanita de Senabria, married her with the consent and approbation of the King and Queen, and immediately retired to his manors in Kent. From that time forward he took absolutely no part in politics or court affairs. He lived the life of a country squire of his day in serene health and happiness. His wife died when John—the only issue of the marriage—was six years old, and the boy was educated by Father Chilches, a placid and easy-going Spanish priest, who acted as domestic chaplain at Commendone. This man, loving ease and quiet, was nevertheless a scholar and a gentleman. He had been at the court of Charles V, and was an ideal tutor for Johnnie. His religion, though sincere, sat easily upon him. The Divorce from Rome did not draw him from his calm retreat, the oath enforcing the King's supremacy had no terrors for him, and he died at a good old age in 1548, during the protectorate of Somerset.

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From this man Johnnie had learnt to speak Spanish, Italian, and French. Naturally quick and intelligent, he had added something of his mother's foreign grace and self-possession to the

teachings and worldly-wisdom of Don Chilches, while his father had delighted to train him in all manly exercises, than whom none was more fitted to do.

Sir Henry became rich as the years went on, but lived always as a simple squire. Most of his land was pasturage, then far more profitable than the growing of corn. Tillage, with no knowledge of the rotation of crops, no turnip industry to fatten sheep, miserable appliances and entire ignorance of manures, afforded no interest on capital. But the export of wool and broadcloth was highly profitable, and Sir Henry's wool was paid for in good double ryals by the manufacturers and merchants of the great towns.

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John Commendone entered upon his career, therefore, with plenty of money—far more than any one suspected—a handsome person, thoroughly accomplished in all that was necessary for a gentleman of that day.

In addition, his education was better than the general, he was without vices, and, in the present reign, the consistent Catholicity of his house recommended him most strongly to the Queen and her advisers.

"So God 'ild ye, Johnnie. Come not down the stairs with me. Let us make farewell here and now. I go to the Constable's to leave my duty, and then to take a stirrup-cup with the Lieutenant. My serving-men and horses are waiting at the south of White Tower at Coal Harbour Gate. Farewell."

The old man put his arms in their out-moded bravery round his son and kissed him on both cheeks. He hugged like a bear, and his beard was wiry and strong against the smooth cheeks of his son. Then coughing a little, he almost imperceptibly made the sign of the cross, and, turning, clanked away, his sword ringing on the stone floor and his spurs—for he wore riding-boots of Spanish leather—clicking in unison.

John was left alone.

He sat down upon the low wooden bed and gazed at the chest where the knight had been sitting. The little room, with its single window looking out upon the back offices of the palace, seemed strangely empty, momentarily forlorn. Johnnie sighed. He thought of the woods of Commendone, of the old Tudor house with its masses of chimneys and deep-mullioned windows—of all that home-life so warm and pleasant; dawn in the park with the deer cropping wet, silver grass, the whistle of the wild duck as they flew over the lake, the garden of rosemary, St. John's wort, and French lavender, which had been his mother's.

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Then, stifling a sigh, he sprang to his feet, buckled on his sword—the fashionable "whiffle"-shaped weapon with globular pommel and the quillons of the guard ornamented in gold—and gave a glance at a little mirror hung upon the wall. By no means vain, he had a very careful taste in dress, and was already considered something of a dandy by the young men of his set.

He wore a doublet of black satin, slashed with cloth of silver; and black velvet trunks trussed and tagged with the same. His short cloak was of cloth of silver lined with blue velvet pounced with his cypher, and it fell behind him from his left shoulder.

He smoothed his small black moustache—for he wore no beard—set his ruff of two pleats in order, and stepped gaily out of his room into a long panelled corridor, a very proper young man, taut, trim, and *point device*.

There were doors on each side of the corridor, some closed, some ajar. A couple of serving-men were hastening along it with ewers of water and towels. There was a hum and stir down the whole length of the place as the younger gentlemen of the Court made their toilettes.

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From one door a high sweet tenor voice shivered out in song—

"Filz de Venus, voz deux yeux desbendez
Et mes ecrits lisez et entendez..."

"That's Mr. Ambrose Cholmondely," Johnnie nodded to himself. "He has a sweet voice. He sang in the sextette with Lady Bedingfield and Lady Paget last night. A sweet voice, but a fool! Any girl—or dame either for that matter—can do what she likes with him. He travels fastest who travels alone. Master Ambrose will not go far, pardieu, nor travel fast!"

He came to the stair-head—it was a narrow, open stairway leading into a small hall, also panelled. On the right of the hall was a wide, open door, through which he turned and entered the common-room of the gentlemen who were lodged in this wing of the palace.

The place was very like the senior common-room of one of the more ancient Oxford colleges, wainscoted in oak, and with large mullioned windows on the side opposite to a high carved fire-place.

A long table ran down the centre, capable of seating thirty or forty people, and at one end was a beaufet or side-board with an almost astonishing array of silver plate, which reflected the sunlight that was pouring into the big, pleasant room in a thousand twinkling points of light.

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It was an age of silver. The secretary to Francesco Capella, the Venetian Ambassador to London,

writes of the period: "There is no small innkeeper, however poor and humble he may be, who does not serve his table with silver dishes and drinking cups; and no one who has not in his house silver plate to the amount of at least £100 sterling is considered by the English to be a person of any consequence. The most remarkable thing in London is the quantity of wrought silver."

The gentlemen about the Queen and the King Consort had their own private silver, which was kept in this their common messroom, and was also supplemented from the Household stores.

Johnnie sat down at the table and looked round. At the moment, save for two serving-men and the pantler, he was alone. Before him was the silver plate and goblet he had brought from Commendone, stamped with his crest and motto, "*Sapere aude et tace.*" He was hungry, and his eye fell upon a dish of perch in foyle, one of the many good things upon the table.

The pantler hastened up.

"The carpes of venison are very good this morning, sir," he said confidentially, while one serving-man brought a great piece of manchet bread and another filled Johnnie's flagon with ale.

"I'll try some," he answered, and fell to with a good appetite.

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Various young men strolled in and stood about, talking and jesting or whispering news of the Court, calling each other by familiar nicknames, singing and whistling, examining a new sword, cursing the amount of their tailors' bills—as young men have done and will do from the dawn of civilisation to the end.

John finished his breakfast, crossed himself for grace, and, exchanging a remark or two here and there, went out of the room and into the morning sunshine which bathed the old palace of the Tower in splendour.

How fresh the morning air was! how brilliant the scene before him!

To his right was the Coal Harbour Gate and the huge White Tower. Two Royal standards shook out in the breeze, the Leopards of England and blazoned heraldry of Spain, with its tower of gold upon red for Castile, the red and yellow bars of Arragon, the red and white checkers of Burgundy, and the spread-eagle sable of Sicily.

To the left was that vast range of halls and galleries and gardens which was the old palace, now utterly swept away for ever. The magnificent pile of brick and timber known as the Queen's gallery, which was the actual Royal lodging, was alive and astir with movement. Halberdiers of the guard were stationed at regular distances upon the low stone terrace of the façade, groups of officers went in and out of the doors, already some ladies were walking in the privy garden among the parterres of flowers, brilliant as a window of stained glass. The gilding and painted blazonry on the great hall built by Henry III glowed like huge jewels.

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On the gravel sweep before the palace grooms and men-at-arms were holding richly caparisoned horses, and people were continually coming up and riding away, their places to be filled by new arrivals.

It is almost impossible, in our day, to do more than faintly imagine a scene so splendid and so debonair. The clear summer sky, its crushed sapphire unveiled by smoke, the mass of roofs, flat, turreted, embattled—some with stacks of warm, red chimneys splashed with the jade green of ivy—the cupulars and tall clock towers, the crocketed pinnacles and fantastic timbered gables, made a whole of extraordinary beauty.

Dozens of great gilt vanes rose up into the still, bright air, the gold seeming as if it were cunningly inlaid upon the curve of a blue bowl.

The pigeons cooed softly to each other, the jackdaws wheeled and chuckled round the dizzy heights of the White Tower, there was a sweet scent of wood smoke and flowers borne upon the cool breezes from the Thames.

The clocks beat out the hour of noon, there was the boom of a gun and a white puff of smoke from the Constable Tower, a gay fanfaronade of trumpets shivered out, piercingly sweet and triumphant, a distant bell began to toll somewhere over by St. John's Chapel.

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John Commendone entered the great central door of the Queen's gallery.

He passed the guard of halberdiers that stood at the foot of the great staircase, exchanging good mornings with Mr. Champneys, who was in command, and went upwards to the gallery, which was crowded with people. Officers of the Queen's archers, dressed in scarlet and black velvet, with a rose and imperial crown woven in gold upon their doublets, chatted with permanent officials of the household. There was a considerable sprinkling of clergy, and at one end of the gallery, nearest to the door of the Ante-room, was a little knot of Dominican monks, dark and somewhat saturnine figures, who whispered to each other in liquid Spanish. John went straight to the Ante-room entrance, which was screened by heavy curtains of tapestry. He spoke a word to the officer guarding it with a drawn sword, and was immediately admitted to a long room hung with pictures and lit by large windows all along one side of its length.

Here were more soldiers and several gentlemen ushers with white wands in their hands. One of them had a list of names upon a slip of parchment, which he was checking with a pen. He looked up as John came in.

"Give you good day, Mr. Commendone," he said. "I have you here upon this paper. His Highness is with the Queen in her closet, and you are to be in waiting. Lord Paget has just had audience, and the Bishop of London is to come."

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He lowered his voice, speaking confidentially. "Things are coming to a head," he said. "I doubt me but that there will be some savage doings anon. Now, Mr. Commendone, I wish you very well. You are certainly marked out for high preferment. Your cake is dough on both sides. See you keep it. And, above all, give talking a lullaby."

John nodded. He saw that the other knew something. He waited to hear more.

"You have been observed, Mr. Commendone," the other went on, his pointed grey beard rustling on his ruff with a sound as of whispering leaves, and hardly louder than the voice in which he spoke. "You have had those watching you as to your demeanours and deportments whom you did not think. And you have been very well reported of. The King likes you and Her Grace also. They have spoken of you, and you are to be advanced. And if, as I very well think, you will be made privy to affairs of state and policy, pr'ythee remember that I am always at your service, and love you very well."

He took his watch from his doublet. "It is time you were announced," he said, and turning, opened a door opposite the tapestry-hung portal through which Johnnie had entered.

"Mr. Commendone," he said, "His Highness's gentleman."

An officer within called the name down a short passage to a captain who stood in front of the door of the closet. There was a knock, a murmur of voices, and John was beckoned to proceed.

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He felt unusually excited, though at the same time quite cool. Old Sir James Clinton at the door had not spoken for nothing. Certainly his prospects were bright.... In another moment he had entered the Queen's room and was kneeling upon one knee as the door closed behind him.

The room was large and cheerful. It was panelled throughout, and the wainscoting had been painted a dull purple or liver-colour, with the panel-beadings picked out in gold. The roof was of stone, and waggon-headed with Welsh groins—that is to say, groins which cut into the main arch below the apex. Two long Venice mirrors hung on one wall, and over the fire-place was a crucifix of ivory.

In the centre of the place was a large octagonal table covered with papers, and a massive silver ink-holder.

Seated at the table, very busy with a mass of documents, was King Philip II of Spain. Don Diego Deza, his confessor and private chaplain, stood by the side of the King's chair.

Seated at another and smaller table in a window embrasure Queen Mary was bending over a large flat book. It was open at an illuminated page, and the sunlight fell upon the gold and vermillion, the *rouge-de-fer* and powder-blue, so that it gleamed like a little *parterre* of jewels.

It was the second time that John Commendone had been admitted to the Privy Closet. He had been in waiting at supper, the Queen had spoken to him once or twice; he was often in the King Consort's lodging, and was already a favourite among the members of the Spanish suite. But this was quite different. He knew it at once. He realised immediately that he was here—present at this "domestic interior," so to speak, for some important purpose. Had he known the expressive idiom of our day, he would have said to himself, "I have arrived!"

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Philip looked up. His small, intensely serious eyes gave a gleam of recognition.

"Buenos dias, señor," he said.

John bowed very low.

Suddenly the room was filled with a harsh and hoarse volume of sound, a great booming, resonant voice, like the voice of a strong, rough man.

It came from the Queen.

"Mr. Commendone, come you here. His Highness hath work to do. Art a lutanist, Lady Paget tells me, then look at this new book of tablature with the voice part very well writ and the painting of the initial most skilfully done."

The young man advanced to the Queen. She held out her left hand, a little shrivelled hand, for him to kiss. He did so, and then, rising, bent over the wonderfully illuminated music book.

The six horizontal lines of the lute notation, each named after a corresponding note of the instrument, were drawn in scarlet. The Arabic numerals which indicated the frets to be used in producing the notes were black and orange, the initial H was a wealth of flat heraldic colour.

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"His golden locks time hath to filuer turnde"

the Queen read out in her great masculine voice,—a little subdued now, but still fierce and strong, like the purring of a panther. "What think you of my new book of songs, Mr. Commendone?"

"A beautiful book, Madam, and fit for Your Grace's skill, who hath no rival with the lute."

"'Tis kind of you to say so, Mr. Commendone, but you over compliment me."

She bent her brows together, lost in serious thought for a moment, and drummed with lean fingers upon the table.

Suddenly she looked up and her face cleared.

"I can say truly," she continued, "that I am a very skilled player. For a woman I can fairly put myself in the first rank. But I have met others surpassing me greatly."

She had thought it out with perfect fairness, with an almost pedantic precision. Woman-like, she was pleased with what the young courtier had said, but she weighed truth in grains and scruples—tithe of mint and cummin, the very word and article of bald fact; always her way.

"And here, Mr. Commendone," she continued, "is my new virginal. It hath come from Firenze, and was made by Nicolo Pedrini himself. My Lord Mayor begged Our acceptance of it."

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The virginal was a fine instrument—spinet it came to be called in Elizabeth's reign, from the spines or crow-quills which were attached to the "jacks" and plucked at the strings.

The case was made of cypress wood, inlaid with whorls of thin silver and enamels of various colours.

"We were pleased at the Lord Mayor's courtesy," the Queen concluded, and the change in pronoun showed John that the interview was over in its personal sense, and that he had been very highly honoured.

He bowed, with a murmur of assent, and drew aside to the wall of the room, waiting easily there, a fresh and gallant figure, for any further commands.

Nor did it escape him that the Queen had given him a look of prim, but quite marked approval—as an old maid may look upon a handsome and well-mannered boy.

The Queen pressed down the levers of the spinet once or twice, and the thin, sweet chords like the ghost of a harp rang out into the room.

John watched her from the wall.

The divine right of monarchs was a doctrine very firmly implanted in his mind by his upbringing and the time in which he lived. The absolutism of Henry VIII had had an extraordinary influence on public thought.

To a man such as John Commendone the monarch of England was rather more than human.

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At the same time his cool and clever brain was busily at work, drinking in details, criticising, appraising, wondering.

The Queen wore a robe of claret-coloured velvet, fringed with gold thread and furred with powdered ermine. Over her rather thin hair, already turning very grey, she wore the simple caul of the period, a head-dress which was half bonnet, half skull-cap, made of cloth of tinsel set with pearls.

Small, lean, sickly, painfully near-sighted, yet with an eye full of fierceness and fire—your true Tudor-tiger eye—she was yet singularly feminine. As she sat there, her face wrinkled by care and evil passions even more than by time, touching the keys of her spinet, picking up a piece of embroidery, and frequently glancing at her husband with quick, hungry looks of fretful and even suspicious affection, she was far more woman than queen.

The great booming voice which terrified strong men, coming from this frail and sinister figure, was silent now. There was pathos even in her attitude. A submissive wife of Philip with her woman's gear.

The King of Spain went on writing, coldly, carefully, and with concentrated attention, and John's eyes fell upon him also, his new master, the most powerful man in the world of that day. King of Spain, Naples, Sicily, Duke of Milan, Lord of Franche Comté and the Netherlands, Ruler of Tunis and the Barbary coast, the Canaries, Cape de Verd Islands, Philippines and Spice Islands, the huge West Indian colonies, and the vast territories of Mexico and Peru—an almost unthinkable power was in the hands of this man.

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As it all came to him, Johnnie shuddered for a moment. His nerves were tense, his imagination at work, it seemed difficult to breathe the same air as these two super-normal beings in the still, warm chamber.

From outside came the snarling of trumpets, the stir and noise of soldiery—here, warm silence, the scratching of a pen upon parchment, the echo of a voice which rolled like a kettle-drum....

Suddenly the King laid down his pen and rose to his feet, a tall, lean, sombre-faced man in black and gold. He spoke a few words to Father Diego Deza and then went up to the Queen in the window.

The monk went on arranging papers in orderly bundles, and tying some of them with cords of green silk, which he drew from a silver box.

John saw the Queen's face. It lit up and became almost beautiful for a second as Philip approached. Then as husband and wife conversed in low voices, the equerry saw yet another change come over Mary's twitching and expressive countenance. It hardened and froze, the thin lips tightened to a line of dull pink, the eyes grew bitter bright, the head nodded emphatically several times, as if in agreement at something the King was saying.

Then John felt some one touch his arm, and found that the Dominican had come to him noiselessly, and was smiling into his face with a flash of white teeth and steady, watchful eyes. [Pg 24]

He started violently and turned his head from the Royal couple in some confusion. He felt as though he had been detected in some breach of manners, of espionage almost.

"Buenos dias, señor, como anda usted?" Don Diego asked in a low voice.

"Thank you, I am very well," Johnnie answered in Spanish.

"Como está su padre?"

"My father is very well also. He has just left me to ride home to Kent," John replied, wondering how in the world this foreign priest knew of the old knight's visit.

It was true, then, what Sir James Clinton had said! He was being carefully watched. Even in the Royal Closet his movements were known.

"A loyal gentleman and a good son of the Church," said the priest, "we have excellent reports of him, and of you also, señor," he concluded, with another smile.

John bowed.

"*Los negocios del politica*—affairs of state," the chaplain whispered with a half-glance at the couple in the window. "There are great times coming for England, señor. And if you prove yourself a loyal servant and good Catholic, you are destined to go far. His Most Catholic Majesty has need of an English gentleman such as you in his suite, of good birth, of the true religion, with Spanish blood in his veins, and speaking Spanish." [Pg 25]

Again the young man bowed. He knew very well that these words were inspired. This suave ecclesiastic was the power behind the throne. He held the King's conscience, was his confessor, more powerful than any great lord or Minister—the secret, unofficial director of world-wide policies.

His heart beat high within him. The prospects opening before him were enough to dazzle the oldest and most experienced courtier; he was upon the threshold of such promotion and intimacies as he, the son of a plain country gentleman, had never dared to hope for.

It had grown very hot; he remarked upon it to the priest, noticing, as he did so, that the room was darker than before.

The air of the closet was heavy and oppressive, and glancing at the windows, he saw that it was no fancy of strained and excited nerves, but that the sky over the river was darkening, and the buildings upon London Bridge stood out with singular sharpness.

"A storm of thunder," said Don Diego indifferently, and then, with a gleam in his eyes, "and such a storm shall presently break over England that the air shall be cleared of heresy by the lightnings of Holy Church—ah! here cometh His Grace of London!"

The Captain of the Guard had suddenly beaten upon the door. It was flung open, and Sir James Clinton, who had come down the passage from the Ante-room, preceded the Bishop, and announced him in a loud, sonorous voice. [Pg 26]

Johnnie instinctively drew himself up to attention, the chaplain hastened forward, King Philip, in the window, stood upright, and the Queen remained seated. From the wall Johnnie saw all that happened quite distinctly. The scene was one which he never forgot.

There was the sudden stir and movement of his lordship's entrance, the alteration and grouping of the people in the closet, the challenge of the captain at the door, the heralding voice of Sir James—and then, into the room, which was momentarily growing darker as the thunder clouds advanced on London, Bishop Bonner came.

The man *pressed* into the room, swift, sudden, assertive. In his scarlet chimere and white rochet, with his bullet head and bristling beard, it was as though a shell had fallen into the room.

A streak of livid light fell upon his face—set, determined, and alive with purpose—and the man's eyes, greenish brown and very bright, caught a baleful fire from the waning gleam.

Then, with almost indecent haste, he brushed past John Commendone and the eager Spanish monk, and knelt before the Queen.

He kissed her hand, and the hand of the King Consort also, with some murmured words which Johnnie could not catch. Then he rose, and the Queen, as she had done upon her arrival from Winchester after her marriage, knelt for his blessing. [Pg 27]

Commendone and the chaplain knelt also; the King of Spain bowed his head, as the rapid, breathless pattering Latin filled the place, and one outstretched hand—two white fingers and one

white thumb—quivered for a moment and sank in the leaden light.

There was a new grouping of figures, some quick talk, and then the Queen's great voice filled the room.

"Mr. Commendone! See that there are lights!"

Johnnie stumbled out of the closet, now dark as at late evening, strode down the passage, burst into the Ante-room, and called out loudly, "Bring candles, bring candles!"

Even as he said it there was a terrible crash of thunder high in the air above the Palace, and a simultaneous flash of lightning, which lit up the sombre Ante-room with a blinding and ghostly radiance for the fraction of a second.

White faces immobile as pictures, tense forms of all waiting there, and then the voice of Sir James and the hurrying of feet as the servants rushed away....

It was soon done. While the thunder pealed and stammered overhead, the amethyst lightning sheets flickered and cracked, the white whips of the fork-lightning cut into the black and purple gloom, a little procession was made, and gentlemen ushers followed Johnnie back to the Royal Closet, carrying candles in their massive silver sconces, dozens of twinkling orange points to illumine what was to be done. [Pg 28]

The door was closed. The King, Queen, and the Bishop sat down at the central table upon which all the lights were set.

Don Diego Deza stood behind Philip's chair.

The Queen turned to John.

"Stand at the door, Mr. Commendone," she said, "and with your sword drawn. No one is to come in. We are engaged upon affairs of state."

Her voice was a second to the continuous mutter of the thunder, low, fierce, and charged with menace. Save for the candles, the room was now quite dark.

A furious wind had risen and blew great goutts of hot rain upon the window-panes with a rattle as of distant artillery.

Johnnie drew his sword, held it point downwards, and stood erect, guarding the door. He could feel the tapestry which covered it moving behind him, bellying out and pressing gently upon his back.

He could see the faces of the people at the table very distinctly.

The King of Spain and his chaplain were in profile to him. The Queen and the Bishop of London he saw full-face. He had not met the Bishop before, though he had heard much about him, and it was on the prelate's countenance that his glance of curiosity first fell. [Pg 29]

Young as he was, Johnnie had already begun to cultivate that cool scrutiny and estimation of character which was to stand him in such stead during the years that were to come. He watched the face of Edmund Bonner, or Boner, as the Bishop was more generally called at that time, with intense interest. Boner was to the Queen what the Dominican Deza was to her husband. The two priests ruled two monarchs.

In the yellow candle-light, an oasis of radiance in the murk and gloom of the storm, the faces of the people round the table hid nothing. The Bishop was bullet-headed, had protruding eyes, a bright colour, and his moustache and beard only partially hid lips that were red and full. The lips were red and full, there was a coarseness, and even sensuality, about them, which was, nevertheless, oddly at war with their determination and inflexibility. The young man, pure and fastidious himself, immediately realised that Boner was not vicious in the ordinary meaning of the word. One hears a good deal about "thin, cruel lips"—the Queen had them, indeed—but there are full and blood-charged lips which are cruel too. And these were the lips of the Bishop of London.

There was a huge force about the man. He was plebeian, common, but strong.

Don Diego, Commendone himself, the Queen and her husband, were all aristocrats in their different degree, bred from a line—pedigree people. [Pg 30]

That was the bond between them.

The Bishop was outside all this, impatient of it, indeed; but even while the groom of the body twirled his moustache with an almost mechanical gesture of disgust and misliking, he felt the power of the man.

And no historian has ever ventured to deny that. The natural son of the hedge-priest, George Savage—himself a bastard—walked life with a shield of brutal power as his armour. The blood-stained man from whom—a few years after—Queen Elizabeth turned away with a shudder of irrepensible horror, was the man who had dared to browbeat and bully Pope Clement VII himself. He took a personal and undignified delight in the details of physical and mental torture of his victims. In 1546 he had watched with his own eyes the convulsions of Dame Anne Askew upon the rack. He was sincere, inflexible, and remarkable for obstinacy in everything except principle. As Ambassador to Paris in Henry's reign he had smuggled over printed sheets of

Coverdale's and Grafton's translation of the Bible in his baggage—the personal effects of an ambassador being then, as now, immune from prying eyes. During the Protectorate he had lain in prison, and now the strenuous opposer of papal claims in olden days was a bishop in full communion with Rome.

... He was speaking now, in a loud and vulgar voice, which even the presence of their Majesties failed to soften or subdue. [Pg 31]

—"And this, so please Your Grace, is but a sign and indication of the spirit abroad. There is no surcease from it. We shall do well to gird us up and scourge this heresy from England. This letter was delivered by an unknown woman to my chaplain, Father Holmes. 'Tis a sign of the times."

He unfolded a paper and began to read.

"I see that you are set all in a rage like a ravening wolf against the poor lambs of Christ appointed to the slaughter for the testimony of the truth. Indeed, you are called the common cut-throat and general slaughter-slave to all the bishops of England; and therefore 'tis wisdom for me and all other simple sheep of the Lord to keep us out of your butcher's stall as long as we can. The very papists themselves begin now to abhor your blood-thirstiness, and speak shame of your tyranny. Like tyranny, believe me, my lord, any child that can any whit speak, can call you by your name and say, 'Bloody Boner is Bishop of London'; and every man hath it as perfectly upon his fingers'-ends as his Paternoster, how many you, for your part, have burned with fire and famished in prison; they say the whole sum surmounteth to forty persons within this three-quarters of this year. Therefore, my lord, though your lordship believeth that there is neither heaven nor hell nor God nor devil, yet if your lordship love your own honesty, which was lost long ago, you were best to surcease from this cruel burning of Christian men, and also from murdering of some in prison, for that, indeed, offendeth men's minds most. Therefore, say not but a woman gave you warning, if you list to take it. And as for the obtaining of your popish purpose in suppressing the Truth, I put you out of doubt, you shall not obtain it as long as you go to work this way as ye do; for verily I believe that you have lost the hearts of twenty thousand that were rank papists within this twelve months." [Pg 32]

The Bishop put the letter down upon the table and beat upon it with his clenched fist. His face was alight with inquiry and anger.

Every one took it in a different fashion.

Philip crossed himself and said nothing, formal, cold, and almost uninterested. Don Diego crossed himself also. His face was stern, but his eyes flitted hither and thither, sparkling in the light.

Then the Queen's great voice boomed out into the place, drowning the thunder and the beating rain upon the window-panes, pressing in gouts of sound on the hot air of the closet.

Her face was bagged and pouched like a quilt. All womanhood was wiped out of it—lips white, eyes like ice....

"I'll stamp it out of this realm! I'll burn it out. Jesus! but we will burn it out!"

The Bishop's face was trembling with excitement. He thrust a paper in front of the Queen.

"Madam," he said, "this is the warrant for Doctor Rowland Taylor." [Pg 33]

Mary caught up a pen and wrote her name at the foot of the document in the neat separated letters of one accustomed to write in Greek, below the signature of the Chancellor Gardiner and the Lords Montague and Wharton, judges of the Legantine Court for the trial of heretics.

"I will make short with him," the Queen said, "and of all blasphemers and heretics. There is the paper, my lord, with my hand to it. A black knave this, they tell me, and withal very stubborn and lusty in blasphemy."

"A very black knave, Madam. I performed the ceremony of degradation upon him yestereen, and, by my troth, never did the walls of Newgate chapel shelter such a rogue before. He would not put on the vestments which I was to strip from him, and was then, at my order, robed by another. And when he was thoroughly furnished therewith, he set his hands to his sides and cried, 'How say you, my lord, am I not a goodly fool? How say you, my masters, if I were in Chepe, should I not have boys enough to laugh at these apish toys?'"

The Queen crossed herself. Her face blazed with fury. "Dog!" she cried. "Perchance he will sing another tune to-morrow morn. But what more?"

"I took my crosier-staff to smite him on the breast," the Bishop continued. "And upon that Mr. Holmes, that is my chaplain, said, 'Strike him not, my lord, for he will sure strike again.' 'Yes, and by St. Peter will I,' quoth Doctor Taylor. 'The cause is Christ's, and I were no good Christian if I would not fight in my Master's quarrel.' So I laid my curse on him, and struck him not." [Pg 34]

The King's large, sombre face twisted into a cold sneer.

"*Perro labrador nunca buen morderor*—a barking dog is never a good fighter," he said. "I shall watch this clerk-convict to-morrow. Methinks he will not be so lusty at his burning."

The Bishop looked up quickly with surprise in his face.

"My lord," the Queen said to him, "His Majesty, as is both just and right, desireth to see this blasphemer's end, and will report to me on the matter. Mr. Commendone, come here."

Johnnie advanced to the table.

"You will go to Sir John Shelton," the Queen went on, "and learn from him all that hath been arranged for the burning of this heretic. The King will ride with the party and you in close attendance upon His Majesty. Only you and Sir John will know who the King is, and your life depends upon his safety. I am weary of this business. My heart grieves for Holy Church while these wolves are not let from their wickedness. Go now, Mr. Commendone, upon your errand, and report to Father Deza this afternoon."

She held out her hand. John knelt on one knee and kissed it.

As he left the closet the rain was still lashing the window-panes, and the candles burnt yellow in the gloom. [Pg 35]

By a sudden flash of lightning he saw the four faces looking down at the death warrant. There was a slight smile on all of them, and the expressions were very intent.

The great white crucifix upon the panelling gleamed like a ghost. [Pg 36]

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF SHAME; THE LADDER OF GLORY

It was ten o'clock in the evening. The thunderstorm of the morning had long since passed away. The night was cool and still. There was no moon, but the sky above London was powdered with stars.

The Palace of the Tower was ablaze with lights. The King and Queen had supped in state at eight, and now a masque was in progress, held in the glorious hall which Henry III painted with the story of Antiochus.

The sweet music shivered out into the night as John Commendone came into the garden among the sleeping flowers.

"And the harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts." Commendone had never read the Bible, but the words of the Prophet would have well expressed his mood had he but known them.

For he was melancholy and ill at ease. The exaltation of the morning had quite gone. Though he was still pleasantly conscious that he was in a fair way to great good fortune, some of the savour was lost. He could not forget the lurid scene in the Closet—the four faces haunted him still. And he knew also that a strange and probably terrible experience waited him during the next few hours. [Pg 37]

"God on the Cross," he said to himself, snapping his fingers in perplexity and misease—it was the fashion at Court to use the great Tudor oaths—"I am come to touch with life—real life at last. And I am not sure that I like it. But 'tis too new as yet. I must be as other men are, I suppose!"

As he walked alone in the night, and the cool air played upon his face, he began to realise how placid, how much upon the surface, his life had always been until now. He had come to Court perfectly equipped by nature, birth, and training for the work of pageantry, a picturesque part in the retinue of kings. He had fallen into his place quite naturally. It all came easy to him. He had no trace of the "young gentleman from the country" about him—he might have started life as a Court page.

But the real emotions of life, the under-currents, the hates, loves, and strivings, had all been a closed book. He recognised their existence, but never thought they would or could affect him. He had imagined that he would always be aloof, an interested spectator, untouched, untroubled.

And he knew to-night that all this had been but a phantom of his brain. He was to be as other men. Life had got hold on him at last, stern and relentless.

"To-night," he thought, "I really begin to live. I am quickened to action. Some day, anon, I too must make a great decision, one way or the other. The scene is set, they are pulling the traverse from before it, the play begins. [Pg 38]

"I am a fair white page," he said to himself, "on which nothing is writ, I have ever been that. To-night comes Master Scrivener. 'I have a mind to write upon thee,' he saith, and needs be that I submit."

He sighed.

The music came to him, sweet and gracious. The long orange-litten windows of the Palace spoke of the splendours within.

But he thought of a man—whose name he had never heard until that morning—lying in some dark room, waiting for those who were to come for him, the man whom he would watch burning before the sun had set again.

It had been an evening of incomparable splendour.

The King and Queen had been served with all the panoply of state. The Duke of Norfolk, the Earls of Arundel and Pembroke, Lord Paget and Lord Rochester, had been in close attendance.

The Duke had held the ewer of water, Paget and Rochester the bason and napkin. After the ablutions the Bishop of London said grace.

The Queen blazed with jewels. The life of seclusion she had led before her accession had by no means dulled the love of splendour inherent in her family. Even the French ambassador, well used to pomp and display, leaves his own astonishment on record. [Pg 39]

She wore raised cloth of gold, and round her thin throat was a partlet or collar of emeralds. Her stomacher was of diamonds, an almost barbaric display of twinkling fire, and over her gold caul was a cap of black velvet sewn with pearls.

During the whole of supper it was remarked that Her Grace was merry. The gay lords and ladies who surrounded her and the King—for all alike, young maids and grey-haired dames of sixty must blaze and sparkle too—nodded and whispered to each other, wondering at this high good-humour.

When the Server advanced with his white wand, heading the procession of yeomen-servers with the gilt dishes of the second course—he was a fat pottle-bellied man—the Queen turned to the Duke of Norfolk.

"*Dame!*" she said in French, "here is a prancing pie! *Ma mye!* A capon of high grease! Methinks this gentleman hath a very single eye for the larder!"

"Yes, m'am," the Duke answered, "and so would make a better feast for Polypheme than e'er the lean Odysseus."

They went on with their play of words upon the names of the dishes in the menu....

"But say rather a porpoise in armour."

"Halibut engrailed, Madam, hath a face of peculiar whiteness like the under belly of that fish!"

"A jowl of sturgeon!"

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"A Florentine of puff paste, m'am."

"*Habet!*" the Queen replied, "I can't better that. Could you, Lady Paget? You are a great jester."

Lady Paget, a stately white-haired dame, bowed to the Duke and then to the Queen.

"His Grace is quick in the riposte," she said, "and if Your Majesty gives him the palm—*qui meruit ferat!* But capon of high grease for my liking."

"But you've said nothing, Lady Paget."

"My wit is like my body, m'am, grown old and rheumy. The salad days of it are over. I abdicate in favour of youth."

Again this adroit lady bowed.

The Queen flushed up, obviously pleased with the compliment. She looked at the King to see if he had heard or understood it.

The King had been talking to the Bishop of London, partly in such Latin as he could muster, which was not much, but principally with the aid of Don Diego Deza, who stood behind His Majesty's chair, and acted as interpreter—the Dominican speaking English fluently.

During the whole of supper Philip had appeared less morose than usual. There was a certain fire of expectancy and complacency in his eye. He had smiled several times; his manner to the Queen had been more genial than it was wont to be—a fact which, in the opinion of everybody, duly accounted for Her Grace's high spirits and merriment. [Pg 41]

He looked up now as Lady Paget spoke.

"*Ensalada!*" he said, having caught one word of Lady Paget's speech—salad. "Yes, give me some salad. It is the one thing"—he hastened to correct himself—"it is one of the things they make better in England than in my country."

The Queen was in high glee.

"His Highness grows more fond of our English food," she said; and in a moment or two the Comptroller of the Household came up to the King's chair, followed by a pensioner bearing a great silver bowl of one of those wonderful salads of the period, which no modern skill of the kitchen seems able to produce to-day—burridge, chicory, bugloss, marigold leaves, rocket, and alexanders, all mixed with eggs, cinnamon, oil, and ginger.

Johnnie, who was sitting at the Esquires' table, with the Gentlemen of the Body and Privy Closet, had watched the gay and stately scene till supper was nearly over.

The lights, the music, the high air, the festivity, had had no power to lighten the oppression which he felt, and when at length the King and Queen rose and withdrew to the great gallery where the Masque was presently to begin, he had slipped out alone into the garden.

"His golden locks time hath to silver turned."

The throbbing music of the old song, the harps' thridding, the lutes shivering out their arpeggio accompaniment, the viols singing together—came to him with rare and plaintive sweetness, but they brought but little balm or assuagement to his dark, excited mood.

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Ten o'clock beat out from the roof of the Palace. Johnnie left the garden. He was to receive his instruction as to his night's doing from Mr. Medley, the Esquire of Sir John Shelton, in the Common Room of the Gentlemen of the Body.

He strode across the square in front of the façade, and turned into the long panelled room where he had breakfasted that morning.

It was quite empty now—every one was at the Masque—but two silver lamps illuminated it, and shone upon the dark walls of the glittering array of plate upon the beaufet.

He had not waited there a minute, however, leaning against the tall carved mantelpiece, a tall and gallant figure in his rich evening dress, when steps were heard coming through the hall, the door swung open, and Mr. Medley entered.

He was a thick-set, bearded man of middle height, more soldier than courtier, with the stamp of the barrack-room and camp upon him; a brisk, quick-spoken man, with compressed lips and an air of swift service.

"Give you good evening, Mr. Commendone," he said; "I am come with Sir John's orders."

Johnnie bowed. "At your service," he answered.

The soldier looked round the room carefully before speaking.

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"There is no one here, Mr. Medley," Johnnie said.

The other nodded and came close up to the young courtier.

"The Masque hath been going this half-hour," he said, in a low voice, "but His Highness hath withdrawn. Her Grace is still with the dancers, and in high good-humour. Now, I must tell you, Mr. Commendone, that the Queen thinketh His Highness in his own wing of the Palace, and with Don Diego and Don de Castro, his two confessors. She is willing that this should be so, and said 'Good night' to His Highness after supper, knowing that he will presently set out to the burning of Dr. Taylor. She knoweth that the party sets out for Hadley at two o'clock, and thinketh that His Highness is spending the time before then in prayer and a little sleep. I tell you this, Mr. Commendone, in order that you go not back to the Masque before that you set out from the Tower to a certain house where His Highness will be with Sir John Shelton. You will take your own servant mounted and armed, and a man-at-arms also will be at the door of your lodging here at ten minutes of midnight. The word at the Coal Harbour Gate is 'Christ.' With your two men you will at once ride over London Bridge and so to Duck Lane, scarce a furlong from the other side of the bridge. Doubtless you know it"—and here the man's eyes flickered with a half smile for a moment—"but if not, the man-at-arms, one of Sir John's men, will show you the way. You will knock at the big house with the red door, and be at once admitted. There will be a light over the door. His Highness will be there with Sir John, and that is all I have to tell you. Afterwards you will know what to do."

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Johnnie bowed. "Give you good night," he said. "I understand very well."

As soon as the Esquire had gone, Johnnie turned out of the Common Room, ascended the stairs, went to his own chamber and threw himself upon the little bed.

He had imagined that something like this was likely to occur. The King's habits were perfectly well known to all those about him, and indeed were whispered of in the Court at large, Queen Mary, alone, apparently knowing nothing of the truth as yet. The King's unusual bonhomie at supper could hardly be accounted for, at least so Johnnie thought, by the fact that he was to see his own and the Queen's bigotry translated into dreadful reality. To the keen young student of faces the King had seemed generally relieved, expectant, with the air of a boy about to be released from school. Now, the reason was plain enough. His Highness had gone with Sir John Shelton to some infamous house in a bad quarter of the city, and it was there the Equerry was to meet him and ride to the death scene.

Johnnie tossed impatiently upon his bed. He remembered how on that very morning he had expressed his hopes to Sir Henry that his duties would not lead him into dubious places. A lot of water had run under the bridges since he kissed his father farewell in the bright morning light. His whole prospects were altered, and advanced. For one thing, he had been present at an intimate and private conference and had received marked and special favour—he shuddered now as he remembered the four intent faces round the table in the Privy Closet, those sharp faces, with a cruel smirk upon them, those still faces with the orange light playing over them in the

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dark, tempest-haunted room.

"I' faith," he said to himself, "thou art fairly put to sea, Johnnie! but I will not feed myself with questioning. I am in the service of princes, and must needs do as I am told. Who am I to be squeamish? But hey-ho! I would I were in the park at Commendone to-night."

About eleven o'clock his servant came to him and helped him to change his dress. He wore long riding-boots of Spanish leather, a light corselet of tough steel, inlaid with arabesques of gold, and a big quilted Spanish hat. Over all he fastened a short riding-cloak of supple leather dyed purple. He primed his pistols and gave them to a man to be put into his holsters, and about a quarter before midnight descended the stairs.

He found a man-at-arms with a short pike, already mounted, and his servant leading the other two horses; he walked toward the Coal Harbour Gate, gave the word to the Lieutenant of the Guard, and left the Tower.

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A light moon was just beginning to rise and throw fantastic shadows over Tower Hill. It was bright enough to ride by, and Johnnie forbade his man to light the horn lantern which was hanging at the fellow's saddle-bow.

They went at a foot pace, the horses' feet echoing with an empty, melancholy sound from the old timbered houses back to the great bastion wall of the Tower.

The man-at-arms led the way. When they came to London Bridge, where a single lantern showed the broad oak bar studded with nails, which ran across the roadway, Johnnie noticed that upon the other side of it were two halberdiers of the Tower Guard in their uniforms of black and crimson, talking to the keeper of the gate.

As they came up the bar swung open.

"Mr. Commendone?" said the keeper, an elderly man in a leather jerkin.

Johnnie nodded.

"Pass through, sir," the man replied, saluting, as did also the two soldiers who were standing there.

The little cavalcade went slowly over the bridge between the tall houses on either side, which at certain points almost met with their overhanging eaves. The shutters were up all over the little jewellers' shops. Here and there a lamp burned from an upstairs window, and the swish and swirl of the river below could be heard quite distinctly.

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At the middle of the bridge, just by the well-known armourer's shop of Guido Ponzio, the Italian sword-smith, whose weapons were eagerly purchased by members of the Court and the officers both of the Tower and Whitehall, another halberdier was standing, who again saluted Commendone as he rode by.

It was quite obvious to Johnnie that every precaution had been taken so that the King's excursion into *les coulisses* might be undisturbed.

The pike was swung open for them on the south side of the bridge directly they drew near, and putting their horses to the trot, they cantered over a hundred yards of trodden grass round which houses were standing in the form of a little square, and in a few minutes more turned into Duck Lane.

At this hour of the night the narrow street of heavily-timbered houses was quite dark and silent. It seemed there was not a soul abroad, and this surprised Johnnie, who had been led to understand that at midnight "The Lane" was frequently the scene of roistering activity. Now, however, the houses were all blind and dark, and the three horsemen might have been moving down a street in the city of the dead.

Only the big honey-coloured moon threw a primrose light upon the topmost gables of the houses on the left side of "The Lane"—all the rest being black velvet, sombreness and shadow.

John's mouth curved a little in disdain under his small dark moustache, as he noted all this and realised exactly what it meant.

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When a king set out for furtive pleasures, lesser men of vice must get them to their kennels! Lights were out, all manifestation of evil was thickly curtained. The shameless folk of that wicked quarter of the town must have shame imposed upon them for the night.

The King was taking his pleasure.

John Commendone, since his arrival in London, and at the Court, had quietly refused to be a member of any of those hot-blooded parties of young men who sallied out from the Tower or from Whitehall when the reputable world was sleeping. It was not to his taste. He was perfectly capable of tolerating vice in others—looking on it, indeed, as a natural manifestation of human nature and event. But for himself he had preferred aloofness.

Nevertheless, from the descriptions of his friends, he knew that Duck Lane to-night was wearing an aspect which it very seldom wore, and as he rode slowly down that blind and sinister thoroughfare with his attendants, he realised with a little cold shudder what it was to be a king.

He himself was the servant of a king, one of those whom good fortune and opportunity had promoted to be a minister to those almost super-human beings who could do no wrong, and ruled and swayed all other men by means of their Divine Right.

This was a position he perfectly accepted, had accepted from the first. Already he was rising high in the course of life he had started to pursue. He had no thought of questioning the deeds of princes. He knew that it was his duty, his *métier*, in life to be a pawn in the great game. What affected him now, however, as they came up to a big house of free-stone and timber, where a lantern of horn hung over a door painted a dull scarlet, was a sense of the enormous and irrevocable power of those who were set on high to rule.

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No! They were not human, they were not as other men and women are.

He had been in the Queen's Closet that morning, and had seen the death warrant signed. The great convulsion of nature, the furious thunders of God, had only been, as it were, a mere accompaniment to the business of the four people in the Queen's lodge.

A scratch of a pen—a man to die.

And then, during the evening, he had seen, once more, the King and Queen, bright, glittering and radiant, surrounded by the highest and noblest of England, serene, unapproachable, the centre of the stupendous pageant of the hour.

And now, again, he was come to the stews, to the vile quarter of London, and even here the secret presence of a king closed all doors, and kept the pandars and victims of evil silent in their dens like crouching hares.

As they came up to the big, dark house, a little breeze from the river swirled down the Lane, and fell fresh upon Johnnie's cheek. As it did so, he knew that he was hot and fevered, that the riot of thought within him had risen the temperature of his blood. It was cool and grateful—this little clean breeze of the water, and he longed once more, though only for a single second, that he was home in the stately park of Commendone, and had never heard the muffled throb of the great machine of State, of polity, and the going hither and thither of kings and queens.

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But it only lasted for a moment.

He was disciplined, he was under orders. He pulled himself together, banished all wild and speculative thought—sat up in the saddle, gripped the sides of his cob with his knees, and set his left arm akimbo.

"This is the house, sir," said the trooper, saluting.

"Very well," Johnnie answered, as his servant dismounted and took his horse by the bridle.

Johnnie leapt to the ground, pulled his sword-belt into position, settled his hat upon his head, and with his gloved fist beat upon the big red door before him.

In ten seconds he heard a step on the other side of the door. It swung open, and a tall, thin person, wearing a scarlet robe and a mask of black velvet over the upper part of the face, bowed low before him, and with a gesture invited him to enter.

Johnnie turned round.

"You will stay here," he said to the men. "Be quite silent, and don't stray away a yard from the door."

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Then he followed the tall, thin figure, which closed the door, and flitted down a short passage in front of him with noiseless footsteps.

He knew at once that he was in Queer Street.

The nondescript figure in its fantastic robe and mask struck a chill of disgust to his blood.

It was a fantastic age, and all aberrations—all deviations—from the normal were constantly accentuated by means of costumes and theatric effect.

The superficial observer of the manners of our day is often apt to exclaim upon the decadence of our time. One has heard perfectly sincere and healthy Englishmen inveigh with anger upon the literature of the moment, the softness and luxury of life and art, the invasion of sturdy English ideals by the corrupt influences of France.

"Give me the days of Good Queen Bess, the hearty, healthy, strong Tudor life," is the sort of exclamation by no means rare in our time.

... "Bluff King Hal! Drake, Raleigh, all that rough, brave, and splendid time! Think of Shakespeare, my boy!"

Whether or no our own days are deficient in hardihood and endurance is not a question to be discussed here—though the private records of England's last war might very well provide a complete answer to the query. It is certain, however, that in an age when personal prowess with arms was still a title to fortune, when every gentleman of position and birth knew and practised the use of weapons, the under-currents of life, the hidden sides of social affairs, were at least as "curious" and "decadent" as anything Montmartre or the Quartier Latin have to show.

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It must be remembered that in the late Tudor Age almost every one of good family, each gentleman about the Court, was not only a trained soldier, but also a highly cultured person as well. The Renaissance in Italy was in full swing and activity. Its culture had crossed the Alps, its art was borne upon the wings of its advance to our northern shores.

Grossness was refined....

Johnnie twirled his moustache as he followed the nondescript sexless figure which flitted down the dimly-lit panelled passage before him like some creature from a masque.

At the end of the passage there was a door.

Arrived at it, a long, thin arm, in a sleeve of close-fitting black silk, shot out from the red robe. A thin ivory-coloured hand, with fingers of almost preternatural length, rose to a painted scarlet slit which was the creature's mouth.

The masked head dropped a little to one side, one lean finger, shining like a fish-bone, tapped the mouth significantly, the door opened, some heavy curtains of Flanders tapestry were pushed aside, and the Equerry walked into a place as strange and sickly as he had ever met in some fantastic or disordered dream.

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Johnnie heard the door close softly behind him, the "swish, swish" of the falling curtains. And then he stood up, his eyes blinking a little in the bright light which streamed upon them—his hand upon his sword-hilt—and looked around to find himself. He was in a smallish room, hung around entirely with an arras of scarlet cloth, powdered at regular intervals with a pattern of golden bats.

The floor was covered with a heavy carpet of Flanders pile—a very rare and luxurious thing in those days—and the whole room was lit by its silver lamps, which hung from the ceiling upon chains. On one side, opposite the door, was a great pile of cushions, going half-way up the wall towards the ceiling—cushions as of strange barbaric colours, violent colours that smote upon the eye and seemed almost to do the brain a violence.

In the middle of the room, right in the centre, was a low oak stool, upon which was a silver tray. In the middle of the tray was a miniature chafing-dish, beneath which some volatile amethyst-coloured flame was burning, and from the dish itself a pastille, smouldering and heated, sent up a thin, grey whip of odorous smoke.

The whole air of this curious tented room was heavy and languorous with perfume. Sickly, and yet with a sensuous allurements, the place seemed to reel round the young man, to disgust one side of him, the real side; and yet, in some low, evil fashion, to beckon to base things in his blood—base thoughts, physical influences which he had never known before, and which now seemed to suddenly wake out of a long sleep, and to whisper in his ears.

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All this, this surveyal of the place in which he found himself, took but a moment, and he had hardly stood there for three seconds—tall, upright, and debonair, amid the wicked luxury of the room—when he heard a sound to his left, and, turning, saw that he was not alone.

Behind a little table of Italian filigree work, upon which were a pair of tiny velvet slippers, embroidered with burnt silver, a sprunking-glass—or pocket mirror—and a tall-stemmed bottle of wine, sat a vast, pink, fleshy, elderly woman.

Her face, which was as big as a ham, was painted white and scarlet. Her eyebrows were pencilled with deep black, the heavy eyes shared the vacuity of glass, with an evil and steadfast glitter of welcome.

There were great pouches underneath the eyes; the nose was hawk-like, the chins pendulous, the lips once, perhaps, well curved and beautiful enough, now full, bloated, and red with horrid invitation.

The woman was dressed with extreme richness.

Fat and powdered fingers were covered with rings. Her corsage was jewelled—she was like some dreadful mummy of what youth had been, a sullen caricature of a long-past youth, when she also might have walked in the fields under God's sky, heard bird-music, and seen the dew upon the bracken at dawn.

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Johnnie stirred and blinked at this apparition for a moment; then his natural courtesy and training came to him, and he bowed.

As he did so, the fat old woman threw out her jewelled arms, leant back in her chair, stuttering and choking with amusement.

"*Tiens!*" she said in French, "*Monsieur qui arrive!* Why have you never been to see me before, my dear?"

Johnnie said nothing at all. His head was bent a little forward. He was regarding this old French procuress with grave attention.

He knew now at once who she was. He had heard her name handed about the Court very often—Madame La Motte.

"You are a little out of my way, Madame," Johnnie answered. "I come not over Thames. You see, I am but newly arrived at the Court."

He said it perfectly politely, but with a little tiny, half-hidden sneer, which the woman was quick to notice.

"Ah! Monsieur," she said, "you are here on duty. *Merci*, that I know very well. Those for whom you have come will be down from above stairs very soon, and then you can go about your business. But you will take a glass of wine with me?"

"I shall be very glad, Madame," Johnnie answered, as he watched the fat, trembling hand, with all its winking jewels, pouring Vin de Burgogne into a glass. He raised it and bowed. [Pg 56]

The old painted woman raised her glass also, and lifted it to her lips, tossing the wine down with a sudden smack of satisfaction.

Then, in that strange perfumed room, the two oddly assorted people looked at each other straightly for a moment.

Neither spoke.

At length Madame La Motte, of the great big house with the red door, heaved herself out of her arm-chair, and waddled round the table. She was short and fat; she put one hand upon the shoulder of the tall, clean young man in his riding suit and light armour.

"*Mon ami*," she said thickly, "don't come here again."

Johnnie looked down at the hideous old creature, but with a singular feeling of pity and compassion.

"Madame," he said, "I don't propose to come again."

"Thou art limn and debonair, and a very pretty boy, but come not here, because in thy face I see other things for thee. Lads of the Court come to see me and my girls, proper lads too, but in their faces there is not what I discern in thy face. For them it matters nothing; for thee 'twould be a stain for all thy life. Thou knowest well whom I am, Monsieur, and canst guess well where I shall go—e'en though His Most Catholic Majesty be above stairs, and will get absolution for all he is pleased to do here. But you—thou wilt be a clean boy. Is it not so?" [Pg 57]

The fat hand trembled upon the young man's arm, the hoarse, sodden voice was full of pleading.

"*Ma mère*," Johnnie answered her in her own language, "have no fear for me. I thank you—but I did not understand...."

"Boy," she cried, "thou canst not understand. Many steps down hellwards have I gone, and in the pit there is knowledge. I knew good as thou knowest it. Evil now I know as, please God, thou wilt never know it. But, look you, from my very knowledge of evil, I am given a tongue with which to speak to thee. Keep virgin. Thou art virgin now; my hand upon thy sword-arm tells me that. Keep virgin until the day cometh and bringeth thy lady and thy destined love to thee."

There were tears in the young man's eyes as he looked down into the great pendulous painted face, from which now the evil seemed to be wiped away as a cloth wipes away a chalk mark upon a slate.

As the last ray of a setting sun sometimes touches to a fugitive glory—a last fugitive glory—some ugly, sordid building of a town, so here he saw something maternal and sweet upon the face of this old brothel-keeper, this woman who had amassed a huge fortune in ministering to the pride of life, the pomp, vanity, and lusts of Principalities and Powers.

He turned half round, and took the woman's left hand in his. [Pg 58]

"My mother," he said, with an infinitely winning and yet very melancholy gaze, "my mother, I think, indeed, that love will never come to me. I am not made so. May the Mother of God shield me from that which is not love, but nathless seemeth to have love's visage when one is hot in wine or stirred to excitement. But thou, thou wert not ever...."

She broke in upon him quickly.

Her great red lips pouted out like a ripe plum. The protruding fishy eyes positively lit up with disdain of herself and of her life.

"*Mon cher*," she said, "*Holà!* I was a young girl once in Lorraine. I had a brother—I will tell you little of that old time—but I have blood."

"Yes," she continued, throwing back her head, till the great rolls of flesh beneath her chin stretched into tightness, "yes, I have blood. There was a day when I was a child, when the poet Jean D'Aquis wrote of us—

'Quand nous habitions tous ensemble
Sur nos collines d'autrefois,
Où l'eau court, où le buisson tremble
Dans la maison qui touche aux bois.'

... It was." Suddenly she left Johnnie standing in the middle of the room, and with extraordinary agility for her weight and years, glided round the little table, and sank once more into her seat.

The door at the other end of the room opened, and a tall girl, with a white face and thin, wicked mouth, and a glorious coronal of red hair came into the room. [Pg 59]

"'Tis finished," she said, to the mistress of the house. "Sir John Shelton is far in drink. He——" she stopped suddenly, as she saw Johnnie, gave him a keen, questioning glance, and then looked once more towards the fat woman in the chair.

Madame nodded. "This is His Highness's gentleman," she said, "awaiting him. So it's finished?"

The girl nodded, beginning to survey Johnnie with a cruel, wicked scrutiny, which made him flush with mingled embarrassment and anger.

"His Highness is coming down, Mr. Esquire," she said, pushing out a little red tip of tongue from between her lips. "His Highness...."

The old woman in the chair suddenly leapt up. She ran at the tall, red-haired girl, caught her by the throat, and beat her about the face with her fat, jewelled hands, cursing her in strange French oaths, clutching at her hair, shaking her, swinging her about with a dreadful vulgar ferocity which turned John's blood cold.

As he stood there he caught a glimpse, never to be forgotten, of all that underlay this veneer of midnight luxury. He saw vile passions at work, he realised—for the first time truly and completely—in what a hideous place he was.

The tall girl, sobbing and bleeding in the face, disappeared behind the arras. The old woman turned to Johnnie. Her face was almost purple with exertion, her eyes blazed, her hawk-like nose seemed to twitch from side to side, she panted out an apology: [Pg 60]

"She dared, Monsieur, she dared, one of my girls, one of my slaves! Hist!"

A loud voice was heard from above, feet trampled upon stairs, through the open door which led to the upper parts of the house of ill-fame came Sir John Shelton, a big, gross, athletic man, obviously far gone in wine.

He saw Johnnie. "Ah, Mr. Commendone," he said thickly. "Here we are, and here are you! God's teeth! I like well to see you. I myself am well gone in wine, though I will sit my horse, as thou wilt see."

He lurched up to Johnnie and whispered in the young man's ear, with hot, wine-tainted breath.

"He's coming down," he whispered. "It's your part to take charge of His Highness. He's——"

Sir John stood upright, swaying a little from the shoulders, as down the stairway, framed in the lintel of the door, came King Philip of Spain.

The King was dressed very much as Johnnie himself was dressed; his long, melancholy face was a little flushed—though not with wine. His eyes were bright, his thin lips moved and worked.

Directly he saw Commendone his face lit up with recognition. It seemed suddenly to change.

"Ah, you are here, Mr. Commendone," he said in Spanish. "I am glad to see you. We have had our amusements, and now we go upon serious business." [Pg 61]

The alteration in the King's demeanour was instant. Temperate, as all Spaniards were and are, he was capable at a moment's notice of dismissing what had passed, and changing from *bon viveur* into a grave potentate in a flash.

He came up to Johnnie. "Now, Mr. Commendone," he said, in a quiet, decisive voice, "we will get to horse and go upon our business. The *señor don* here is gone in wine, but he will recover as we ride to Hadley. You are in charge. Let's begone from this house."

The King led the way out of the red room.

The old procuress bowed to the ground as he went by, but he took no notice of her.

Johnnie followed the King, Sir John Shelton came staggering after, and in a moment or two they were out in the street, where was now gathered a small company of horse, with serving-men holding up torches to illumine the blackness of the night.

They mounted and rode away slowly out of Duck Lane and across London Bridge, the noise of their passing echoing between the tall, barred houses.

Several soldiers rode first, and after them came Sir John Shelton. Commendone rode at the King's left hand, and he noticed that His Highness's broad hat was pulled low over his face and a riding cloak muffled the lower part of it. Behind them came the other men-at-arms. As soon as they were clear of the bridge the walk changed into a trot, and the cavalcade pushed toward Aldgate. Not a soul was in the streets until they came to the city gate itself, where there was the usual guard. They passed through and came up to the "Woolsack," a large inn which was just outside the wall. In the light of the torches Commendone could see that the place was obviously one of considerable importance, and had probably been a gentleman's house in the past. [Pg 62]

Large square windows divided into many lights by mullions and transoms took up the whole of the front. The roofs were ornamental, richly crocketed and finialed, while there was a blazonry of painted heraldry and coats of arms over and around the large central porch. Large stacks of tall, slender chimney-shafts, moulded and twisted, rose up into the dark, and were ornamented over their whole surface with diaper patterns and more armorial bearings. The big central door of the "Woolsack" stood open, and a ruddy light beamed out from the hall and from the windows upon the ground-floor. As they came up, and Sir John Shelton stumbled from his horse, holding the King's stirrup for him to dismount, Commendone saw that the space in front of the inn, a wide square with a little trodden green in the centre of it, held groups of dark figures standing here and there.

Halberds rose up against the walls of the houses, showing distinctly in the occasional light from a cresset held by a man-at-arms.

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Sir John Shelton strode noisily into a big panelled hall, the King and Commendone following him, Johnnie realising that, of course, His Highness was incognito.

The host of the inn, Putton, hurried forward, and behind him was one of the Sheriffs of London, who held some papers in his hand and greeted Sir John Shelton with marked civility.

The knight pulled himself together, and shook the Sheriff by the hand.

"Is everything prepared," he said, "Mr. Sheriff?"

"We are all quite ready, Sir John," the Sheriff answered, looking with inquiring eyes at Commendone and the tall, muffled figure of the King.

"Two gentlemen of the Court who have been deputed by Her Grace to see justice done," Sir John said. "And now we will to the prisoner."

Putton stepped forward. "This way, gentlemen," he said. "Dr. Taylor is with his guards in the large room. He hath taken a little succory pottage and a flagon of ale, and seemeth resigned and ready to set out."

With that the host opened a door upon the right-hand side of the hall and ushered the party into a room which was used as the ordinary of the inn, a lofty and spacious place lit with candles.

There was a high carved chimney-piece, over which were the arms of the Vintners' Company, sable and chevron *cetv*, three tuns argent, with the figure of Bacchus for a crest. A long table ran down the centre of the place, and at one end of it, seated in a large chair of oak, sat the late Archdeacon of Exeter. Three or four guards stood round in silence.

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Dr. Rowland Taylor was a huge man, over six feet in height, and more than a little corpulent. His face, which was very pale, was strongly cast, his eyes, under shaggy white brows, bright and humorous; the big, genial mouth, half-hidden by the white moustache and beard, both kindly and strong. He wore a dark gown and a flat velvet cap upon his head, and he rose immediately as the company entered.

"We are come for you, Dr. Taylor," the Sheriff said, "and you must immediately to horse."

The big man bowed, with quiet self-possession.

"'Tis very well, Master Sheriff," he said; "I have been waiting this half-hour agone."

"Bring him out," said Sir John Shelton, in a loud, harsh voice. "Keep silence, Master Taylor, or I will find a way to silence thee."

John Commendone shivered with disgust as the leader of the party spoke.

Even as he did so he felt a hand upon his arm, and the tall, muffled figure of the King stood close behind him.

"Tell the knight, señor," the King said rapidly in Spanish, "to use the gentleman with more civility. He is to die, as is well fitting a heretic should die, for God's glory and the safety of the realm. But he is of gentle birth. Tell Sir John Shelton."

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Commendone stepped up to Sir John. "Sir," he said, in a voice which, try as he would, he could not keep from being very disdainful and cold—"Sir, His Highness bids me to tell you to use Dr. Taylor with civility, as becomes a man of his birth."

The half-drunken captain glared at the cool young courtier for a moment, but he said nothing, and, turning on his heel, clanked out of the room with a rattle of his sword and an aggressive, ruffling manner.

Dr. Taylor, with guards on each side, the Sheriff immediately preceding him, walked down the room and out into the hall.

Commendone and the King came last.

Johnnie was seized with a sudden revulsion of feeling towards his master. This man, cruel and bigoted as he was, the man whom he had seen with fanaticism and the blood lust blazing in his eye, the man whom he had seen calmly leaving a vile house, was nevertheless a king and a gentleman. The young man could hardly understand or realise the extraordinary combination of

qualities in the austere figure by his side of the man who ruled half the known world. Again, he felt that sense of awe, almost of fear, in the presence of one so far removed from ordinary men, so swift in his alterations from coarseness to kingliness, from relentless cruelty to cold, sombre decorum.

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Dr. Taylor was mounted upon a stout cob, closely surrounded by guards, and with a harsh word of command from Sir John, the party set out.

The host of the "Woolsack" stood at his lighted door, where there was a little group of serving-men and halberdiers, sharply outlined against the red-litten façade of the quaint old building, and then, as they turned a corner, it all flashed away, and they went forward quietly and steadily through a street of tall gabled houses.

Directly the lights of the inn and the square in front of it were left behind, they saw at once that dawn was about to begin. The houses were grey now, each moment more grey and ghostly, and they were no longer sable and shapeless. The air, too, had a slight stir and chill within it, and each moment of their advance the ghostly light grew stronger, more wan and spectral than ever the dark had been.

Pursuant to his instructions, Commendone kept close to the King, who rode silently with a drooping head, as one lost in thought. In front of them were the backs of the guards in their steel corselets, and in the centre of the group was the massive figure of the man who was riding to his death, a huge, black outline, erect and dignified.

John rode with the rest as a man in a dream. His mind and imagination were in a state in which the moving figures around him, the cavalcade of which he himself was a part, seemed but phantoms playing fantastic parts upon the stage of some unreal theatre of dreams.

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He heard once more the great man-like voice of Queen Mary, but it seemed very far away, a sinister thing, echoing from a time long past.

The music of the dance in the Palace tinkled and vibrated through his subconscious brain, and then once more he heard the voice of the evil old woman of the red house, the voice of one in hell, telling him to flee youthful lusts, telling him to wait stainless until love should come to him.

Love! He smiled unconsciously to himself. Love!—why should the thoughts of love come to a heart-whole man riding upon this sad errand of death; through ghostly streets, stark and grey?...

He looked up dreamily and saw before him, cutting into a sky which was now big and tremulous with dawn, the tower of St. Botolph's Church, a faint, misty purple. Far away in the east the sky was faintly streaked with pink and orange, the curtain of the dark was shaken by the birth-pangs of the morning. The western sky over St. Paul's was already aglow with a red, reflected light.

The transition was extraordinarily sudden. Every instant the aspect of things changed; the whole visible world was being re-created, second by second, not gradually, but with a steady, pressing onrush, in which time seemed merged and forgotten, to be of no account at all, and a thing that was not.

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Johnnie had seen the great copper-coloured moon heave itself out of the sea just like that—the world turning to splendour before his eyes.

But it was dawn now, and in the miraculously clear, inspiring light, the countless towers and pinnacles of the city rose with sharp outline into the quiet sky.

The breeze from the river rustled and whispered by them like the trailing skirts of unseen presences, and as the cool air in all its purity came over the silent town, the feverishness and sense of unreality in the young man's mind were dissolved and blown away.

How silent London was!—the broad street stretched out before them like a ribbon of silver-grey, but the tower of St. Botolph's was already solid stone, and no longer mystic purple.

And then, for some reason or other, John Commendone's heart began to beat furiously. He could not have said why or how. There seemed no reason to account for it, but all his pulses were stirred. A sense of expectancy, which was painful in its intensity, and unlike anything he had ever known before in his life, pervaded all his consciousness.

He gripped his horse by the knees, his left hand holding the leather reins, hung with little tassels of vermilion silk, his right hand resting upon the handle of his sword.

They came up to the porch of the church, and suddenly the foremost men-at-arms halted, the slight backward movement of their horses sending those who followed backward also. There was a pawing of hooves, a rattle of accoutrements, a sharp order from somewhere in front, and then they were all sitting motionless.

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The moment had arrived. John Commendone saw what he had come to see. From that instant his real life began. All that had gone before, as he saw in after years, had been but a leading up and preparation for this time.

Standing just outside the porch of the church was a small group of figures, clustering together, white faces, pitiful and forlorn.

Dr. Taylor's wife, suspecting that her husband should that night be carried away, had watched all

night in St. Botolph's porch, having with her her two children, and a man-servant of their house.

The men-at-arms had opened out a little, remaining quite motionless on their horses.

Sir John Shelton, obviously mindful of Commendone's warning at the "Woolsack," remained silent also, his blotched face grey and scowling in the dawn, though he said no word.

The King pulled his hat further over his eyes, and Johnnie at his right could see perfectly all that was happening.

He heard a voice, a girl's voice.

"Oh, my dear father! Mother! mother! here is my father led away."

Almost every one who has lived from any depth of being, for whom the world is no grossly material place, but a state which is constantly impinged upon and mingles with the Unseen, must be conscious that at one time or other of his life sound has been, perhaps, the most predominant influence in it.

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Now and again, at rare and memorable intervals, the grossness of this tabernacle wherein the soul is encased is pierced by sound. More than all else, sound penetrates deep into the spiritual consciousness, punctuates life, as it were, at rare moments of emotion, gathering up and crystallising a thousand fancies and feelings which seem to have no adequate cause among outward things.

Johnnie had heard the sound of his mother's voice, as she lay dying—a dry, whispering, husky sound, never to be forgotten, as she said, "Johnnie, promise mother to be good; promise me to be good." He had heard the sweet sound of the death mort winded by the huntsman in the park of Commendone, as he had run down his first stag—in the voice of the girl who cried out with anguish in the pure morning light, he heard for the third or fourth time, a sound which would always be part of his life.

"O, my dear father! Mother! mother! here is my father led away."

She was a tall girl, in a long grey cloak.

Her hair, growing low upon her forehead, and very thick, was the colour of ripe corn. Great eyes of a deep blue, like cut sapphire, shone in the dead white oval of her face. The parted lips were a scarlet eloquence of agony.

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By her side was a tall, grey-haired dame, trembling exceedingly.

One delicate white hand flickered before the elder woman's eyes, all blind with tears and anguish.

Then the Doctor's wife cried, "Rowland, Rowland, where art thou?"

Dr. Taylor answered, "Dear wife, I am here."

Then she came to him, and he took a younger girl, who had been clinging to her mother's skirts, his little daughter Mary, in his arms, dismounting from his horse as he did so, with none to stay him. He, his wife, and the tall girl Elizabeth, knelt down and said the Lord's Prayer.

At the sight of it the Sheriff wept apace, and so did divers others of the company, and the salt tears ran down Johnnie's cheeks and splashed upon his breast-plate.

After they had prayed Dr. Taylor rose up and kissed his wife, and shook her by the hand, and said: "Farewell, my dear wife, be of good comfort, for I am quiet in my conscience. God shall stir up a father for my children."

After that he kissed his daughter Mary and said, "God bless thee and make thee His servant," and kissing Elizabeth also he said, "God bless thee. I pray you all stand strong and steadfast unto Christ His Word, and keep you from idolatry."

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The tall lady clung to him, weeping bitterly. "God be with thee, dear Rowland," she said; "I shall, with God's grace, meet thee anon in heaven."

Then Johnnie saw the serving-man, a broad, thick-set fellow, with a keen, brown face, who had been standing a little apart, come up to Dr. Taylor. He was holding by the hand a little boy of ten years or so, with wide, astonished eyes, Thomas, the Doctor's son.

When Dr. Taylor saw them he called them, saying, "Come hither, my son Thomas."

John Hull lifted the child, and sat him upon the saddle of the horse by which his father stood, and Dr. Taylor put off his hat, and said to the members of the party that stood there looking at him: "Good people, this is mine own son, begotten of my body in lawful matrimony; and God be blessed for lawful matrimony."

Johnnie upon his horse was shaking uncontrollably, but at these last words he heard an impatient jingle of accoutrements by his side, and looking, saw that the face of His Highness was fierce and angry that an ordained priest should speak thus of wedlock.

But this was only for a passing moment; the young man's eyes were fixed upon the great clergyman again in an instant.

The priest lifted up his eyes towards heaven, and prayed for his son. He laid his hand upon the child's head and blessed him; and so delivered the child to John Hull, whom he took by the hand and said, "Farewell, John Hull, the faithfulest servant that ever man had."

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There was a silence, broken only by the sobbing of women and a low murmur of sympathy from the rough men-at-arms.

Sir John Shelton heard it and glanced quickly at the muffled figure of the King.

It was a shrewd, penetrating look, and well understood by His Highness. This natural emotion of the escort, at such a sad and painful scene, might well prove a leaven which would work in untutored minds. There must be no more sympathy for heretics. Sir John gave a harsh order, the guard closed in upon Dr. Taylor, there was a loud cry from the Archdeacon's wife as she fell fainting into the arms of the sturdy servant, and the cavalcade proceeded at a smart pace. John looked round once, and this is what he saw—the tall figure of Elizabeth Taylor, fixed and rigid, the lovely face set in a stare of horror and unspeakable grief, a star of sorrow as the dawn reddened and day began.

And now, as they left London, the progress was more rapid, the stern business upon which they were engaged looming up and becoming more imminent every moment, the big man in the centre of the troop being hurried relentlessly to his end.

And so they rode forth to Brentwood, where, during a short stay, Sir John Shelton and his men caused to be made for Dr. Taylor a close hood, with two holes for his eyes to look out at, and a slit for his mouth to breathe at. This they did that no man in the pleasant country ways, the villages or little towns, should speak to him, nor he to any man.

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It was a practice that they had used with others, and very wise and politic.

"For," says a chronicler of the time, "their own consciences told them that they led innocent lambs to the slaughter. Wherefore they feared lest if the people should have heard them speak or have seen them, they might have been more strengthened by their godly exhortations to stand steadfast in God's Word, to fly the superstitions and idolatries of the Papacy."

All the way Dr. Taylor was joyful and merry, as one that accounted himself going to a most pleasant banquet or bridal. He said many notable things to the Sheriff and the yeomen of the guard that conducted him, and often moved them to weep through his much earnest calling upon them to repent and to amend their evil and wicked living. Oftentimes, also, he caused them to wonder and rejoice, to see him so constant and steadfast, void of all fear, joyful in heart, and glad to die. At one time during their progress he said: "I will tell you, I have been deceived, and, as I think, I shall deceive a great many. I am, as you see, a man that hath a very great carcase, which I thought would have been buried in Hadley churchyard, if I died in my bed, as I well hoped I should have done; but herein I see I was deceived. And there are a great number of worms in Hadley churchyard, which should have had a jolly feed upon this carrion, which they have looked for many a day. But now I know we are to be deceived, both I and they; for this carcase must be burnt to ashes; and so shall they lose their bait and feeding, that they looked to have had of it."

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Sir John Shelton, who was riding by the side of Commendone, and who was now sober enough, the wine of his midnight revels having died from him, turned to Johnnie with a significant grin as he heard Dr. Taylor say this to his guards.

Shelton was coarse, overbearing, and a blackguard, but he had a keen mind of a sort, and was of gentle birth.

"Listen to this curtail dog, Mr. Commendone," he said, with a sneer. "A great loss to the Church, i' faith. He talketh like some bully-rook or clown of the streets. And these are the men who in their contumacy and their daring deny the truth of Holy Church——" He spat upon the ground with disgust.

Commendone nodded gravely. His insight was keener far than the other's. He saw, in what Bishop Heber afterwards called "the coarse vigour" of the Archdeacon's pleasantries, no foolish irreverence indeed, but the racy English courage and humour of a saintly man, resolved to meet his earthly doom brightly, and to be an example to common men.

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Johnnie was the son of a bluff Kentish squire. He knew the English soil, and all the stoic hardy virtues, the racy mannerisms which spring from it. Courtier and scholar, a man of exquisite refinement, imbued with no small share of foreign grace and courtliness, there was yet a side of him which was thoroughly English. He saw deeper than the coarse-mouthed captain at his side.

The voices of those who had gathered round the porch of St. Botolph's without Aldgate still rang in his ears.

The Sheriff and his company, when they heard Dr. Rowland Taylor jesting in this way, were amazed, and looked one at another, marvelling at the man's constant mind, that thus, without any fear, made but a jest at the cruel torment and death now at hand prepared for him.

The sun clomb the sky, the woods were green, the birds were all at matins. Through many a shady village they passed where the ripening corn rustled in the breeze, the wood smoke went up in blue lines from cottage and manor house, the clink of the forge rang out into the street as the blacksmiths lit their fires, the milkmaids strode out to find the lowing kine in the pastures. It was

a brilliant happy morning as they rode along through the green lanes, a very bridal morning indeed.

When they were come within two miles of Hadley, Dr. Taylor desired for a while to light off his horse. They let him do it, and the Sheriff at his request ordered the hood to be removed from him.

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The whole troop halted for a minute or two, and the Doctor, says the chronicler, "leaped and set a frisk or twain as men commonly do in dancing. 'Why, Master Doctor,' quoth the Sheriff, 'how do you now?' He answered, 'Well, God be praised, good Master Sheriff, never better; for now I know I am almost at home. I have not pass two stiles to go over, and I am even at my father's house.'

"'But, Master Sheriff,' said he, 'shall we not go through Hadley?'

"'Yes,' said the Sheriff, 'you shall go through Hadley.'

"'Then,' said he, 'O good Lord! I thank Thee, I shall yet once more ere I die see my flock, whom Thou, Lord, knowest I have most heartily loved and truly taught. Good Lord! bless them and keep them steadfast in Thy word and truth.'"

The streets of Hadley were beset on both sides of the way with women and men of the town and the country-side around, who awaited to see Dr. Taylor.

As the troop passed by, now at walking pace, when the people beheld their old friend led to death in this way, their voices were raised in lamentation and there was great weeping.

On all sides John Commendone heard the broad homely Suffolk voices, lifted high in sorrow.

"Ah, good Lord," said one fat farmer's wife to her man, "there goeth our good shepherd from us that so faithfully hath taught us, so fatherly hath cared for us, so godly hath governed us."

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And again, the landlord of the "Three Cranes" at Hadley, where the troop stopped for a moment to water their horses at the trough before the inn, and the country people surged and crowded round: "O merciful God; what shall we poor scattered lambs do? What shall come of this most wicked world! Good Lord! strengthen him and comfort him. Alack, dear Doctor, may the Lord help thee!"

The great man upon his horse, towering above the yeomen of the guard who surrounded him, lifted his hand.

"Friends," he said, "and neighbours all, grieve not for me. I have preached to you God's word and truth, and am come this day to seal it with my blood."

Johnnie would have thought that the people who bore such an obvious love for their rector, and who now numbered several hundreds—sturdy country-men all—would have raised an outcry against the Sheriff and his officers. Many of them had stout cudgels in their hands, some of them bore forks with which they were going to the fields, but there was very little anger. The people were cowed, that was very plain to see. The power of the law struck fear into them still; the long, unquestioned despotism of Henry VIII still exercised its sway over simple minds. Now and again, as the horses were being watered, a fierce snarl of anger came from the outskirts of the crowd. Commendone himself, with his somewhat foreign appearance, and the tall, muffled figure of the King, excited murmurs and insults.

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"They be Spaniards," one fellow cried, "they two be—Spaniards from the Queen's Papist husband. How like you this work, Master Don?"

But that was all. Once Sir John Shelton looked with some apprehension at the King, but the King understood nothing, and though the sturdy country-folk in their numbers might well have overcome the guard, a rescue was obviously not thought of nor was the slightest attempt at it made.

All this was quite homely and natural to Johnnie. He felt with the people; he had spent his life in the country. Down at quiet, retired Commendone his father and he were greatly loved by all the farmers and peasants of the estate. His mother—that graceful Spanish lady—had endeared herself for many years to the simple folk of Kent. Old Father Chilches had said Mass in the chapel at Commendone for many years without let or hindrance. Catholic as the house of Commendone had always been, there was nothing bigoted or fanatical in their religion. And now the young man's heart was stirred to its very depths as this homely rustic folk lifted up their voices in sorrow.

Even then, however, he questioned nothing in his mind of the justice of what was to be done. Despite the infinite pity he felt for this good pastor who was to die and his flock who grieved him so, he was yet perfectly loyal in his mind to the power which ordained the execution, part of whose machinery he was. The Queen had said so; the monarch could do no wrong. There were reasons of State, reasons of polity, reasons of religion which he himself was not competent to enter into or to discuss, but which he accepted blindly then.

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And so, as they moved onwards towards Aldham Common, where the final scene was to be enacted, he moved with the others, one of the ministers of doom.

And through all the bright morning air, through the cries and tears of the country-folk, he heard one voice, the voice of a girl, he saw one white and lovely face ever before his eyes.

When they came to Aldham Common there was a great multitude of people gathered there.

"What place is this?" Dr. Taylor asked, with a smile, though he knew very well. "And what meaneth it that so much people are gathered together?"

The Sheriff, who was a stranger to this part of the country, and who was very agitated and upset, answered him with eager and deprecating civility. "It is Aldham Common, Dr. Taylor, the place where you must suffer; and the people are come to look upon you." The good man hardly knew what he was saying.

Dr. Taylor smiled once more.

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"Thanked be God," he said, "I am even at home," and alighted from his horse.

Sir John Shelton, who also dismounted, snatched the hat from the Doctor's head, which was shown to be clipped close, like a horse's back in summer time—a degradation which Bishop Bonner had caused to be performed upon him the night before as a mean and vulgar revenge for the Doctor's words to him at the ceremony of his degradation.

But when the people saw Dr. Taylor's reverent and ancient face and his long white beard, they burst into louder weeping than ever, and cried, "God save thee, good Dr. Taylor! Jesus Christ strengthen thee, and help thee; the Holy Ghost comfort thee," and many other suchlike godly wishes.

They were now come into the centre of Aldham Common, where already a posse of men sent by the Sheriff of the county were keeping a space clear round a tall post which had been set into the ground, and which was the stake.

Sir John Shelton, who now assumed complete command of the proceedings, gave several loud orders. The people were pressed back with oaths and curses by the yeomen of the escort, and Dr. Taylor was hurried quickly towards the stake.

The long ride from London had not been without a certain quiet and dignity; but from this moment everything that was done was rude, hurried, and violent. The natural brutality of Shelton and his men blazed up suddenly. What before had been ineffably sad was now changed to horror, as John Commendone sat his horse by the side of the man whose safety he was there to guard, and watched the final scene.

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Dr. Taylor, who was standing by the stake and disrobing, wished to speak to the people, but the yeomen of the guard were so busy about him that as soon as he opened his mouth one or another of these fellows thrust a fist or tipstaff into his mouth. They were round him like a pack of dogs, snarling, buffeting him, making him feel indeed the bitterness of death.

This was done by Sir John Shelton's orders, no doubt committed to him from London, for it was obvious that any popular feeling in the martyr's favour must be suppressed as soon as possibly could be done.

If Dr. Taylor had been allowed to speak to the surging crowd that knew and loved him, the well-known voice, the familiar and beloved exhortations might well have aroused a fury against the ministers of the law which they would be powerless to withstand.

Dr. Taylor himself seemed to recognise this, for he sat down upon a stool which was placed near the stake and did not offer to speak again. He looked round while three or four ill-favoured fellows in leather were bringing up bundles of furze and freshly cut faggots to the stake, and as he was obviously not about to address the people, the guard was a little relaxed.

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He saw pressing on the outskirts of the crowd an old countryman, with a brown wrinkled face.

"Soyce," he called out cheerily, "I pray thee come and pull off my boots, and take them for thy labour. Thou hast long looked for them, now take them."

The ancient fellow, who was indeed the sexton of Hadley Church, came trembling up, and did as the rector asked.

Then Dr. Taylor rose up, and put off his clothes unto his shirt, and gave them away. Which done, he said with a loud voice, "Good people! I have taught you nothing but God's Holy Word and those lessons that I have taken out of God's blessed Book, the Holy Bible."

He had hardly said it when a sergeant of the guard, named Homes, gave him a great stroke upon the head with a waster, and said, "Is that the keeping of thy promise, thou heretic?"

The venerable head, now stained with blood, drooped, and for a moment the vitality and vigour seemed to go from the Rector. He saw that it was utterly useless, that there was no hope of him being allowed to address his folk, and so he knelt down and prayed in silence.

While he was praying a very old woman, in poor rags, that was standing among the people, ran in and knelt by his side, and prayed with him.

Homes caught hold of her and tried to drag her from the Doctor, but she screamed loudly and clung to the Rector's knees.

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"Tread her down with horses; tread her down," said Sir John Shelton, his face purple with anger.

But even the knight's men would not do it, and there was such a deep threatening murmur from the crowd that Shelton forbore, and the old woman stayed there and prayed with the Doctor.

At last he rose, blessing her, and, dressed only in his shirt, big, burly, and very dignified, he went to the stake and kissed it, and set himself into a pitch barrel, which they had put for him to stand in.

He stood there so, with his back upright against the stake, with his hands folded together, and his eyes towards heaven, praying continually.

Four men set up the faggots and piled them round him, and one brought a torch to make the fire.

As the furze lit and began to crackle at the bottom of the pile, the man Homes, either really mad with religious hatred, or, as is more probable, a brute, only zealous to ingratiate himself with his commander, picked up a billet of wood and cast it most cruelly at the Doctor. It lit upon his head and broke his face, so that the blood ran down it.

Then said Dr. Taylor, "O friend, I have harm enough; what needed that?"

Then, with Sir John Shelton standing close by, and the people round shuddering with horror, the Rector began to say the Psalm *Miserere* in English.

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Sir John shot out his great red hand and struck the martyr upon the lips with his open palm.

"Ye knave," he said, "speak Latin; I will make thee."

At that, John Commendone, scarcely knowing what he did, leapt from his horse and caught Shelton by the shoulder. With all the strength of his young athletic frame he sent him spinning away from the stake. Sir John staggered, recovered himself, and with his face blazing with anger, rushed at the young man.

At that the King suddenly wheeled his horse, and interposed between them.

"Keep you away, Sir John," he said in Spanish, "that is enough."

The knight did not understand the King's words, but the tone and the accent were significant. With a glare of fury at Johnnie, he slunk aside to his men.

The calm voice of the Rector went on reciting the words of the Psalm. When it was finished he said the Gloria, and as the smoke rolled up around him, and red tongues of flame began to be brightly visible in the sunlight, he held up both his hands, and said, "Merciful Father of heaven, for Jesus Christ my Saviour's sake, receive my soul into Thy hands."

So stood he still without either crying or moving, with his hands folded together, until suddenly one of the men-at-arms caught up a halbert and struck him on the head so that the brains fell out, and the corpse sank into the fire.

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"Thus," says the chronicler, "the man of God gave his blessed soul into the hands of his merciful Father, and his most dear and certain Saviour Jesus Christ, Whom he most entirely loved, faithfully and earnestly preached, obediently followed in living, and constantly glorified in death."

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CHAPTER III

THE MEETING WITH JOHN HULL AT CHELMSFORD

John Commendone, Sir John Shelton, and the King of Spain walked up a flight of broad stone steps, which led to the wide-open door of Mr. Peter Lacel's house on the far side of Aldham Common.

It was now about ten o'clock in the morning, or a little after.

As soon as the body of the martyr had fallen into the flames, Sir John had wheeled round upon his horse, and, attended by his men, had trotted away, breaking through the crowd, who had rushed to the smouldering pyre and were pressing round it. They had gone some three hundred yards on to the Common at a quick pace.

"I don't like this at all, Sire," Sir John had muttered to the King. "The people are very turbulent. It will be as well, I think, that we go to the 'Crown.' It is that large house on the other side of the Common. There we shall find entertainment and refreshment, for I am told it is a good inn by a letter from the Sheriff, Mr. Peter Lacel—whom I had looked to see here as was duly arranged."

Then Sir John had stopped suddenly.

"He cometh," he cried. "That is Mr. Lacel with his yeomen," and as the knight spoke Johnnie saw a little party upon horseback galloping towards them. Foremost of them was a bluff, bearded country gentleman, his face agitated and concerned.

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"Good Sir John," said the gentleman as he reined up his horse, "I would not have had this happen for much money. I have mistook the hour, and was upon some county business with two of the

justices at my house. Is it all over then? Hath Dr. Taylor suffered?"

"The runagate is stone dead," Shelton replied. "It is all over, and hath passed off as well as may be, though I like not very much the demeanour of the people. But how do you, Mr. Lacel?"

"I do very well, thank you," the Sheriff answered, "but I hope much, Sir John, that this mischance of mine will not be accounted to me as being any lack of zeal to Her Grace."

Shelton waved his hand. "No," he said, "we know you very well, Mr. Lacel. Lack of loyalty will never be put to your charge. But now, doubtless, you will entertain us, for we have ridden since early dawn, and are very tired."

Mr. Lacel's face shone with relief. "Come you, Sir John," he said, "come you with these gentlemen and your men forthwith to the Manor. You must indeed be weary and needing refreshment. But what of yonder?"

He pointed in front of him, and Sir John turned in his saddle.

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A few hundred yards away a dense crowd was swaying, and above their heads even now was a column of yellow smoke.

"There is no need for you there, Mr. Lacel," Sir John replied. "The Sheriff of London and his men are doing all that is needful. I am here with mine, and we shall all be glad to taste your hospitality after this business. This,"—he made a little gesture of the hand towards Johnnie—"is Mr. Commendone, Sir Henry Commendone's son, of Kent, attached to the King's person, and here to-day to report of Dr. Taylor's burning to the Queen. This"—here he bowed towards Philip—"a Spanish nobleman of high degree, who is of His Majesty's Gentlemen, and who hath ridden with us."

"Bid ye welcome, gentlemen," said Mr. Lacel, "and now, an ye will follow me, there is breakfast ready in the Manor, and you can forget this nasty work, for I doubt none of you like it better than myself."

With that the whole party had trotted onwards towards the Sheriff's house.

The men-at-arms were met by grooms and servants, and taken round to the buttery. John, Shelton, and the King walked up the steps and into a great hall, where a long table was laid for their reception.

The King, whose demeanour to his host was haughty and indifferent, spoke no word at all, and Sir John Shelton was in considerable embarrassment. At all costs, the King's incognito must be preserved. Mr. Lacel was a Catholic gentleman of Suffolk, a simple, faithful, unthinking country squire, who, at the same time, had some local influence. It would never do, however, to let the Sheriff know that the King himself was under his roof, and yet His Highness's demeanour was so reserved and cold, his face so melancholy, frozen, and inscrutable, that Shelton was considerably perplexed. It was with a sense of great relief that he remembered the King spoke but little English, and he took Mr. Lacel aside while serving-men were placing chairs at the table, and whispered that the Don was a cold, unlikeable fellow, but high in the Royal favour, and must be considered.

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"Not a testoon care I," Mr. Lacel answered. "I am glad to see ye, Sir John, and these Court gallants from Spain disturb me not at all. Now, sit ye down, sit ye down, and fall to."

They all sat down at the table.

The King took a silver cup of wine, bowed to his host, and sipped. His face was very yellow, his eyes dwindled, and a general air of cold and lassitude pervaded him. Suddenly he turned to Commendone, who was sitting by his side watching his master with eager and somewhat frightened attention.

"Señor," he said, in Spanish, "Señor Commendone, I am very far from well. The long ride hath tired me. I would rest. Speak to Sir John Shelton, and ask this worthy *caballero*, who is my host, if I may retire to rest."

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Johnnie spoke at once to Mr. Lacel, explaining that the Spanish nobleman was very fatigued and wished to lie down.

The Sheriff jumped up at once, profuse in hospitality, and himself led the way, followed by the King and Commendone, to an upper chamber.

They saw the King lie down upon the bed, and curtains pulled half-way over the mullioned windows of the room, letting only a faint beam of sunlight enter there.

"Thy friend will be all right now, Mr. Commendone," said the squire. "These Spanish gentlemen are not over-strong, methinks." He laughed roughly, and Johnnie heard again, in the voice of this country gentleman, that dislike of Spain and of the Spanish Match, which his own father shared.

They went out of the room together, and Johnnie shrugged his shoulders—it was absolutely necessary that the identity of the King should not be suspected.

"Well, well, Mr. Lacel," he said, linking his arm within his host's, and assuming a friendly country manner—which, of course, came perfectly natural to him, "it is not for you and I to question or to

make comment upon those gentlemen from over-seas who are in high favour in London just now. Let us to breakfast."

In a minute more they were sitting at the table, where Sir John Shelton was already busy with wine and food. [Pg 92]

For a few minutes the three men ate in silence. Then Mr. Lacel must have from them every detail of the execution. It was supplied him with great vigour and many oaths by Sir John.

Mr. Lacel shook himself.

"I am indeed sorry," said he, "that I was not at the execution, because it was my bounden duty to be there. Natheless, I am not sorry for myself. To see a rogue or masterless man trussed up is very well, but Dr. Rowland Taylor that was Rector here, and hath in times past been a guest at this very table—well, I am glad I did not see the man die. Was a pleasant fellow, could wind a horn or throw a falcon with any of the gentry round, had a good lusty voice in a chorus, and learning much beyond the general."

"Mr. Lacel, Mr. Lacel," Sir John Shelton said in a loud and rather bullying voice, "surely you have no sympathy nor liking for heretics?"

"Not I, i' faith," said the old gentleman at the top of the table, striking the thick oak with his fist. "I have been a good Catholic ever, and justice must be done. 'Twas the man I liked, Master Shelton, 'twas the man I liked. Now we have here as Rector a Mr. Lacy. He is a good Catholic priest, and dutiful at all his services. I go to Mass three times a week. But Father Lacy, as a man, is but a sorry scrub. He eateth nothing, and a firkin of ale would last him six months. Still, gentlemen, ye cannot live on both sides of a buckler. Poor Roly Taylor was a good, honest man, a sportsman withal, and well loved over the country-side—I am glad I saw not his burning. Certainly upon religion he was mad and very ill-advised, and so dies he. I trust his stay in purgation be but short." [Pg 93]

Sir John Shelton put down his tankard with a crash.

"My friend," he said, "doth not know that His Grace of London did curse this heretic? I myself was there and heard it."

The ruffian lifted his tankard of wine to his lips, and took a long draught. His face was growing red, his eyes twinkled with half-drunken cunning and suspicion.

"Aye," he cried, "I heard it—'And by the authority of God the Father Almighty, and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of St. Peter and Paul, and of the Holy Saints, we excommunicate, we utterly curse and ban, commit and deliver to the Devil of hell, ye that have in spite of God and of St. Peter, whose Church this is, in spite of holy saints, and in spite of our most Holy Father the Pope, God's Vicar here on earth, denied the truths of Holy Church. Accursed may ye be, and give body and soul to the Devil. We give ye over utterly to the power of the Fiend, and thy soul when thou art dead shall lie this night in the pains of hell-fire, as this candle is now quenched and put out.'"

As he finished, Sir John knocked over a tall glass cruet of French vinegar, and stared with increasing drunkenness at his host. [Pg 94]

Mr. Lacel, simple gentleman that he was, was obviously disgusted at his guest. He said very little, however, seeing that the man was somewhat gone in liquor, as Johnnie also realised that the stale potatoes of the night before were wakened by the new drink, and rising up into Shelton's brain.

"Well, well, Sir John," Mr. Lacel replied, "I am no theologian, but I am a good son of the Church, and have always been, as you and those at Court—those in high places, Sir John," he said it with a certain emphasis and spirit—"know very well."

The quiet and emphatic voice had its effect. Shelton dropped his bullying manner. He was aware, and realised that Mr. Lacel probably knew also, that he was but a glorified man-at-arms, a led captain, and not at all in the confidence of great people, nor acquainted with private affairs of State. He had been puffed up by his recent association with the King in his vile pleasures, but a clever ruffian enough, he saw now that he had gone too far.

He saw also that John Commendone was looking at him with a fixed and disdainful expression. He remembered that the young courtier was high in the good graces of the King and Queen.

"I' faith," he cried, with an entire change of manner—"I' faith, old friend Peter, I was but jesting; we all know thou art loyal to Church and State, their law. Mr. Commendone, I ask you, hast seen a more—"

Johnnie's voice cut into the man's babbling.

"Sir John," he said, "if I were you I would go upstairs and see how the Spanish gentleman doeth."

He looked very keenly, and with great meaning, at the knight.

Sir John pushed his chair from the table. "Spine of God," he cried thickly, "and I was near forgetting His Highness. I will to him at once."

He stumbled away from the table, pulled himself together, and, following Mr. Lacel's butler, who

had just come into the hall, ascended the broad stairway.

Mr. Lacel looked very curiously at Johnnie.

"Sir," he said in a low voice, looking round the hall to see if any servant were within earshot, "that drunkard hath said more than he meant. I am not quite the country fool I seem to be, but least said is soonest mended. I have known Sir John Shelton for some years—a good man in the chase, a soldier, but a drunken fool withal. I know your name, and I have met your father at the Wool Exchange in London. We are both of Catholic houses, but I think none of us like what is going on now, and like to go on since"—here he dropped his voice almost to a whisper, and glanced upwards to the gallery which ran round the hall—"since Her Grace had wedded out of the kingdom. But we must say nothing. Who that gentleman upstairs is, I do not seek to know, but I tell you this, Mr. Commendone, that, heretic or none, I go to-morrow morning to Father Lacy and give him a rose-angel to say masses for the soul of a good dead friend of mine. I shall not tell him who 'tis, and he's too big a fool to ask, but——"

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The old man's voice caught in his throat. He lifted his cup, and instinctively Johnnie did the same.

"Here's to him," Mr. Lacel whispered, "and to his dame, a sweet and gracious lady, and to his little lad Thomas, and the girl Mary; they have oft sat on my knee—for I am an old widower, Mr. Commendone—when I have told them the tale of the babes in the wood."

Tears were in the Sheriff's eyes, and in the eyes of the young man also, as he raised his cup to his lips and drank the sad and furtive toast.

"And here," Mr. Lacel continued, lifting his cup once more, and leaning forward over the table close to his, "and here's to Lizzie, whom dear Dr. Taylor adopted to be as his own daughter when she was but a little maid of three. Here's to Elizabeth, the sweetest girl, the most blithe companion, the daintiest, most brave little lady that ever trod the lanes of Suffolk——"

He had hardly finished speaking, and Johnnie's hand was trembling as he lifted the goblet to his lips, when there was a noise in the gallery above, and Sir John Shelton, pale of face, and followed by the butler, came noisily down the oak stairs.

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The knight's manner was more than a little excited.

"Mr. Commendone," he said in a quick but conciliatory voice, "His Highness—that is to say, the Spanish gentleman—is very fatigued, and cannot ride to London to-day."

He turned to Mr. Lacel.

"Peter," he said, and his voice was now anxious and suave, the voice of a man of affairs, and with something definite to say, "Peter, I must claim your hospitality for the night for myself and for my Spanish friend. Also, I fear, for my men."

Mr. Lacel bowed. "Sir John," he said, "my poor house is very gladly at your disposal, and you may command me in all ways."

"I thank you," Sir John answered, "I thank you very much. You are doing me a service, and perhaps other people a service which——" He broke off shortly, and turned once more to Commendone. "Mr. Commendone," he said, "it is requisite that you will at once to horse with your own servant and one of my men, and ride to London—Excuse me, Peter, but I have a privy word to say to the Esquire."

He drew Johnnie aside. "You must ride post-haste to the Queen," he said, "and tell her that His Majesty is very weary or eke unwell. He will lie the night here and come to London with me in the morning, and by the Mass, Mr. Commendone, I don't envy you your commission!"

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"I will go at once," Johnnie answered, looking at his watch.

"Very good, Mr. Commendone," Sir John answered. "I am not of the Privy Closet, as you know. You are in communion with Her Grace, and have been. But if all we of the guard hear is true, then I am sorry for you. Natheless, you must do it. Tell Her Grace of the burning—oh, tell her anything that commendeth itself to you, but let her not think that His Highness is upon some lover's business. And of Duck Lane not a word, not a single word, as you value your favour!"

"It is very likely, is it not, Sir John," Commendone answered, "that I should say anything of Duck Lane?"

The sneer in his voice was so pronounced that the big bully writhed uneasily.

"Surely," he replied, "you are a very pattern and model of discretion. I know it well enough, Mr. Commendone."

Johnnie made his adieux to his host.

"But what about your horses, sir?" the old gentleman asked. "As I understand it, you ride post-haste to London. Your nag will not take you there very fast after your long ride."

"I must post, that is all," Johnnie answered. "I can get a relay at Chelmsford."

"Nay, Mr. Commendone, it is not to be thought of," said the squire. "Now, look you. I have a plenty horses in my stables. There is a roan mare spoiling for work that will suit you very well."

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And what servants are you taking?"

Sir John Shelton broke in.

"Hadst better take thy own servant and two of my men," he said. "You will be riding back upon the way we came, and I doubt me the country folk are too friendly."

"That is easy done," said Mr. Lacel. "I can horse your yeomen also. In four days I ride myself to Westminster, where I spend a sennight with my brother, and hope to pay my duties at the Court when it moveth to Whitehall, as I hear it is about to do. The horses I shall lend you, Mr. Commendone, can be sent to my brother's, Sir Frank Lacel, of Lacel House."

"I thank you very much, sir," Johnnie answered, "you are very kind." And with that he said farewell, and in a very few minutes was riding over Aldham Common, on his way back to London.

Right in the centre of the Common there was still a large crowd of people, and he saw a farm cart with two horses standing there.

He made a wide detour, however, to get into the main road for Hadley, shrinking with a sudden horror, more poignant and more physically sickening than anything he had known before, from the last sordid and grisly details of the martyr's obsequies.

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... No! Anything would be better than to see this dreadful cleaning up....

The big rawbone mare which he was riding was fresh and playful. Johnnie was a consummate horseman, and he was glad of the distraction of keeping the beast under control. She had a hard mouth, and needed all his skill.

For four or five miles, followed by his attendants at a distance of two or three hundred yards, he rode at a fast canter, now and then letting the mare stretch her legs upon the turf which bordered the rough country road. After this, when the horse began to settle down to steady work, he went on at a fast trot, but more mechanically, and thought began to be born within him again.

Until now he had seemed to be walking and moving in a dream. Even the horrors he had seen had been hardly real. Inexperienced as he was in many aspects of life, he yet knew well that the man with an imagination and sensitive nerves suffers far more in the memory of a dreadful thing than he does at the actual witnessing of it. The very violence of what he had seen done that day had deadened all the nerves, forbidding full sensation—as a man wounded in battle, or with a limb lopped off by sword or shot, is often seen looking with an amazed incredulity at himself, feeling no pain whatever for the moment.

It was now that John Commendone began to suffer. Every detail of Dr. Taylor's death etched themselves in upon his brain in a succession of pictures which burnt like fire.

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As this or that detail—in colour, movement, and sound—came back to him so vividly, his heart began to drum, his eyes to fill with tears, or grow dry with horror, the palms of his hands to become wet. He lived the whole thing over again. And once more his present surroundings became dream-like, as he cantered through the lanes, and what was past became hideously, dreadfully real.

Yet, as the gallant mare bore him swiftly onwards, he realised that the horror and disgust he felt were in reality subservient to something else within him. His whole being seemed quickened, infinitely more alert, ready for action, than it had ever been before. He was like a man who had all his life been looking out upon the world through smoked or tinted glasses—very pleased and delighted with all he saw, unable to realise that there could be anything more true, more vivid.

Then, suddenly, the glass is removed. The neutral greyness which he has taken for the natural, commendable view of things, changes and falls away. The whole world is seen in an infinity of light and colour undreamed of, unexpected, wonderfully, passionately new.

It was thus with Johnnie, and the fact for some time was stunning and paralysing.

Then, as the brain adjusted itself slowly to fresh and marvellous conditions, he began to question himself.

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What did it mean? What did it mean to him? What lay before?

Quite suddenly the explanation came, and he knew.

It was the face of a tall girl, who stood by St. Botolph's tower in the ghostly dawn that had done this thing. It was her voice that had rent aside the veil; it was her eyes of agony which lit up the world so differently.

With that knowledge, with the quick hammering of love at a virgin heart, there came also an enormous expectation. Till now life had been pleasant and happy. All the excitements of the past seemed but incidents in a long tranquillity.

The orchestra had finished the prelude to the play. Now the traverse was drawn aside, and action began.

As the young man realised this, and the white splendour of the full summer sun was answered by the inexpressible glow within, he realised, physically, that he was galloping madly along the road, pressing his spurs to his horse's flanks, riding with loose rein, the stirrups behind him, crouching

forward upon the peaked saddle. He pulled his horse up within two or three hundred yards, though with considerable difficulty, the animal seeming, in some subtle way, to share and be part of that which was rioting within his brain.

He pulled her up, however, and she stood trembling and breathing hard, with great clots of white foam covering the rings of the bit. He soothed her, patting the strong veined neck with his hand, bringing it away from the darkening hide covered with sweat. Then, when she was a little more at ease, he slipped from the saddle and led her a few paces along the road to where in the hedge a stile was set, upon which he sat himself.

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He held hold of the rein for a minute until he saw the mare begin to crop the roadside grass quietly enough, when he released her.

For a mile or more the road by which he had come stretched white and empty in the sun. There was no trace of his men. He waited there till they could come up to him.

He began to talk to himself in slow, measured terms, his own voice sounding strange in his ears, coming to them with a certain comfort. It was as though once more he had regained full command and captaincy of his own soul. There were great things to be done, he was commander of his own legions, and, like a general before a battle, he was issuing measured orders to his staff.

"So that it must be; it must be just that; I must find Elizabeth"—his subconscious brain heard with a certain surprise and wonder how the slow voice trembled at the word—"I must find Elizabeth. And then, when I have found her, I must tell her that she, and she alone, is to be my wife, and my lady ever more. I must sue and woo her, and then she must be my wife. It is that which I have to do. The Court is nothing; my service is nothing; it is Elizabeth!"

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The mare raised her head, her mouth full of long sweet grass, and she looked at him with mild, brown eyes.

He rose from the stile, put his hand within his doublet, and pulled out a little crucifix of ebony, with a Christ of gold nailed to it.

He kissed it, and then, singularly heartened and resolute in mind, he mounted again, seeing, as he did so, that his men were coming up behind. He waited till they were near and then trotted off, and in an hour came to the outskirts of Chelmsford town.

It was now more than two hours after noon, and he halted with his men at the "Tun," the principal inn of the place, and adjacent to a brewery of red brick, where the famous Chelmsford ale—no less celebrated then than now—was brewed.

He rode into the courtyard of the inn, and the ostlers came hurrying up and took his horse away, while he went into the ordinary and sat down before a great round of beef.

The landlord, seeing a gentleman of quality, bustled in and carved for him—a pottle-bellied, voluble man, with something eminently kindly and human in his eye.

"From the Court, sir, I do not doubt?" he said.

Johnnie nodded.

"If I mistake not, you are one of the gentlemen who rode with the Sheriff and Dr. Rowland Taylor this morning?"

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"That was I," Johnnie answered, looking keenly at the man.

"I would have wagered it was, sir. We saw the party go by early. Is the Doctor dead, sir?"

Johnnie nodded once more.

"And a very right and proper thing it is," the landlord continued, "that such should die the death."

"And why think you that, landlord?" Johnnie asked.

The landlord scratched his head, looking doubtfully at his guest.

"It is not for me to say, sir," he replied, after a moment's hesitation. "I am but a tradesman, and have no concern with affairs of State. I am a child in these things, but doubtless what was done was done very well."

Johnnie pushed away the pewter plate in front of him. "My man," he said, "you can speak freely to me. What think you in truth?"

The landlord stared at him for a moment, and then suddenly sat down at the table.

"I don't know, sir," he said, "who or what you may be. As thou art from the Court, thou art a good Catholic doubtless, or wouldst not be there, but you have an honest face, and I will tell you what I think. Under King Hal I gat me to church, and profited well thereby in that reign, for the abbey being broke up, and the friars dispersed, there was no more free beer for any rogue or masterless man to get from the buttery, aye, and others of this town with property, and well-liked men, who would drink the monks' brew free rather than pay for mine own. So, God bless King Henry, I say, who brought much custom to mine inn, being a wise prince. And now, look you, I go

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to Mass, and custom diminisheth not at all. I have had this inn for thirty years, my father before me for fifty; and in this inn, sir, I mean to die. It is nothing to me whether bread and wine are but bread and wine, or whether they be That which all must now believe. I am but a simple man, and let wiser than I decide, keeping always with those who must certainly know better than I. Meanwhile I shall sell my beer and bring up my family as an honest man should do—God's death! What is that?"

He started from his chair as Johnnie did likewise, for even as the man spoke a most horrid and untoward noise filled all the air.

Both men rushed to the bulging window of leaded glass, which looked out into the High Street.

There was a huge shouting, a frightful stamp and clatter as of feet and horses' hooves upon the stones, but above all there came a shrill, snarling, neighing noise, ululating with a ferocity that was not human, a vibration of rage, which was like nothing Commendone had ever heard before.

"Jesus! But what is this?" Johnnie cried, flinging open the casement, his face suddenly white with fear—so utterly outside all experience was the dreadful screeching, which now seemed a thousand times louder. [Pg 107]

He peered out into the street and saw people rushing to the doors and windows of all the houses opposite, with faces as white and startled as his own. He looked to the right, for it was from there the pealing horror of sound was coming, but he could see nothing, because less than twenty yards away the High Street made a sudden turn at right angles towards the Market Place.

"It is some devil, certes," the landlord panted. "Apollyon must have just such a voice. What——"

The words died away upon his lips, and in a moment the two men and all the other watchers in the street knew what had happened.

With a furious stamping of hooves, round the corner of an old timbered house, leaping from the ground in ungovernable fury, and in that leaping advancing but very slowly, came a huge stallion, black as a coal, its eyes red with malice, its ears laid back over its head, the huge bull-like neck erect, and smeared with foam and blood.

Commendone had never seen such a monster; indeed, there were but few of them in England at that time—the product of Lanarkshire mares crossed with the fierce Flanders stallions, only just then introduced into England by that Earl of Arran who had been a suitor for the hand of the Princess Elizabeth.

The thing seemed hardly horse, but malignant demon rather, and with a cold chill at their hearts the landlord and his guest saw that the stallion gripped a man by one arm and shoulder, a man that was no more a man, but a limp bundle of clothes, and shook him as a terrier shakes a rat. [Pg 108]

The bloody and evil eyes glared round on every side as the great creature heaved itself into the air, the long "feather" of silky hair about its fetlocks waving like the pennons of lances. There was a dreadful sense of *display*. The stallion was consciously and wickedly performing, showing what it could do in its strength of hatred—evil, sentient, malign.

It tossed the wretched man up into the air, and flung him lifeless and broken at its fore feet. And then, horror upon horror, it began to pound him, smashing, breaking, and treading out what little life remained, with an action the more dreadful and alarming in that it was one absolutely alien to the usual habits of the horse.

It stopped at last, stiffened all over, its long, wicked head stretched out like that of a pointing dog, while its eyes roved round as if in search of a new victim.

There was a dead silence in the street.

Then Johnnie saw a short, thick-set man, with a big head and a brown face, come out from the archway opposite, where he had been standing in amazement, into the full street, facing the silent, waiting beast.

Something stabbed the young man's heart strangely. It was not fear for the man; it was quite distinct from the breathless excitement and sickening wonder of the moment. [Pg 109]

Johnnie had seen this man before.

With slow, very slow, but resolute and determined steps, the man drew nearer to the stallion.

He was within four yards of it, when it threw up its head and opened its mouth wide, showing the great glistening yellow teeth, the purple lips curling away from them, in a rictus of malignity. From the open mouth, covered with blood and foam, once more came the frightful cry, the mad challenge.

Even as that happened, the man, who carried a stout stick of ash such as drovers used, leapt at the beast and struck it full and fair upon the muzzle, a blow so swift, and so hefty withal, that the ash-plant snapped in twain and flew up into the air.

The next thing happened very swiftly. The man, who had a short cloak upon his arm, threw it over the stallion's head with a sudden movement. There was a white flash in the sunshine, as his short knife left his belt, and with one fierce blow plunged deep into the lower portion of the

stallion's neck just above the great roll of fat and muscle which arched down towards the chest.

Then, with both hands at the handle of the knife, the man pulled it upwards, leaning back as he did so, and putting all his strength into what he did, cutting through the living veins and trachea as a butcher cuts meat. [Pg 110]

There was a dreadful scream, which changed upon an instant to a cough, a fountain of dark blood, and the monster staggered and fell over upon its side with a crash.

A minute afterwards Commendone was out in the High Street mingling with the excited crowd of townspeople.

He touched the sturdy brown-faced man upon the shoulder.

"Come into the inn," he said. "I have somewhat to say to you, John Hull." [Pg 111]

CHAPTER IV

PART TAKEN IN AFFAIRS BY THE HALF TESTOON

It was seven o'clock in the evening when John Commendone arrived at the Tower. He went to the Queen's Gallery, and found that Her Majesty had just come back from Vespers in St. John's Chapel, and was in the Privy Garden with some of her ladies.

Mr. Ambrose Cholmondely was lieutenant of the guard at this hour, and Johnnie went to him, explaining that he must see the Queen at once.

"She won't see any one, Commendone," young Mr. Cholmondely answered. "I really cannot send your name to Her Grace."

"But I must see Her Grace. It is highly important."

Cholmondely looked at Commendone.

"You have ridden far and fast," he said. "You might even be the bearer of despatches, my friend John. But I cannot send in your name to the Queen. Even if I could, I certainly would not do so when you are like this, in such disorder of dress. You've come from no battle-field with news of victory. If the matter urgeth, as you say, then you have your own remedy. The King Consort lies ill in his own lodging; he hath not been seen of any one since supper last night. I don't know where you have been or what you have been doing, and it is no concern of mine, i' faith, but you can very well go to the King's quarters, where, if your business is as you say, one of the dons or Spanish priests will speedily arrange an audience for you with Her Grace." [Pg 112]

Johnnie knew the rigid etiquette of the Court very well.

Technically young Mr. Cholmondely was within his rights. He had received orders and must obey them. Upon the other hand, no one knew better than Commendone that this young gallant was a fool, puffed up with the favour of ladies, and who from the first had regarded him as in some sense a rival—was jealous of him.

John realised in a moment that no one of the Court except the Queen and King Philip's private gentlemen knew of His Highness's absence. It had been put about that he was ill. It would have been an easy thing for Johnnie to turn away from the gate of the Privy Garden, where, in the soft sunset light, Mr. Cholmondely ruffled it so bravely, and find Father Diego. But he was in no mood at that moment for compromise. He was perfectly certain of his own right to admission. He knew that the tidings he bore were far more important than any point of etiquette. He was cool and suave enough as a general rule—not at all inclined, or a likely person, to infringe the stately machinery which controlled the lives of monarchs. But now he was in a mood when these things seemed shrunken, smaller than they had ever been before. He himself was animated by a great private purpose, he bore a message from the King himself to the Queen; he was in a state of exaltation, and looking at the richly dressed young courtier before him, remembering what a popinjay and lap-dog of ladies he was, he felt a sudden contempt for the man who barred his way. [Pg 113]

He wouldn't have felt it before, but he was older now. He had bitten in upon life, an extraordinary strength and determination influenced him and ran in his blood.

"Mr. Cholmondely," he said, "nevertheless, I will go to the Queen, as I am, and go at once."

Cholmondely was just inside the gates which led to the Privy Garden, strolling up and down, while outside the gates were two archers of the Queen's Guard, and a halberdier of the garrison, who was sitting upon a low stone bench.

Johnnie had passed the men and was standing within the garden.

"You will, Mr. Commendone?"

Johnnie took a step forward and brushed the other away with his left arm, contemptuously, as if he had been a serving-man. Then he strode onwards.

The other's sword was out of his scabbard in a second, and he threw himself on guard, his face livid with passion. Johnnie made no motion towards his own sword hilt, but he grasped the other's light rapier with his right hand, twisted it away with a swift muscular motion, broke it upon his knee and flung the pieces into Cholmondely's face.

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"I go to Her Majesty," he said. "When I have done my business with her, I will see you again, Mr. Cholmondely, and you can send your friend to my lodging."

Without a further glance at the lieutenant of the guard he hurried down a broad gravelled path, edged with stocks, asters and dark green borders of box, towards where he knew he would find the Queen.

Cholmondely stood, swaying and reeling for a second. No word escaped him, but from his cheek, cut by the broken sword, came a thin trickle of scarlet.

Johnnie had turned out of the broad walk and into the terraced rose-garden, which went down to the river—where he saw a group of brightly-dressed ladies, rightly conjecturing that the Queen was among them—when he heard running steps behind him.

Cholmondely had almost caught him up, and a dagger gleamed in his right hand. A loud oath burst from him, and he flung himself upon Commendone.

At the exact moment that he did so, the ladies had turned, and saw what was going on; and while the two young men wrestled together, Cholmondely vainly trying to free his dagger-arm from Commendone's vice-like grip, there came a loud, angry voice which both knew well, booming through the pergolas of roses. The instant the great voice struck upon their ears they fell away from each other, arms dropped to their sides, breaths panting, eyes of hate and anger suddenly changed and full of apprehension.

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There were one or two shrieks and feminine twitters, a rustle of silk skirts, a jangle of long silver chatelaines, and like a bouquet of flowers coming towards them, the queen's ladies hurried over the lawn; Her Grace's small form was a little in advance of the rest.

Queen Mary came up to them, her thin face suffused with passion.

"Sirs," she shouted, "what mean you by this? Are gentlemen of Our Court to brawl in Our gardens? By the Mass, it shall go very hard with you gentlemen. It——"

She saw Commendone.

Her voice changed in a second.

"Mr. Commendone! Mr. Commendone! You here? I had looked to see you hours ago. Where is ——"

She had nearly said it, but a warning flash from the young man's eyes stayed the wild inquiry upon her lips. Clever as she was, the Queen caught herself up immediately.

"What is this, sir?" she said, more softly, and in Spanish.

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Johnnie sank on one knee.

"I have just come to the Tower, M'am," he said, "with news for Your Majesty. As you see, I am but just from my horse. I sought you post-haste, and were told that you were here. Unfortunately, I could not persuade Mr. Cholmondely of the urgency of my business. He had orders to admit no one, and daring greatly, I pushed past him, and in the execution of his duty he followed me."

The Queen said nothing for a moment. Then she turned upon Cholmondely.

"And who are you, Mr. Cholmondely," she said in a cold, hard voice, "to deny the Esquire Our presence when he comes with special tidings to Us?"

Cholmondely bowed low.

"I did but hold to my orders, Madam," he said, in a low voice.

The Queen ground her high-heeled shoe into the gravel.

"Your sword, Mr. Cholmondely," she said, "you will hand it to the Esquire, and you will go to your lodging to await our pleasure."

At that, the lieutenant of the guard gave a loud sob, and his face became purple.

The Queen looked at him in amazement and then saw that his scabbard was empty.

In a moment Johnnie had whipped out his own riding-sword and pressed it into Mr. Cholmondely's hand.

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"Stupid!" he said, "here thou art. Now give it me in order."

The Queen had taken it all in immediately. The daughter of a King to whom the forms and etiquette of chivalry were one of the guiding principles of life, she realised in a moment what had occurred.

"Boys! Boys!" she said, impatiently. "A truce to your quarrels. If Mr. Commendone robbed you of

your sword, Mr. Cholmondely, he hath very well made amends in giving you his. You were right, Mr. Cholmondely, in not admitting Mr. Commendone to Our presence, because you knew not the business upon which he came. And you were right, Mr. Commendone, in coming to Us as you did at all hazards. Art two brave, hot-headed boys. Now take each other's hand; let there be no more of this, for"—and her voice became lowing and full of menace again—"if I hear so much as the rattle of thy swords against each other, in future, neither of thee will e'er put hand to pummel again."

The two young men touched each other's hand—both of them, to tell the truth, excessively glad that affairs had turned out in this way.

"Get you back to your post," the Queen said to the lieutenant. "Mr. Commendone, come here."

She turned swiftly, passing through her ladies, who all remained a few yards behind.

"Well, well," she said impatiently, "hath His Highness returned? Hath he borne the fatigue of the journey well?" [Pg 118]

Most carefully, with studied phrases, furtively watching her face, with the skill and adroitness of an old courtier, Johnnie told his story. At any moment he expected an outburst of temper, but it did not come. To his surprise, the Queen was now in a quiet and reflective mood. She walked up and down the bowling green with him, her ladies standing apart at one edge of it, nodding and whispering to see this young gallant so favoured, and wondering what his mission might be.

The Queen asked Johnnie minute questions about Mr. Peter Lacel's house. Was it well found? Would His Highness find proper accommodation to lie there? Was Mr. Lacel married, and had he daughters?

Johnnie assured Her Grace that Mr. Lacel was a widower and without children. He could plainly see that the Queen had that fierce jealousy of a woman wedded late. Not only the torturing of other women, but also the stronger and more pervading dislike of a husband living any life, going through any experiences that she herself did not share. At the same time, he saw also that the Queen was doing her very best to overcome such thoughts as these, was endeavouring to assume the matron of common sense and to put the evil thing away from her.

Then, just as the young man was beginning to feel a little embarrassed at the quick patter of questions, wondering if he would be able to be as adequate as hitherto, remembering guiltily where he had met the King the night before, the Queen ceased to speak of her husband. [Pg 119]

She began to ask him of Dr. Rowland Taylor and his end.

He told her some of the details as quietly as he could, trying to soften the horror which even now overwhelmed him in memory. At one question he hesitated for a moment, mistaking its intent, and the Queen touched him smartly on the arm.

"No, no," she said, "I don't want to hear of the runagate's torment. He suffered rightly, and doubtless his sufferings were great. But tell me not of them. They are not meet for our ears. Tell me of what he said, and if grace came to him at last."

He was forced to tell her, as he knew others would tell her afterwards, of the sturdy denial of the martyr till the very end.

And as he did so, he saw the face, which had been alight with tenderness and anxiety when the King's name was mentioned, gravely judicial and a little disgusted when the actual sufferings of the Archdeacon were touched upon, now become hard and cruel, aflame with bigotry.

"They shall go," the Queen said, rather to herself than to him. "They shall be rooted out; they shall die the death, and so may God's most Holy Church be maintained."

At that, with another and astonishing change of mood, she looked at the young man, looked him up and down, saw his long boots powdered with dust, his dress in disorder, him travel-stained and weary. [Pg 120]

"You have done well," she said, with a very kindly and eminently human smile. "I would that all the younger gentlemen of our old houses were like you, Mr. Commendone. His Highness trusts you and likes you. I myself have reason to think well of you. You are tired by your long ride. Get you to your lodging, and if so you wish it, you shall do as you please to-night, for when His Highness returns I will see that he hath no need of you. And take this from your Queen."

In her hand the Queen carried a little volume, bound in Nile-green skin, powdered with gold heraldic roses. It was the *Tristia et Epistolae ex Ponto* of Ovid, which she had been reading. Johnnie sank upon one knee and took the book from the ivory-white and wrinkled hand.

"Madam," he said, "I will lose my life rather than this gracious gift."

"Hey ho!" the Queen answered. "Tell that to your mistress, Mr. Commendone, if you have one. Still, the book is rare, and when you read of the poet's sorrows at Tomi, think sometimes of the giver who—and do not doubt it—hath many sorrows of her own. It is an ill thing to rule We sometimes think, Mr. Commendone, but God hath put Us in Our place, and We must not falter."

She turned. "Lady Paget," she called, "I have done with this young spark for the nonce; come you, and help me pick red roses, red roses, for my chamber. The King loveth deep red roses, and I am [Pg 121]

told that they are the favoured flower of all noble gentlemen and ladies in the dominions of Spain."

Bowing deeply once more, and walking backwards to the edge of the bowling green, Johnnie withdrew.

He passed through the flower-bordered ways till he came to the gate of the garden.

Outside the gate this time, on the big gravelled sweep which went in front of the Palace, Cholmondely was walking up and down, the blood dried upon his cheek, but not washed away. He turned in his sentinel's parade as Johnnie came out, and the two young men looked at each other for a moment in silence.

"What's it to be?" Johnnie said, with a smile—"Lincoln's Inn Fields to-morrow morning? Her Grace will never know of it."

"I was waiting for you, Johnnie," the other answered. "No, we'll not fight, unless you wish it. Come you to the Common Room, and the pantler shall boil his kettle and brew us some sack."

Johnnie thrust his arm into the other's and together they passed away from the garden, better friends at that moment than they had ever been before—friends destined to be friends for two hours before they were to part forever, though during these hours one of them was to do the other a service which would help to alter the whole course of his life.

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They went into the Common Room, and the pantler was summoned and ordered to brew them a bowl of sack—simply the hot wine and water, with added spices, which our grandmothers of the present time sipped over their cards, and called Negus.

Commendone sunk down into a big oak chair, his hands stretched out along the arms, his whole body relaxed in utter weariness, his dark face now grown quite white. There were lines about his eyes which had not been there a few hours before. The eyes themselves were dull and glassy, the lips were flaccid.

Cholmondely looked at him in amazement. "Go by, Jeronymo!" he said, using a popular tag, or catch-word, of the time, the "What ho, she bumps!" of the period, though there were no music-halls in those days to popularise such gems of phrase. "What ails you, Esquire? I was frightened also by Her Grace, and, i' faith, 'tis a fearful thing to hear the voice of Majesty in reproof. But thou comest better out of it than I, though all was well at the end of it for both of us. Is it with you still?"

Johnnie shook his head feebly. "No," he said, lifting a three-handled silver cup of sack to his lips. "'Twas not that, though I was sorely angered with you, Ambrose; but I have had a long journey into the country, and have returned but half an hour ago. I have seen much—much." He put one hand to his throat, swallowing as he spoke, and then recollecting himself, adding hurriedly, "Upon affairs of State."

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The other gallant sipped his wine. "Thou need'st not have troubled to tell me that," he said dryly. "When a gentleman bursts into the Privy Garden against all order he is doubtless upon business of State. What brought you to this doing I do not know, and I don't ask you, Johnnie. All's well that ends well, and I hope we are to be friends."

"With all my goodwill," Commendone answered. "We should have been friends before."

The other nodded. He was a tall, handsome young man, a little florid in face, but of a high and easy bearing. There was, nevertheless, something infinitely more boyish and ingenuous in his appearance than in that of Commendone. The latter, perhaps of the same age as his companion, was infinitely more unreadable than the other. He seemed older, not in feature indeed, but in manner and capability. Cholmondely was explicit. There was a swagger about him. He was thoroughly typical. Johnnie was cool, collected, and aware.

"To tell you the truth, Commendone," Cholmondely said, with a light laugh which rang with perfect sincerity, "to tell you the truth, I have been a little jealous of you since you came to Court. Thou art a newcomer here, and thou hast risen to very high favour; and then, by the Mass! thou dost not seem to care about it all. Here am I, a squire of dames, who pursue the pleasures of Venus with great ardour and not ever with success. But as for thee, John Commendone of Kent, i' faith, the women are quarrelling for thee! Eyes grow bright when thou comest into the dance. A week ago, at the barrier fight in the great hall, Cicily Thwaites, that I had marked out for myself to be her knight, was looking at thee with the eyes of a duck in a tempest of thunder. So that is that, Johnnie. 'Tis why I have not liked thee much. But we're friends now, and see here —"

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He stepped up to the young man in the chair and clapped his hand upon his shoulder. "See here," he went on in a deeper voice, "thou hast well purged the dregs and leaven of my dislike. Thou gav'st me thy sword when hadst disarmed me, and I stood before Her Grace shamed. I don't forget that. I will never forget it. There will never be any savour or smell of malice between thou and me."

The wine had roused the blood in Commendone's tired veins. He was more himself now. The terrible fatigue and nerve tension of the past few hours was giving place to a sense of physical well-being. He looked at the handsome young fellow before him standing up so taut and trim,

with the sunlight pouring in upon his face from one of the long open windows, his head thrown slightly back, his lips a little parted, bright with the health of youth, and felt glad that Ambrose Cholmondely was to be his friend. And he would want friends now, for some reason or other—why he could not divine—he had a curious sense that friends would be valuable to him now. He felt immeasurably older than the other, immeasurably older than he had ever felt before. There was something big and stern coming into his life. The diplomatic, the cautious, trained side of him knew that it must hold out hands to meet all those that were proffered in the name of friend.

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Cholmondely sat down upon the table, swinging his legs backwards and forwards, and stroking the smooth pointed yellow beard which lay upon his ruff, with one long hand covered with rings.

"And how like you, Johnnie," he said, "your attendance upon His Majesty? From what we of the Queen's Household hear, the garden of that service is not all lavender. Nay, nor ale and skittles neither."

Johnnie shrugged his shoulders, his face quite expressionless. In a similar circumstance, Ambrose Cholmondely would have gleefully entered into a gossip and discussion, but Commendone was wiser than that, older than his years. He knew the value of silence, the virtue of a still tongue.

"Sith you ask me, Ambrose," he answered, sipping his wine quietly, "I find the service good enough."

The other grinned with boyish malice. There was a certain rivalry between those English gentlemen who had been attached to King Philip and those who were of the Queen's suite. Her Majesty was far more inclined to show favour to those whom she had put about her husband than to the members of her own *entourage*. They were picked men, and the gay young English sparks resented undue and too rapid promotion and favour shown to men of their own standing, while, Catholics as most of them were, there was yet an innate political distrust instilled into them by their fathers and relations of this Spanish Match. And many courtiers thought that, despite all the safe-guards embodied in the marriage contract, the marriage might yet mean a foreign dominion over the realm—so fond and anxious was the Queen.

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"Each man to his taste," Cholmondely said. "I don't know precisely what your duties are, Johnnie, but for your own sake I well hope they don't bring you much into the companionship of such gentry as Sir John Shelton, let us say."

Johnnie could hardly repress a start, though it passed unnoticed by his friend. "Sir John Shelton?" he said, wondering if the other knew or suspected anything of the events of the last twenty-four hours. "Sir John Shelton? It's little enough I have to do with him."

"And all the better."

Johnnie's ears were pricked. He was most anxious to get to know what was behind Cholmondely's words. It would be worth a good deal to him to have a thorough understanding of the general Court view about the King Consort. He affected an elaborate carelessness, even as he did so smiling within himself at the ease by which this boy could be drawn.

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"Why all the better?" he said. "I care not for a bully-rook such as Shelton any more than you, but I have nothing to do with him."

"Then you make no excursions and sallies late o' nights?"

Commendone's face was an elaborate mask of wonder.

"Sallies o' nights?" he said.

The other young man swung his legs to and fro, and began to chuckle. He caught hold of the edge of the table with both hands, and looked down on Johnnie in the chair with an amused smile.

"And I had thought you were right in the thick of it," he said. "Thy very innocence, Johnnie, hath prevented thee from seeing what goes on under thy nose. Why, His Highness, Sir John Shelton, and Mr. Clarence Attwood leave the Tower night after night and hie them to old Mother Motte's in Duck Lane whenever the Queen hath the vapours and thinketh her lord is in bed, or at his prayers. Phew!"—he made a gesture of disgust. "It stinketh all over the Court. I see, Commendone, now why thou knowest nothing of this. The King chooseth for his night-bird friends ruffians like Shelton and Attwood. He would not dare ask one that is a gentleman to wallow in brothels with him. But be assured, I speak entirely the truth."

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Johnnie shrugged his shoulders once more. "I know nothing of it," he said, with a quick, side-long glance at Ambrose Cholmondely. "I am not asked to be Esquire on such occasions, at any rate."

"And wouldst not go if thou wert," Cholmondely said, loudly. "Nor would any other gentleman that I know of—only the very scum and vermin of the Court. The game of love, look you, is very well. I am no purist, but I hunt after my own kind, and so should we all do. I don't bemire myself in the stews. Well, there it is. And now, much refreshed by this good wine, and much heartened by our compact, I'll leave thee. I must get back to guard at the garden gate. Her Grace will be leaving anon to dress for supper. Perchance to-night the King will be well enough to make appearance. While thou hast been away, he hath been close in his quarters and very sick. The Spanish priests have been buzzing round him like autumn wasps. And Thorne, the chirurgeon from Wood Street, a very skilful man, hath, they say, been summoned this morning to the Palace."

Addio!"

With a bright smile and a wave of his hand, he flung out of the room.

Johnnie finished the lukewarm sack in his goblet. He had learnt something that he wished to know, and as he saw his friend pass beyond the windows outside, his feet crunching the gravel and humming a little song, Johnnie smiled bitterly to himself. He knew rather more about King Philip's illness than most people in England at that moment. And as for Duck Lane—well! he knew something of that also. As the thought came to him, indeed, he shuddered. He remembered the great ham-like face of the procuress who kept this fashionable hell. He heard her voice speaking to him as, very surely, she spoke to but few people who visited her there. He thought of Ambrose Cholmondely's fastidiousness, and he smiled again as he wondered what the Esquire would say if he only knew.

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It was not a merry smile. There was no humour in it. It was bitter, cynical, and fraught with something of fear and expectation.

He had drunk the wine, and it had reanimated him physically; but he rose now and realised how weary he was in mind, and also—for he was always most scrupulous and careful about his dress—how stained and travel-worn in appearance.

He walked out of the Common Room, his riding sword and spurs clanking as he did so, mounted the stairway of the hall and entered the long corridor which led to his own room.

He had nearly got to his doorway when he heard, coming from a little way beyond it, a low, musical, humming voice. He remembered with a start that there was an interview before him which would mean much one way or the other to his private desires.

During the interview with the Queen and the squabble with Ambrose Cholmondely—as also afterwards, when he was drinking in the Common Room—he had lost mental sight and grip of his own private wishes and affairs. Now they all came back to him in a flash as he heard the humming voice coming from the end of the corridor—

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"Bartl'my Fair! Bartl'my Fair!
Swanked I and drank I when I was there;
Boiled and roast goose and baiting of bear,
Who plays with cudgels at Bartl'my Fair?"

He turned into his own room and looked round. He saw that some of his accoutrements had been taken away. There were vacant pegs upon the walls. He sat down upon the small low bed, bent forward, clasped his hands upon his knees, and wondered whether he should speak or not. He wondered very greatly whether he dare make a query, start an investigation, nearer to his heart than anything else in the world.

At Chelmsford he had run out of the Tun Inn and touched the burly man who had killed the maddened stallion on the shoulder. He had brought him into the ordinary, sat him down in a chair, put a great stoup of ale before him, and then begun to talk to him.

"I know who you are," he said, "very well, because I was one of the gentlemen riding from town to Hadley with your late master, Dr. Taylor. I saw you when his Reverence was wishing good-bye outside St. Botolph, his church, and I heard the words your master said—eke that you were the 'faithfullest servant that ever a man had.' What do you here now, John Hull?"

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The man had drunk his great stoup of ale very calmly. The daring deed in which he had been engaged had seemed to affect his nerves in no way at all. He was shortish, thick-set, with a broad chest measurement, and a huge thickness between chest and back. His face was tanned to the colour of an old saddle, very keen and alert, and he was clean-shaved, a rather odd and distinguishing feature in a serving-man of that time.

He told Johnnie that, now he knew, he recognised him as one of the company who rode with Dr. Taylor to his death. He had followed the cavalcade almost immediately, and on foot. The way was long, and he had arrived at Chelmsford faint and weary with very little money in his pouch, and been compelled to wait there a time for rest and food. His design was to proceed to Hadley, where he knew he could get work and would be welcome.

Mr. Peter Lacel, he told Johnnie in the inn, would doubtless employ him, for though a Catholic gentleman, he had been a friend of the Rector's in the past.

"You want work, then?" Johnnie had said. "You do not wish to be a masterless man, a hedge-dodger, poacher, or a rogue?"

"Work I must have, sir," John Hull replied, "but it must be with a good master. Mr. Peter Lacel will take me on. Masterless, I should be a very great rogue."

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All this happened in the dining-room of the Chelmsford inn, Johnnie sitting in his chair and looking at the thick, brown-faced man with a cool scrutiny which well disguised the throbbing excitement he felt at seeing him—at meeting him in this strange, and surely pre-ordained fashion.

"I'll tell thee who I am," Johnnie had said to the man, naming himself and his state. "That the Doctor spoke of you as he did when going to his death is enough recommendation to me of your fidelity. I need a servant myself, but I would ask you this, John Hull: You are, doubtless, of a

certain party. If I took you to my service, how would you square with who and what I am? A led man of mine must be loyal."

Hull had answered but very little. "Ye can but try me, sir," he said, "but I will come with you to London very joyfully. And I well think——"

He stopped, mumbled something, and stood there, his hands stained with the blood of the horse he had killed, rather clumsy, very much tongue-tied, but with something faithful and even hungry in his eyes.

Johnnie's own servant was a man called Thumb, a dissolute London fellow, who had been with him for a month, and who had performed his duties in a very perfunctory way. Life had been so quick and vivid, so full of movement and the newness of Court life, that the Groom of the Body had hardly had time to remember the personal discomfort he endured from the fellow who had been recommended to him by one of the lieutenants of the Queen's Archers. He had always meant to get rid of him at the first opportunity. Now the opportunity presented itself, though it was not for mere convenience that Commendone had engaged his new servitor.

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He had not the slightest doubt in his own mind that the man was sent to him—put in his way—by the Power which ruled and controlled the fortunes of men. Living as he did, and had done for many years, in a quiet, fastidious, but very real dream and communion with things that the hand or body do not touch and see, he had always known within himself that the goings-in and goings-out of those who believe depend not at all upon chance. Like all men of that day, Commendone was deeply religious. His religion had not made him bigoted, though he clung to the Church in which he had been brought up. But, nevertheless, it was very real to him. There were good and bad angels in those days, who fought for the souls of men. The powers of good and evil were invoked....

The Esquire was certain that this sturdy John Hull had come into his life with a set purpose.

He was riding back to London with one fixed idea in his mind. One word rang and chimed in his brain—the word was "Elizabeth!"

He had left Chelmsford with John Hull definitely enrolled as his servant, had hired a horse for him from the landlord of the "Tun," and had taken him straight to the Tower. When he had entered within the walls, he had told his man Thumb that he would dismiss him on the morrow, and pay him his wages due. He had told him, moreover, that—just as he was hurrying to the Privy Garden with news for the Queen—he must take John Hull to his quarters and put him into the way of service. For a moment, Thumb had been inclined to be insolent, but one single look from the dark, cool eyes, one hinted flash of anger upon the oval olive-coloured face, had sent the Londoner humbly to what he had to do; while the fellow looked, not without a certain apprehension, at the thick-set quiet man who followed him to be shown his new duties....

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"The Spanish don came over seas,
Hey ho nonino;
A Gracious Lady tried to please,
Hey ho nonny.

The country fellows strung their bows,
Hey ho nonino;
What 'twill be, no jack man knows!
Hey ho nonny."

Johnnie jumped up from his bed, strode out of the room, walked a yard or two down the corridor, and entered another and larger room, which he shared with three other members of the suite.

It was the place where they kept their armour, their riding-boots, and some of their swords.

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As he came in he saw that Hull was sitting upon an overturned barrel, which had held quarels for cross-bows.

The man had tied a piece of sacking round his waist and over his breeches, and was hard at work.

Johnnie's three or four damascened daggers were rubbed bright with hog's lard and sand. His extra set of holster pistols gleamed fresh and new—the rust had been all removed from flint-locks and hammers; while the stocks shone with porpoise oil.

And now the new servant was polishing a high-peaked Spanish saddle, and all the leather trappings of a charger, with an inside crust of barley bread and a piece of apple rind.

Directly the man saw his new master he stood up and made a saluting motion with his hand.

Johnnie looked at him coldly, though inwardly he felt an extreme pleasure at the sight of his new recruit so lately added to him, so swift to get to work, and withal so blithe about it.

"You must not sing the songs I have heard you singing," he said, shortly. "Don't you know where you are?"

"I had forgotten, sir," the man replied. "I have a plaguey knowledge of rhymes. They do run in my head, and must out."

"They must not, I assure you," Johnnie answered, "but I like this well enough. Hast got thee to work at once, then."

"I love it, sir. To handle such stuff as yours is rare for a man like me. Look you here, sir"—he lifted up a small dagger which he withdrew from its sheath of stag's leather, dyed vermilion—"Hear how it ringeth!" [Pg 136]

He twanged the supple blade with his forefinger, and the little shivering noise rang out into the room.

The man's keen, brown face was lit up with simple enjoyment. "I love weapons, master," he said, as if in apology.

Johnnie knew at once that here was the man he had been looking for for weeks. The man who cared, the faithful man; but he knew also, or thought he knew, that it was but poor policy to praise a servant unduly.

"Well, well," he said, "you can get on with your work. To-morrow morning, I will see you fitted out as becometh my body servant. To-night you will go below with the other men. I have spoken to the intendant that I have a new servant, and you will have your evening-meat and a place to lie in."

He turned to go.

With all his soul he was longing to ask this man certain questions. He believed that he had been sent to him to tell him of the whereabouts of the girl to whom, so strangely, at such a dreadful hour, he had vowed his life. But the long control over temperament and emotion which old Father Chilches had imposed upon him—the very qualities which made him, already, a successful courtier—stood him in good stead now. The dominant desire of his heart was to be repressed. He knew very well, he realised perfectly clearly, how intimate a member of Dr. Taylor's household this faithful servant—"the faithfulest servant that ever man had"—must have been. And knowing it, he felt sure that the time was not yet come to ask John Hull any questions. He must arouse no suspicions within the man's mind. Hull had entered his service gladly, and promised to be more than adequate and worthy of any trust that could be reposed in him. But he had seen Johnnie riding away with his beloved master, one of those who had taken him to torture and death. The very shrewdness and cleverness imprinted upon the fellow's face were enough to say that he would at once take alarm at any questioning about Dr. Taylor's family, at this moment. [Pg 137]

John Hull scraped with his foot and made a clumsy bow as his new master turned away. Then, suddenly, he seemed to remember something. His face changed in expression.

"God forgive me, sir," he said, "indeed, I had near forgot it. When I went into your chamber and took this harness for cleaning, there was a letter lying there for you. I can read, sir; Dr. Taylor taught me to read somewhat. I took the letter, fearing that it might be overlooked or e'en taken away, for there are a plaguey lot of serving-men in this passage. 'Tis here, sir, and I crave you pardon me for forgetting of it till now." [Pg 138]

He handed Johnnie a missive of thick yellow-brown paper—such as was woven from linen rags at Arches Smithfield Factory of that day. The letter was folded four-square and tied round with a cord of green silk, and where the threads intersected at the back was a broad seal of dull red wax, bearing the sign of a lamb in its centre.

Johnnie pulled off the cord, the wax cracked, and the thick yellow paper rustled as he pulled it open.

This was the letter:

"HONOURED SIR,—This from my house in Chepe. Thy honoured father who hath lately left the City hath left with me a sum of money which remaineth here at your charges, and for your disposal thereof as you may think fit. This shall be sent to you upon your letter and signature, to-morrow an you so wish.

"Natheless, should you come to my house to-night I will hand it into your keeping in gold coin. I will say that Sir Henry expressed hope that you might care to come to my poor house which has long been the agency for Commendone. For your father's son, sir, there will be very open welcome.

"Your obt. svt.,
and good friend,
ROBERT CRESSEMER,
Alderman of ye City of London."

Commendone read the letter through with care. [Pg 139]

His father had been most generous since Johnnie had arrived at Court, and the young man was in no need of money. Sir Henry had, indeed, hinted that further supplies would be sent shortly, and he must have arranged it with the Alderman ere he left the City.

Johnnie sighed. His father had always been good to him. No desire of his had ever been left ungratified. Many sons of noblemen at Court had neither such a generous allowance nor perfect equipment as he had. He never thought of his father and the old house in Kent without a little

pang of regret. Was it worth it all? Were not the silent woods of Commendone, with their shy forest creatures, better far than this stately citadel and home of kings?

His life had been so tranquil in the past. The happy days had gone by with the regularity of some slow-turning wheel. Now all was stress and turmoil. Dark and dreadful doings encompassed him. He was afloat upon strange waters, and there was no pilot aboard, nor did he know what port he should make, what unknown coast-line should greet his troubled eyes when dawn should come.

These thoughts were but fleeting, as he sat in his bedroom, where he had taken the letter from Mr. Cressemer. He sent them away with an effort of will. The past life was definitely over; now he must gather himself together and consider the immediate future without vain regrets.

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As he mounted the stairs from the Common Room he had it in mind to change from his riding costume and sleep. He needed sleep. He wanted to enter that mysterious country so close to the frontiers of death, to be alone that he might think of Elizabeth. He knew now how men dreamed and meditated of their loves, why lovers loved to be alone.

He held the letter in his hand, looking down at the firm, clear writing with lack-lustre eyes. What should he do? sleep, lose himself in happy fancies, or go to the house of the Alderman? He had no Court duties that night.

He knew Robert Cressemer's name well. Every one knew it in London, but Commendone had heard it mentioned at home for many years. Mr. Cressemer, who would be the next Lord Mayor, was one of those merchant princes who, ever since the time of that great commercial genius, Henry VII, had become such an important factor in the national life.

For many years the Alderman, the foundation of whose fortune had been the export of English wool, had been in intimate relations, both of business and friendship, with Sir Henry Commendone. The knight's wool all went to the warehouses in Chepe. He had shares in the fleet of trading vessels belonging to Cressemer, which supplied the wool-fairs of Holland and the Netherlands. The childlike and absolutely uneconomic act of Edward VI which endeavoured to make all interest illegal, and enacted that "*whoever shall henceforth lend any sum of money for any manner of usury, increase, lucre, gain or interest to be had, received, or hoped for, over and above the sum so lent,*" should suffer serious penalties, had been repealed.

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Banking had received a tremendous impetus, Robert Cressemer had adventured largely in it, and Sir Henry Commendone was a partner with him in more than one enterprise.

Of all this Johnnie knew nothing. He had not the slightest idea how rich his father was, and knew nothing of the fortune that would one day be his.

He did know, however, that Mr. Cressemer was a very important person indeed, the admired and trusted confidant of Sir Henry, and a man of enormous influence. Such a letter, coming from such a man, was hardly to be neglected by a young courtier. Johnnie knew how, if one of his colleagues had received it, it would have been shown about in the Common Room, what rosy visions of fortune and paid bills it would invoke!

He read the letter again. There was no need to go to Mr. Cressemer's house that night if he did not wish to do so. He was weary, he wanted to be alone to taste and savour this new thing within him that was called love. Yet something kept urging him to go, nevertheless. He could not quite have said what it was, though again the sense that he stood very much alone and friends were good—especially such a powerful one as this—crossed his mind. And, as an instance of the quite unconscious but very real revolution that had taken place in his thoughts during the last forty hours, it is to be noted that he *did* feel the need of friends and supporters.

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Yet he was high in favour with the King and Queen, envied by every one, certain of rapid advancement.

But he no longer thought anything of this. Those great ones were on one side of a great *something* which he would not or could not define. He was on the other, he and the girl with eyes of crushed sapphire and a red mouth of sorrow.

It would be politic to go.... "I'll put it to chance," he said to himself at length. "How doth Ovid have it?..."

"*Casus ubique valet; semper tibi pendeat hamus:
Quo minime credas gurgite, piscis erit.*"

I remember Father Chilches' translation:

"There's always room for chance, so drop thy hook,
A fish there'll be when least for it you look."

Here goes!"

He opened his purse to find a coin with which to settle the matter, and poured out the contents into his palm. There were eight or nine gold sovereigns of Henry VIII, beautiful coins with "*Hiberniæ Rex*" among the other titles, which were still known as "double ryals," three gold ducats, coined in that year, with the Queen and King Consort *vis-à-vis* and one crown above the heads of both, and one little silver half testoon.

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He put the gold back in his purse and held out the small coin upon his hand. "What is't to be, little testoon?" he said whimsically, looking at the big M and crown, "bed and thoughts of her, or the worshipful Master Cressemer and, I don't doubt, a better supper than I'm likely to get in the Tower? 'M, I go."

He spun the coin, and it came down with the initial uppermost. He laughed and flung it on to a shelf, calling John Hull to help him change his dress.

Nothing told him that in that spin he had decided—or let it better be said there was decided for him—the whole course of his life. At that actual moment!

Thus the intrusion of the little testoon.

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CHAPTER V

THE FINDING OF ELIZABETH

At a little before nine in the late twilight, Commendone left the Tower. He was attended by John Hull, whom he had armed with the short cutlass-shaped sword which serving-men were allowed to wear.

He might be late, and the City was no very safe place in those days for people returning home through the dark. Johnnie knew, moreover, that he would be carrying a considerable sum in gold with him, and it was as well to have an attendant.

They walked towards Chepe, Johnnie in front, his man a yard or so behind. It was summer-time, but even in summer London went to bed early, and the prentices were returning home from their cudgel-play and shooting at the butts in Finsbury fields.

The sky was a faint primrose above the spires of the town. The sun, that tempest of fire, had sunk, but still left long lines in the sky, lines which looked as if they had been drawn by a vermilion pencil; while, here and there, were locks, friths, and islands of gold and purple floating in the sky, billowed and upheaved into an infinity of distant glory.

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They went through the narrow streets beneath the hundreds of coloured signs which hung from shop and warehouse.

At a time when the ordinary porter, prentice, and messenger could hardly read, each place of business must signify and locate itself by a sign. A merchant of those days did not send a letter by hand to a business house, naming it to the messenger. He told the man to go to the sign of the Three Cranes, the Gold Pig on a black ground, the Tower and Dragon in such and such a street.

London was not lit on a summer night at this hour. In the winter, up to half-past eight or so the costers' barrows with their torches provided the only illumination. After that all was dark, and in summer there was no artificial light at all when the day had gone.

They came up to the cross standing to the east of Wood Street, which was silhouetted against the last gleams of day in the sky. Its hexagonal form of three sculptured tiers, which rose from one another like the divisions of a telescope, cut out a black pattern against the coloured background. The niches with their statues, representing many of the Sovereigns of England, were all in grey shadow, but the large gilt cross which surmounted it still caught something of the evening fires.

To the east there was the smaller tower of octagonal form, which was the Conduit, and here also the top was bathed in light—a figure standing upon a gilded cone and blowing a horn.

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The gutters in the streets were dry now, for the rain storm of two days ago had not lasted long, and they were sticky and odorous with vegetable and animal filth.

The two men walked in the centre of the street, as was wiser in those days, for—as still happens in the narrow quarters of old French towns to-day—garret windows were open, and pails were emptied with but little regard for those who were passing by.

When they came into Chepe itself, things were a little less congested, for great houses were built there, and Johnnie walked more quickly. Many of the houses of the merchant princes were but little if at all inferior to the mansions of the nobility at that time. They stood often enough in gloomy and unfrequented courts, and were accessible only by inconvenient passages, but once arrived at, their interiors were of extraordinary comfort and magnificence.

Johnnie knew that Mr. Cressemer's house was hereabouts, but was not certain of the precise location. He looked up through the endless succession of Saracens' heads, Tudor roses, blue bears, and golden lambs, but could see nothing in the growing dark. He turned round and beckoned to John Hull.

"You know the City?" he said.

"Very well, master," the man answered, looking at him, so Johnnie thought, with a very strange expression.

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"Then, certes, you can tell me the house of Master Robert Cressemer, the Alderman," said Johnnie.

Hull gave a sudden, violent start. His eyes, always keen and alert, now grew wide.

"Sir," he said, "I know that house very well, but what do you there?"

Johnnie stared at him in amazement for a moment. Then the blood mantled in his cheeks.

"Sirrah," he said, "what mean you by this? What is it to you where I go or what I do?"

There was nobody in their immediate vicinity at the moment, and the thick-set serving-man, by a quick movement, placed himself in front of his master, his right hand upon the newly-provided sword, his left playing with the hilt of the long knife which had served him so well at Chelmsford.

"I said I would be loyal to ye, master," the fellow growled, "but I see now that it cannot be. I will be no servant of those who do burn and slay innocent folk, and shalt not to the Alderman's if thou goest with evil intent."

An enormous surprise almost robbed the young man of his anger.

Was this man, this "faithfullest servant," some brigand or robber, or assassin, in disguise? What could it mean? His hand was upon his sword in a moment, it was ready to flash out, and the accomplished fencer who had been trained in every art and trick of sword-play, knew well that the strength of the thick-set man before him would avail nothing. But he waited a moment, really more interested and surprised than angered or alarmed.

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"I don't want to kill you, my good man," he said, "and so I will give you leave to speak. But by the Mass! this is too much; an you don't explain yourself, in the kennel and carrion you lie."

"I beg your pardon, sir," Hull answered, his face taking into it a note of apology, "but you come from the Court; you rode with those bloody villains that did take my dear master that was to his death. Are you not now going with a like intent to the house of Mr. Cressemer?"

"I don't know," Johnnie answered, "why I should explain to you the reason for my visit to His Worship, but despite this gross impudence, I will give you a chance, for I have learnt to know that there is often an explanation behind what seemeth most foul. The Alderman is one of the oldest and best friends my father, the Knight of Kent, hath ever had. The letter thou gavest me two hours ago was from His Worship bidding me to supper. And now, John Hull, what hast to say before I slit you?"

For answer, John Hull suddenly fell upon his knees, and held out his hands in supplication.

"Sir," he said, in a humble voice, "I crave that of your mercy and gentleness you will forgive me, and let this pass. Sure, I knew you for a gallant gentleman, and no enemy to my people when first I saw you. I marked you outside St. Botolph's Church, and knew you again at Chelmsford. But I thought you meant harm...."

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His voice died away in an inarticulate mumble. He seemed enormously sincere and penitent, and dreadfully embarrassed also by some knowledge or thought at the back of his mind, something which he feared, or was unable to disclose.

Johnnie's heart was beating strangely, though he did not know why. He seemed to tread into something strange and unexpected. Life was full of surprises now.

All he said was: "Make a fool of thyself no longer, John Hull; get up and lead me to His Worship's. I forgive thee. But mark you, I shall require the truth from you anon."

The man scrambled up, made a clumsy bow, and hurried on for a few yards, until a narrow opening between two great stacks of houses disclosed itself. He walked down it, his shoes echoing upon a pavement stone. Johnnie followed him, and they came out into a dark courtyard in which a single lantern of glass and iron hung over a massive door studded with nails.

"This is His Worship's house," said John Hull.

Johnnie went up to the door and beat upon it with the handle of his dagger, standing on the single step before it. In less than half a minute, the door was opened and a serving-man in livery of yellow stood before him.

"Mr. John Commendone," Johnnie said, "to see His Worship the Alderman upon an invitation."

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The man bowed, opened the door still wider, and invited Johnnie into a large flagged hall, lit by three silver lamps.

"Worshipful sir," he said, "my master told me that perchance you would be a-coming this night, and he awaits you in the parlour."

"This is my servant," Johnnie said to the man, and even as he did so, he saw a look of immense surprise, mingled with welcome, upon the fellow's face.

"I will take him to the kitchen, Your Worship," the man said, and as he spoke, a footman came out of a door on the opposite side of the hall, bowed low to Johnnie, and led him up a broad flight of stairs.

Commendone shrugged his shoulders. There were mysteries here, it seemed, but so far they were none of his, and at any rate he was within the house of a friend.

At first there was no evidence of any particular luxury, and Johnnie was surprised. Though he had little idea how wealthy his own father had become, the great house of Commendone was a very stately, well-found place. He knew, moreover, that Mr. Robert Cressemer was one of the richest citizens of London, and he had heard his friends talking at Court of the state and splendour of some of those hidden mansions which clustered in the environs of Chepeside, Wood Street, and Basinghall Street.

He had not gone much farther in his progress when he knew. He passed through a pair of folding doors, inlaid with rare woods—a novelty to him at that time, for he had never travelled in Italy or France. He walked down a broad corridor, the walls hung with pictures and the floor tessellated with wood, and was shown by another footman who was standing at a door at the end of the corridor into a superb room, wainscoted with cedar up to half of its height, and above it adorned with battles of gods and giants in fresco. The room was brilliantly lit by candles, at frequent intervals all round the panelled walls, and close to the gilded beading which divided them from the frescoes above, were arms of some black wood or stone, which they were he could not have said, stretched out, and holding silver sconces in which the candles were set.

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It was as though gigantic Moors or Nubians had thrown their arms through the wall to hold up the light which illuminated this large and splendid place. At one end of the room was a high carved fire-place, and though it was summer, some logs of green elm smouldered and crackled upon the hearth, though the place was cool enough.

Seated by the fireside was a stout, short, elderly man, with a pointed grey beard, and heavy black eyebrows from beneath which large, slightly prominent, and very alert eyes looked out. His hair was white, and apparently he was bald, because a skull cap of black velvet covered his head. He wore a ruff and a long surtout of wool dyed crimson, and pointed here and there with braid of dark green and thin lace of gold. A belt of white leather was round his middle, and from it hung a chatelaine of silver by his right side, from which depended a pen case and some ivory tablets. On his left side, Johnnie noticed that a short serviceable dagger was worn. His trunk hose were of black, his shoes easy ones of Spanish leather with crimson rosettes upon the instep.

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"Mr. John Commendone," said the footman.

Mr. Cressemer rose from his seat, his shrewd, capable face lighting up with welcome.

"Ah," he said, "so thou hast come to see me, Mr. Commendone. 'Tis very good of thee, and a welcome sight to eyes which have looked upon your father so often."

He went up to the slim young man as the footman closed the door, and shook him warmly by the hand, looking him in the face meanwhile with a keen wise scrutiny, which made Johnnie feel young, inexperienced, a little embarrassed.

He felt he was being summed up, judged and weighed, appraised in the most kindly fashion, but by one who did not easily make a mistake in his estimate of men.

At Court, King Philip had regarded him with cold interest, the Queen herself with piercing and more lively regard. Since his arrival in London, Johnnie had been used to scrutinies. But this was different from any other he had known. It was eminently human and kindly first of all, but in the second place it was more searching, more real, than any other he had hitherto undergone. In short, a king or queen looked at a courtier from a certain point of view. Would he serve their ends? Was he the right man in the right place? Had they chosen well?

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There was nothing of this now. It was all kindness mingled with a grave curiosity, almost with hope.

Johnnie, who was much taller than Mr. Cressemer, could not help smiling a little, as the bearded man looked at him so earnestly, and it was his smile that broke the silence, and made them friends from that very moment.

The Alderman put his left hand upon Johnnie's shoulder.

"Lad," he said, and his voice was the voice of a leader of men, "lad, I am right glad to see thee in my poor house. Art thy father's son, and that is enough for me. Come, sit you down t'other side of the fire. Come, come."

With kindly geniality the merchant bustled his guest to a chair opposite his own, and made him sit. Then he stood upon a big hearthrug of bear-skin, rubbed his hands, and chuckled.

"When I heard ye announced," he said, "I thought to myself, 'Here's another young gallant of the Court keen on his money; he hath lost no time in calling for it.' But now I see thee, and know thee for what thou art—for it is my boast, and a true one, that I was never deceived in man yet—I see my apprehensions were quite unfounded."

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Johnnie bowed. For a moment or two he could hardly speak. There was something so homelike, so truly kind, in this welcome that his nerves, terribly unstrung by all he had gone through of late, were almost upon the point of breakdown.

This was like home. This was the real thing. This was not the Court—and here before him he

knew very well was a man not only good and kindly, but resolute and great.

"Now, I'll tell thee what we'll do, Master Johnnie, sith thou hast come to me so kindly. We will sip a little water of Holland—I'll wager you've tasted nothing like it, for it cometh straight from the English Exchange house at Antwerp—and then we will to supper, where you will meet my dear sister, Mistress Catherine Cressemer, who hath been the long companion of my widowerhood, and ordereth this my house for me."

He turned to where a square sheet of copper hung from a peg upon a cord of twisted purple silk. Taking up the massive silver pen case at the end of his chatelaine, he beat upon the gong, and the copper thunder echoed through the big room.

A man entered immediately, to whom Mr. Cressemer gave orders, and then sat himself down upon the other side of the fire.

"Your father," he said confidentially, "came to me after he left you in the Tower the morning before this. He was very pleased with what he saw of you, Master Johnnie, and what he heard of you also. Art going to be a big man in affairs without doubt. I wish I had met ye before. I have been twice to Commendone Park. Once when thou wert a little rosy thing of two year old or less, and the Señora—Holy Mary give her grace!—had thee upon her knee. I was staying with the Knight. And then again when Father Chilches was thy tutor, and thou must have been fourteen year or more. I was at the Park for three days. But thou wert away with thy aunt, Miss Commendone, of Wanstone Court, and I saw nothing of thee."

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"So you knew my mother," Johnnie said eagerly.

"Aye, that I did, and a very gracious lady she was, Master Commendone. I will tell thee of her, and thy house in those days, at supper. My sister will be well pleased to hear it also. Meanwhile"—he sipped at the white liqueur which the servant had brought, and motioned Johnnie towards his own thin green glass with little golden spirals running through it—"meanwhile, tell me how like you the Court life?"

Johnnie started. They were the exact words of his father. "I am getting on very well," he said in reply.

"So I hear, and am well pleased," the Alderman answered. "You have everything in your favour—a knowledge of Spanish, a pleasant presence, and trained to the usage of good society. But, though you may not think it, I have influence, even at Court, though it is in no ways apparent. Tell me something of your aims, and your views, and I shall doubtless be able to help your advancement. There are ticklish times coming, be certain of that, and my experience may be of great service to you. Her Grace, God bless her! is, I fear—I speak to you as man to man, Mr. Commendone—too keen set and determined upon the Papal Supremacy for the true welfare of this realm. I am Catholic. I have always been Catholic. But doctrine, and a purely political dominion from Rome, aye, or from Spain either, is not what we of the City, and who control the finances of the kingdom much more than less, desire or wish to see. After all, Mr. Commendone, I trust I make myself clearly understood to you, and that you are of the same temper and mind as your father and myself; after all is loudly set and perchance badly done, we have to look to the upholding of the realm, inside and out, rather than to be fine upon points of doctrine."

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He leant forward in his seat with great earnestness, clasped his right hand, upon the little finger of which was a great ring, with a cut seal of emerald, and brought it down heavily upon the table by his side.

"I believe," he said, "in the Mass, and if I were asked to die for my belief, that would I do. I would do it very reluctantly, Master John. I would evade the necessity for doing it in every way I knew. But if I were set down in front of judges or eke inquisitors, and asked to say that when the priest hath said the words of consecration, the elements are not the very true body of Our Lord Jesus, then I would die for that belief. And of the Invocation of Saints, and of the greatest saint of all—Our Lady—I see no harm in it, but a very right and pleasant practice. For, look you, if these are indeed, as we believe and know clustering around the throne of God, which is the Holy Trinity, then indeed they must hear our prayers, if we believe truly in the Communion of Saints; and hearing them, being in high favour in heaven, their troubles past and they glorified, certes, we down here may well think their voices will be heard around the Throne. That is true Catholic doctrine as I see it. But of the power of the Bishop of Rome to direct and interfere in the honest internal affairs of a country—well, I snap my fingers at it. And of the power of the priesthood, which is but part of the machinery by which His Holiness endeavoureth to accrue to himself all earthly power, at that also I spit. From my standpoint, a priest is an ordained man of God; his function is to say Mass, to consecrate the elements, and so to bring God near to us upon the altar. But of your confessions, your prying into family life, your temporal dominion, I have the deepest mistrust. And also, I think, that the cause of Holy Church would be much better served if its priests were allowed—for such of them as wished it—to be married men. A man is a man, and God hath given him his natural attributes. I am not really learned, nor am I well read in the history of the world, but I have looked into it enough, Master Commendone, to know that God hath ordained that men should take women in marriage and rear up children for the glory of the Lord and the welfare of the State. Mark you"—his face became striated with lines of contempt and dislike—"mark you, this celibacy is to be the thing which will destroy the power of the sacrificing priest in the eyes of all before many hundred years have passed. I shall not see it, thou wilt not see it. We are good Church of England men now, but what I say will come to pass, and

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then God himself only knoweth what anarchs and deniers, what blasphemers and runagates will hold the world.

"Her Grace," he went on, "believeth that as Moses ordered blasphemers to be put to death, so she thinketh it the duty of a Christian prince to eradicate the cockle from the fold of God's Church, to cut out the gangrene that it may not spread to the sounder parts. But Her Grace is a woman that hath been much sequestered all her life till now. She cometh to the throne, and is but—I trust I speak no treason, Mr. Commendone—a tool and instrument of the priests from Spain, and the man from Spain also who is her lord. Why! if only the Church in this realm could go on as King Henry started it—not a new Church, mind you, but a Church which hath thrown off an unnecessary dominion from Italy—if it could go on as under the reign of the little King Edward was set out and promised very well, 'twould be truly Catholic still, and the priests of the Church would be all married men and citizens within the State, with a stake in civil affairs, and so by reason of their spiritual power and civil obligations, the very bulwark of society."

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Johnnie listened intently, nodding now and then as the Alderman made a point, and as he himself realised the value of it.

"Look you, Master Commendone," His Worship continued, "look you, only yesterday a worthy clergyman, whom I knew and loved, a man of his inches, a shrewd and clever gentleman of good birth, was haled from the City down to his own parish and burnt as a heretic. Heretic doubtless the good man was. He would be living now if he had not denied the blessed and comforting truth of Transubstantiation before that blood-stained wolf, the Bishop of London. The man I speak of was a good man, and though he was mistaken on that issue, he would, under kindlier auspices, doubtless have returned to the central truth of our religion. He was married, and had lived in honourable wedlock with his wife for many years. She was a lady from Wales, and a sweet woman. But it was his marriage as much as any other thing about him that brought him to his death."

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The Alderman's voice sank into something very like a whisper. "One of my men," he said, "was riding down with the Sheriff of London to Hadley, where Dr. Taylor, he of whom I speak, suffered this very morning. At five this afternoon my man was back, and told me how the good doctor died. He died with great constancy, very much, Mr. Commendone, as one of the old saints that the Romans did use so cruelly in the early years of Our Lord's Church. Yet, as something of a student of affairs—and Dr. Taylor is not the first good heretic who hath died rather than recant—I see that the married clergy suffer with the most alacrity. And why? Because, as I see it, they are bearing testimony to the validity and sanctity of their marriage. The honour of their wives and children is at stake; the desire of leaving them an unsullied name and a virtuous example, combined with a sense of religious duty. And thus the heart derives strength from the very ties which in other circumstances might well tend to weaken it.

"I am in mourning to-night, mourning in my heart, Mr. Commendone, for a good, mistaken friend who hath suffered death."

As his voice fell, the Alderman was looking sadly into the red embers of the fire with the music of a deep sadness and regret in his voice. He wasn't an emotional man at all—by nature that is—Johnnie saw it at once. But he saw also that his host was very deeply moved. Johnnie rose from his chair.

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"You are telling me no news at all, Mr. Alderman," he said. "I had orders, and I was one of those who rode with Sir John Shelton and the Sheriff to take Dr. Taylor to the stake at Aldham Common."

Mr. Cressemer started violently.

"Mother of God!" he said, "did you see that done?"

Johnnie nodded. He could not trust himself to speak.

The Alderman's cry of horror brought home to him almost for the first time not the terror of what he had seen—that he had realised long ago—but a sense of personal guilt, a disgust with himself that he should have been a participator in such a deed, a spectator, however pitying.

He felt unclean.

Then he said in a low voice: "What I tell you, Mr. Cressemer, will, I know, remain as a secret between us. I feel I am not betraying any trust in telling *you*. I am, as you know, attached to the person of His Majesty, and I have been admitted into great confidence both by him and Her Grace the Queen. The King rode to Hadley disguised as a simple cavalier, and I was with him as his attendant."

He stopped short, feeling that the explanation was bald and unsufficing.

The Alderman stepped up to Johnnie and put his hand upon his arm. "Poor lad, poor lad," he said in tones of deepest pity. "I grieve in that thou hadst to witness such a thing in the following of thy duty."

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"I had thought," the young man faltered, his assurance deserting him for a moment at the words of this reverend and broad-souled man, "I thought you would think me stained in some wise, Mr. Cressemer. I..."

"Whist!" the elder man answered impatiently. "Have no such foolish thoughts. Am I not a man of affairs? Do I not know what discipline means? But this gives me great cause for thought. You have confided in me, Mr. Commendone, and so likewise will I in you. This morning the Doctor's wife, his little son, and little daughter Mary, set off for the Marches of Wales with a party of my men and their baggage. Mistress Taylor was born a Rhyader, of a good family in Conway town. Her brother liveth there, and all her friends are of Wales. It was as well that the dame should leave the City at once, for none knoweth what will be done to the relations of heretics at this time —Why, man! Thou art white as linen, thy hand shakes. What meaneth it?"

Johnnie, in truth, was a strange sight as he stood in front of his host. All his composure was gone. His eyes burnt in a white face, his lips were dry and parted, there was an almost terrible inquiry in his whole aspect and manner.

"'Tis nothing," he managed to say in a hoarse voice, which he hardly knew for his own. "Pr'ythee continue, sir."

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Mr. Cressemer gave the young man a keen, questioning glance before he went on speaking. Then he said:

"As I tell you, these members of the good Doctor's family are now safely on their way, and God grant them rest and peace in their new life. They will want for nothing. But the Doctor's other daughter, Mistress Elizabeth, was not his own daughter, but was adopted by him when she was but a little child. The girl is a very sweet and good girl, and my sister, Mistress Catherine, has long loved her. And as this is a childless house, alas! the maid hath come to live with us and she will be as my own daughter, if God wills it."

"She is well?" Johnnie asked, in a hoarse whisper.

The Alderman shook his head sadly. "She is the bravest maiden I have ever met," he said. "She hath stuff in her which recalls the ladies of old Rome, so calm and steadfast is she. There is in her at this time some divine illumination, Mr. Commendone, that keepeth her strong and unafraid. Ah, but she is sore stricken! She knew some hours ago of the doings at Hadley, for as I told you, one of my men brought the news. She hath been in prayer a long time, poor lamb, and now my sister is with her to hearten her and give her such comfort as may be. God's ways are very strange, Mr. John. Who would have thought now that you should come to this house to-night from that butchery?" He sighed deeply.

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Johnnie made the sign of the cross. "God moveth in a mysterious way," he said, "to perform His wonders. He rides upon the tempest, and eke directs the storm, and leadeth pigmy men and women with a sure hand and a certain purpose."

"Say not 'pigmy,' Mr. John," the Alderman answered, "we are not small in His eyes, though it is well that we should be in our own. But you speak with a certain meaning. You grew pale just now. I think you may justly confide in me. I am of thy father's age, and a friend of thy father's. What is it, lad?"

Speaking with great difficulty, looking downwards at the floor, Johnnie told him. He told him how he had met John Hull and taken him into his service, how that even now the man was in the kitchen among the servants of the Alderman. He told of the fellow's menace in Chepe, and how inexplicable it had seemed to him. Then he hesitated, and his voice sunk into silence.

"Ye saw the poor lamb?" Mr. Cressemer said in a low voice, which nevertheless trembled with excitement. "Ye saw her weeping as good Dr. Taylor was borne away? Ye took this good varlet Hull into thy service? And now thou art in my house. It seemeth indeed that God's finger is writing in the book of thy life; but I must hear more from thee, Mr. Commendone. Tell me, if thou wilt, what it may mean."

Johnnie straightened himself. He put his hand upon the pommel of his sword. He looked his host full in the eyes.

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"It means this, sir," he said, in a quiet and resolute voice. "All my life I have kept myself from those pleasures and peccadilloes that young gentlemen of my station are wont to use. I have never looked upon a maiden with eyes of love—or worse. Before God His Throne, Our Lady the Blessed Virgin, and all the crowned saints I say it. But yester morn, when I saw her weeping in the grey, my heart went out from me, and is no more mine. I vowed then that by God's grace I would be her knight and lover for ever and a day. My employment hath not to-day given me the opportunity to go to Mass, but I have promised myself to-morrow morn that in the chapel of St. John I will vow myself to her with all fealty, and indeed nor man, nor power, nor obstacle of any sort shall keep me from her, if God allows. Wife she shall be to me, and so I can make her love me. All this I swear to you, by my honour"—here he pulled his sword from the scabbard and reverently kissed the hilt—"and to the Blessed Trinity." And now he pulled his crucifix from his doublet, and kissed it.

Then he turned away from the Alderman, took a few steps to the fire-place, and leant against the carving, his head bowed upon his arms.

There was a dead silence in the big room. Tears were gathering in the eyes of the grave elderly man, while his mind worked furiously. He saw in all this the direct hand of Providence working towards a definite and certain end.

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He had loved the slim and gracious lad directly he saw him. His heart had gone out to one so gallant and one so debonair, the son of his old and trusted friend. He had long loved the Rector of Hadley's sweet daughter, who was so idolised also by Mistress Catherine Cressemer, his sister. During the reign of Edward VI the girl had often come up to London to spend some months with her wealthy and influential friends. She had a great part in the heart of the childless widower.

Now this strange and wonderful thing had happened.

These thoughts passed through the old man's mind in a few seconds, while the silence was not broken. Then, as he was about to turn and speak to Johnnie, the door of the room opened quickly, and a short, elderly woman hurried in.

She was very simply dressed in grey woollen stuff, though the bodice and skirt were edged with costly fur. The white lace of Bruges upon her head framed a face of great sweetness, and now it was alive with excitement.

She was a little woman, fifty years of age, with a flat wrinkled face; but her eyes were full of kindness, and, indeed, so was her whole face, although her lips were drawn in by the loss of her front teeth, and this gave her a rather witch-like mouth.

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"Robert! Robert!" she said in a high, excited voice. "John Hull, that was servant to our dear Doctor, is in this house. The men have him in the kitchen—word has just been sent up to me. What shall we do? Dear Lizzie—she is more tranquil now, and bearing her cross very bravely—dear Lizzie had thought not to see him again. Will it be well that we should have him up? Think you the child can bear seeing him?"

The lady had piped this out in a rush of excited words. Then suddenly she saw Johnnie, who had turned round and stood by the fire, bowing. His face was drawn and white, and he was trembling.

"Catherine," Mr. Cressemer said, "strange things are happening to-night, of which I must speak with you anon. But this is Mr. John Commendone, son of our dear Knight of Kent, who hath come to see me, and who haply or by design of God was forced to witness the death of Dr. Rowland this morning."

Johnnie made a low bow, the little lady a lower curtsy.

Then, heedless of all etiquette, with the tears streaming down her cheeks, she trotted up to the young man and caught hold of both his hands, looking up at him with the saddest, kindest face he had ever seen.

"Oh, boy, boy," she said, "thou hast come at the right time. We know with what constancy the Doctor died, but our lamb will be well content to hear of it from kindly lips, for she is very strong and steadfast, the pretty dear! And thou hast a good face, and surely art a true son of thy father, Sir Henry of Commendone."

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CHAPTER VI

A KING AND A VICTIM. TWO GRIM MEN

There was a "Red Mass," a votive Mass of the Holy Ghost, sung on the next morning in the Tower.

The King and Queen, with all the Court, were present.

Johnnie knelt with the gentlemen attached to the persons of the King and Queen, the gentlemen ushers behind them, and then the military officers of the guard.

The *Veni Creator Spiritus* was intoned by the Chancellor, and the music of the Mass was that of Dom Giovanni Palestrina, director of sacred music at the Vatican at that time.

The music, which by its dignity and beauty had alone prevented the Council of Trent from prohibiting polyphonic music at the Mass, had a marvellous appeal to the Esquire. It was founded upon a *canto fermo*, a melody of an ancient plain song of the Middle Ages, and used in High Mass from a very remote period.

The six movements of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei were of a superlative technical excellence. The trained ear, the musical mind, were alike enthralled by them. Tinel, Waddington, and Christopher Tye had written no music then, and the mellow angelic harmonies of Messer Palestrina were all new and fresh in their inspiration of dignity, grandeur, and devotion, most precious incense, as it were, about the feet of the Lord.

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The Bishop of London was celebrant, and Father Deza deacon. The Queen and King received in the one Kind, while two of the re-established Carthusians from Sheen, and two Brigittine monks from Sion, held a white cloth before Their Graces.

This was not liked by many there—it had always been the privilege of peers.

But of this Commendone knew nothing. The hour was for him one of the deepest devotion and

solemnity. He had not slept all the night long. For a few moments he had seen Elizabeth, had spoken with her, had held her by the hand. His life was utterly and absolutely changed. His mind, excited with want of sleep, irrevocably stamped and impressed by the occupation of the last two days, was caught up by the exquisite music into a passionate surrender of self as he vowed his life to God and his lady.

Earth and all it held—save only her—was utterly dissolved and swept away. An unspeakable peace and stillness was in his heart.

Much, we read, is required from those to whom much is given, and Johnnie was to go through places far more terrible than the Valley of the Shadow of Death ever is to most men before he saw the Dawn. [Pg 171]

When the Mass was said—the final "*Missa est*" was to ring in the young man's ears for many a long day—he went to breakfast. He took nothing in the Common Room, however, but John Hull brought him food in his own chamber.

The man's brown, keen face beamed with happiness. He was like some faithful dog that had lost one master and found another. He could not do enough for Johnnie now—after the visit to Mr. Cressemer's house. He took charge of him as if he had been his man for years. There was a quiet assumption which secretly delighted Commendone. There they were, master and man, a relationship fixed and settled.

On that afternoon there was to be a tournament in the tilting yard, and Johnnie meant to ride—he had nearly carried away the ring at the last joust. Hull knew of it—in a few hours the fellow seemed to have fallen into his place in an extraordinary fashion—and he had been busy with his master's armour since early dawn.

While Johnnie was making his breakfast, though he would very willingly have been alone, and indeed had retired for that very purpose, Hull came bustling in and out of the armour-room his face a brown wedge of pleasure and excitement. The *volante pièce*, the *mentonnière*, the *grande-garde* of his master's exquisite suite of light Milan armour shone like a newly-minted coin. The black and lacquered *cuirasse*, with a line of light blue enamel where it would meet the gorget, was oiled and polished—he had somehow found the little box of bandrols with the Commendone colour and cypher which were to be tied above the coronels of Johnnie's lances. [Pg 172]

And all the time John Hull chattered and worked, perfectly happy, perfectly at home. Already, to Commendone's intense amusement, the man had become dictatorial—as old and trusted servants are. He had got some powder of resin, and was about to pour it into the jointed steel gauntlet of the lance hand.

"It gives the grip, master," he said. "By this means the hand fitteth better to the joints of the steel."

"But 'tis never used that I know of. 'Tis not like the grip of a bare hand on the ash stave of a pike...."

There was a technical discussion, which ended in Johnnie's defeat—at least, John Hull calmly powdered the inside of the glaive.

He was got rid of at last, sent to his meal with the other serving-men, and Commendone was left alone. He had an hour to himself, an hour in which to recall the brief but perfect joy of the night before.

They had taken him to Elizabeth after supper, his good host and hostess. There was something piteously sweet in the tall slim girl in her black dress—the dear young mouth trembling, the blue eyes full of a mist of unshed tears, the hair ripest wheat or brownest barley. [Pg 173]

She had taken his hand—hers was like cool white ivory—and listened to him as a sister might.

He had sat beside her, and told her of her father's glorious death. His dark and always rather melancholy face had been lit with sympathy and tenderness. Quite unconscious of his own grace and grave young dignity, he had dwelt upon the Martyr's joy at setting out upon his last journey, with an incomparable delicacy and perfection of phrase.

His voice, though he knew it not, was full of music. His extreme good looks, the refinement and purity of his face, came to the poor child with a wonderful message of consolation.

When he told her how a brutal yeoman had thrown a faggot at the Archdeacon, she shuddered and moaned a little.

Mr. Cressemer and his sister looked at Johnnie with reproach.

But he had done it of set purpose. "And then, Mistress Elizabeth," he continued, "the Doctor said, 'Friend, I have harm enough. What needeth that?'"

His hand had been upon his knee. She caught it up between her own—innocent, as to a brother, unutterably sweet.

"Oh, dear Father!" she cried. "It is just what he would have said. It is so like him!" [Pg 174]

"It is liker Christ our Lord," Robert Cressemer broke in, his deep voice shaking with sorrow. "For

what, indeed, said He at His cruel nailing? [Greek: Pater, aphe autois ou gar oidasi ti poiysi.]"

... And then they had sent Johnnie away, marvelling at the goodness, shrewdness, and knowledge of the Alderman, with his whole being one sob of love, pity, and protection for his dear simple mourner—so crystal clear, so sisterlike and sweet!

It was time to go upon duty.

Johnnie looked at his thick oval watch—a "Nuremberg Egg," as it was called in those days—cut short his reverie of sweet remembrance, and went straight to the King Consort's wing of the Palace.

When he was come into the King's room he found him alone with Torromé, his valet, sitting in a big leather-covered arm-chair, his ruff and doublet taken off, and wearing a long dressing-gown of brown stuff, a friar's gown it almost seemed.

The melancholy yellow face brightened somewhat as the Esquire came in.

"I am home again, Señor," he said in Spanish, though "*en casa*" was the word he used for home, and that had a certain pathos in it. "There is a *torneo*, a *justa*, after dinner, so they tell me. I had wished to ride myself, but I am weary from our *viajero* into the country. I shall sit with the Queen, and you, Señor, will attend me."

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He must have seen a slight, fleeting look of disappointment upon Commendone's face.

Himself, as the envoy Suriano said of him in 1548, "deficient in that energy which becometh a man, sluggish in body and timid in martial enterprise," he nevertheless affected an exaggerated interest in manly sports. He had, it is true, mingled in some tournaments at Brussels in the past, and Calvera says that he broke his lances, "very much to the satisfaction of his father and aunts." But in England, at any rate, he had done nothing of the sort, and his voice to Commendone was almost apologetic.

"We will break a lance together some day," he said, "but you must forego the lists this afternoon."

Johnnie bowed very low. This was extraordinary favour. He knew, of course, that the King would never tilt with him, but he recognised the compliment.

He knew, again, that his star was high in the ascendant. The son of the great Charles V was reserved, cautious, suspicious of all men—except when, in private, he would unbend to buffoons and vulgar rascals like Sir John Shelton—and the icy gravity of his deportment to courtiers seldom varied.

Commendone was quite aware that the King did not class him with men of Shelton's stamp. He was the more signally honoured therefore.

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"This night," His Grace continued, "after the jousts, your attendance will be excused, Señor. I retire early to rest."

The Esquire bowed, but he had caught a certain gleam in the King's small eyes. "Duck Lane or Bankside!" he thought to himself. "Thank God he hath not commanded me to be with him."

Johnnie was beginning to understand, more than he had hitherto done, something of his sudden rise to favour and almost intimacy. The King Consort was trying him, testing him in every way, hoping to find at length a companion less dangerous and drunken, a reputation less blown upon, a servant more discreet....

He could have spat in his disgust. What he had tolerated in others before, though loftily repudiated for himself, now became utterly loathsome—in King or commoner, black and most foul.

The King wore a mask; Johnnie wore one also—there was *finesse* in the game between master and servant. And to-night the King would wear a literal mask, the "*maschera*," which Badovardo speaks of when he set down the frailties of this monarch for after generations to read of: "*Nelle piaceri delle donnè è incontinente, predendo dilletatione d'andare in maschera la notte et nei tempi de negotii gravi.*"

Then and there Johnnie made a resolution, one which had been nascent in his mind for many hours. He would have done with the Court as soon as may be. Ambition, so new a child of his brain, was already dead. He would marry, retire from pageant and splendour even as his father had done years and years ago. With Elizabeth by his side he would once more live happily among the woods and wolds of Commendone.

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Torromé, the *criado* or valet, came into the room again from the bed-chamber. His Highness was to change his clothes once more—at high noon he must be with the Queen upon State affairs. The Chancellor and Lord Wharton were coming, and with them Brookes, the Bishop of Gloucester, the papal sub-delegate, and the Royal Proctors, Mr. Martin and Mr. Storey.

The prelates, Ridley and Latimer, were lying in prison—their ultimate fate was to be discussed on that morning.

The King had but hardly gone into his bed-chamber when the door of the Closet opened and Don Diego Deza entered, unannounced, and with the manner of habitude and use.

He greeted Commendone heartily, shaking him by the hand with considerable warmth, his clear-cut, inscrutable face wearing an expression of fixed kindliness—put on for the occasion, meant to appear sincere, there for a purpose.

"I will await His Grace here," the priest said, glancing at the door leading to the bedroom, which was closed. "I am to attend him to the Council Chamber, where there is much business to be done. So next week, Mr. Commendone, you'll be at Whitehall! The Court will be gayer there—more suited to you young gallants."

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"For my part," Johnnie answered, "I like the Tower well enough."

"Hast a contented mind, Señor," the priest answered brightly. "But I hap to know that the Queen will be glad to be gone from the City. This hath been a necessary visit, one of ceremony, but Her Grace liketh the Palace of Westminster better, and her Castle of Windsor best of all. I shall meet you at Windsor in the new year, and hope to see you more advanced. Wilt be wearing the gold spurs then, I believe, and there will be two knights of the honoured name of Commendone!"

Johnnie answered: "I think not, Father," he said, turning over his own secret resolve in his mind with an inward smile. "But why at Windsor? Doubtless we shall meet near every day."

"Say nothing, Mr. Commendone," the priest answered in a low voice. "There can be no harm in telling you—who are privy to so much—but I sail for Spain to-morrow morn, and shall be some months absent upon His Most Catholic Majesty's affairs."

Shortly after this, the King came out of his room, three of his Spanish gentlemen were shown in, and with Johnnie, the Dominican, and his escort, His Highness walked to the Council Chamber, round the tower of which stood a company of the Queen's Archers, showing that Her Grace had already arrived.

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Then for two hours Johnnie kicked his heels in the Ante-room, watching this or that great man pass in and out of the Council Chamber, chatting with the members of the Spanish suite—bored to death.

At half-past one the Council was over, and Their Majesties went to dinner, as did also Johnnie in the Common Room.

At half-past three of the clock the Esquire was standing in the Royal box behind the King and Queen, among a group of other courtiers, and looking down on the great tilting yard, where he longed himself to be.

The Royal Gallery was at one end of the yard, a great stage-box, as it were, into which two carved chairs were set, and which was designated, as a somewhat fervent chronicler records, "the gallery, or place at the end of the tilting yard adjoining to Her Grace's Palace of the Tower, whereat her person should be placed. It was called, and with good cause, the Castle, or Fortress of Perfect Beauty, forasmuch as Her Highness should be there included."

Johnnie stood and watched it all with eyes in which there was but little animation. A few days before nothing would have gladdened him more than such a spectacle as this. To-day it was as nothing to him.

Down below was a device of painted canvas, imitating a rolling-trench, which was supposed to be the besieging works of those who attempted the "Fortress of Perfect Beauty."

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"Upon the top of it were set two cannons wrought of wood, and coloured so passing well, as, indeed, they seemed to be two fair field-pieces of ordnance. And by them were placed two men for gunners in cloth and crimson sarcanet, with baskets of earth for defence of their bodies withal."

At the far end of the lists there came a clanking and hammering of the farriers' and armourers' forges.

Grooms in mandilions—the loose, sleeveless jacket of their calling—were running about everywhere, leading the chargers trapped with velvet and gold in their harness. Gentlemen in short cloaks and Venetian hose bustled about among the knights, and here and there from the stables, and withdrawing sheds outside the lists, great armoured figures came, the sun shining upon their plates—russet-coloured, fluted, damascened with gold in a hundred points of fire.

Nothing could be more splendid, as the trumpeters advanced into the lists, and the fierce fanfaronade snarled up to the sky. The Garter King-at-arms in his tabard, mounted on a white horse with gold housings, rode out into the centre of the yard, and behind him, though on foot, were Blue-mantle and Rouge-dragon.

The afternoon air was full of martial noise, the clank of metal, the brazen notes of horns, the stir and murmur of a great company.

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To Johnnie it seemed that he did not know the shadow from the substance. It all passed before him in a series of coloured pictures, unreal and far away. Had he been down there among the knights and lords, he felt that he would but have fought with shadows. It was as though a weird seizure had taken hold on him, a waking dream enmeshed him in its drowsy impalpable net, so

that on a sudden, in the midst of men and day, while he walked and talked and stood as ever before, he yet seemed to move among a world of ghosts, to feel himself the shadow of a dream. Once when Sir Charles Paston Cooper, a very clever rider at the swinging ring, and also doughty in full shock of combat, had borne down his adversary, the Queen clapped her hands.

"Habet!" she cried, like any Roman empress, excited and glad, because young Sir Charles was a very strong adherent of the Crown, and known to be bitterly opposed to the pretensions of the Lady Elizabeth. "Habet!" the Queen cried again, with a shriek of delight.

She looked at her husband, whose head was a little bent, whose sallow face was lost in thought. She did not venture to disturb his reverie, but glanced behind him and above his chair to where John Commendone was standing.

"C'est bien fait, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur?" she said in French.

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The young man's face, also, was frozen into immobility. It did not waken to the Queen's joyous exclamation. The eyes were turned inwards, he was hearing nothing of it all.

Her Grace's face flushed a little. She said no more, but wondered exceedingly.

The stately display-at-arms went on. The sun declined towards his western bower, and blue shadows crept slowly over the sand.

A little chill wind arose suddenly, and as it did so, Commendone awoke.

Everything flashed back to him. In the instant that it did so, and the dreaming of his mind was blown away, the curtain before his subconscious intelligence rolled up and showed him the real world. The first thing he saw was the head of King Philip just below him. The tall conical felt hat moved suddenly, leaning downwards towards a corner of the arena just below the Royal box.

Johnnie saw the King's profile, the lean, sallow jowl, the corner of the curved, tired, and haughty lip—the small eye suddenly lit up.

Following the King's glance, he saw below the figure of Sir John Shelton, dressed very quietly in ordinary riding costume, and by the side of the knight, Torromé, the valet of His Highness.

Both men nodded, and the King slightly inclined his head in reply.

Then His Highness leant back in his chair, and a little hissing noise, a sigh of relief or pleasure, came from his lips.

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Immediately he turned to the Queen, placed one hand upon her jewelled glove, and began to speak with singular animation and brightness.

The Queen changed in a moment. The lassitude and disappointment went from her face in a flash. She turned to her husband, radiant and happy, and once more her face became beautiful.

It was the last time that John Commendone ever saw the face of Queen Mary. In after years he preferred always to think of her as he saw her then.

The tourney was over. Everybody had left the tilting yard and its vicinity, save only the farriers, the armour smiths, and grooms.

In front of the old palace hardly a soul was to be seen, except the sentinels and men of the guard, who paced up and down the terraces.

It was eight o'clock, and twilight was falling. All the windows were lit, every one was dressing for supper, and now and then little roulades of flutes, the twanging of viols being tuned, the mellow clarionette-like voice of the *piccolo-milanese* showed that the Royal band was preparing for the feast.

Johnnie was off duty; his time was his own now, and he could do as he would.

He longed more than anything to go to Chepe to be with the Cressemers again, to see Elizabeth; but, always punctilious upon points of etiquette, and especially remembering the sad case and dolour of his love, he felt it would be better not to go. Nevertheless, he took a sheet of paper from his case into the Common Room, and wrote a short letter of greeting to the Alderman. With this he also sent a posy of white roses, which he bribed a serving-man to get from the Privy Garden, desiring that the flowers should be given to Mistress Elizabeth Taylor.

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This done, he sought and found his servant.

"To-night, John Hull," he said, "I shall not need thee, and thou mayest go into the City and do as thou wilt. I am going to rest early, for I am very tired. Come you back before midnight—you can get the servant's pass from the lieutenant of the guard if you mention my name—and wake me and bring me some milk. But while thou art away, take this letter and these flowers to the house of Master Robert Cressemer. Do not deliver them at once when thou goest, but at ten or a little later, and desire them to be taken at once to His Worship."

This he said, knowing something of the habits of the great house in Chepeside, and thinking that his posy would be taken to Elizabeth when she was retiring to her sleep.

"Perchance she may think of me all night," said cunning Johnnie to himself.

Hull took the letter and the flowers, and departed. Johnnie went to his chamber, disembarassing himself of his stiff starched ruff, took off his sword, and put on the cassock-coat, which was the undress for the young gentlemen of the Court when they met in the Common Room for a meal.

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He designed to take some food, and then to go straight to bed and sleep until his servant should wake him with the milk he had ordered, and especially with the message of how he had done in Chepe.

He had just arrayed himself and was wearily stretching out his arms, wondering whether after all he should go downstairs to sup or no, when the door of his bedroom was pushed open and Ambrose Cholmondely entered.

Johnnie was glad to see his friend.

"*Holà!*" he said, "I was in need of some one with whom to talk. You come in a good moment, *mon ami.*"

Cholmondely sat down upon the bed.

"Well," he said, "didst come off well at the tourney?"

Johnnie shook his head. "I didn't ride," he said, "I was in attendance upon His Grace, rather to my disgust, for I had hoped for some exercise. But you? Where were you, Ambrose?"

"I? Well, Johnnie, I was excused attendance this afternoon. I made interest with Mr. Champneys, and so I got off."

"Venus, her service, I doubt me," Johnnie answered.

Ambrose Cholmondely nodded.

"Yes," he said, "i' faith, a very bootless quest it was. A girl at an inn that I lit upon some time ago—'tis a big hostel of King Henry's time without Aldgate, the 'Woolsack.'"

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Johnnie started. "I went there once," he said.

"I should well have thought," Cholmondely replied, "it would have been out of your purview. Never mind. My business came not to a satisfactory end. The girl was very coy. But I tell you what I did see, and that hath given me much reason for thought. Along the road towards Essex, where I was walking, hoping to meet my inamorata, came a damsel walking, by her dress and bearing of gentle birth, and with a serving-maid by her side. I was not upon the high road, but sat under a sycamore tree in a field hard by, but I saw all that passed very well. A carriage came slowly down the road towards this lady. Out of it jumped that bully-rook John Shelton, and close behind him the Spanish valet Torromé, that is the King's private servant. They caught hold of the girl, Shelton clapped a hand upon her mouth, and they had her in the carriage in a moment and her maid with her—which immediately turned round and went back at a quick pace through Aldgate. I would have interferred, but I could not get to the high road in time; 'twas so quickly done. Johnnie, there will be great trouble in London, if Shelton and these Spaniards he is so friendly with are to do such things in England. It may go on well enough for a time, but suddenly the bees will be roused from their hive, and there will be such a to-do and turmoil, such a candle will be lit as will not easily be put out."

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Johnnie shrugged his shoulders. In his mood of absolute disgust with his surroundings, the recital interested him very little. He connected it at once with the appearance of Shelton and the valet at the end of the tourney, but it was not his business.

"The hog to his sty," he said bitterly. "I am going to take some supper, and then to bed, for I am very weary."

Arm in arm with Ambrose Cholmondely, he descended the stairs, went into the Common Room, and made a simple meal.

The place was riotous with high spirits, the talk was fast and free, but he joined in none of it, and in a very few minutes had returned to his room, closed the door, and thrown himself upon the bed.

Almost immediately he sank into a deep sleep.

He was dreaming of Elizabeth, and in his dream was interwoven the sound of great bells, when the fantastic painted pictures of sleep were suddenly shaken violently and dissolved. They flashed away, and his voice rose in calling after them to stay, when he suddenly awoke.

The bells were still going on, deep golden notes from the central cupola over the Queen's Gallery, beating out the hour of eleven. But as they changed from dream into reality—much louder and imminent—he felt himself shaken violently. A strong hand gripped his shoulder, a hoarse voice mingled with the bell-music in his ears. He awoke.

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His little room was lit by a lanthorn standing upon the mantel with the door open.

John Hull, a huge broad shadow, was bending over him. He sat up in bed.

"*Dame!*" he cried, "and what is this?"

"Master! Master! She has been taken away! My little mistress! Most foully taken away, and none know where she may be!"

Johnnie sprang from his bed, upright and trembling.

"I took the letter and the flowers as you bade me. But all was sorrow and turmoil at the house. Mistress Elizabeth went out in the afternoon with Alice her maid. She was to take the air. They have not returned. Nothing is known. His Worship hath fifty men searching for her, and hath had for hours. But it avails nothing."

Johnnie suddenly became quite quiet. Hull saw his face change. The smooth, gracious contours were gone. An inner face, sharp, resolute, haggard and terribly alive, sprang out and pushed the other away.

"His Worship writ thee a letter, sir. Here 'tis."

Johnnie held out his hand. The letter was brief, the writing hurried and indistinct with alarm.

"DEAR LAD,—They have taken our Lizzie, whom I know not. But I fear the worst things. I cannot find her with all my resource. An' if I cannot, one must dread exceeding. I dare say no more. But come to me on the instant, if canst. Thou—being at Court—I take it, may be able to do more than I, at the moment and in the article of our misfortune. The weight I bring to bear is heavy, but taketh time. Command me in every way as seemeth good to you. Order, and if needs be threaten in my name. All you do or say is as if I said it, and they that deny it will feel my hand heavy on them.

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"But come, dear lad. Our Lady help and shield the little lamb.

"Your friend,
"ROBERT CRESSEMER,
"Alderman."

Johnnie thrust the letter into his bosom.

"John Hull, art ready to follow me to the death, as it may be and very like will?"

"Certes, master."

"Anything for her? Are you my man to do all and everything I tell thee till the end?"

John Hull answered nothing. He ran out of the room and returned in an instant with his master's boots and sword. He saw that the holster pistols were primed. He took one of Johnnie's daggers and thrust it into the sheath of his knife without asking.

The two men armed themselves to the teeth without another word.

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"I'll be round to the stables," Hull said at length. "Two horses, master? I will rouse one groom only and say 'tis State business."

"You know then where we must go?"

"I know not the place. But I guess it. We hear much—we Court servants!" He spat upon the floor. "And I saw *him* looking at her as the Doctor rode to Hadley."

"Wilt risk it?—death, torture, which is worse, John Hull?"

"Duck Lane, master?"

"Duck Lane."

"I thought so. I'm for the horses."

A clatter of descending footsteps, a man standing in a little darkling room, his hand upon his sword hilt. His teeth set, his brain working in ice.

Receding footsteps.... "Faithfullest servant that ever man had!"

And so to the bitter work!

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CHAPTER VII

HEY HO! AND A RUMBELOW!

They had ridden over London Bridge.

The night was dark, and a wind was beginning to rise. Again, here and there about the bridge, soldiers were lounging, but Commendone and his servant passed over successfully. He was recognised from the last time, three nights ago. As they walked their horses through the scattered houses immediately at the southern end of the bridge, Johnnie spoke to Hull.

"I have plans," he said quietly; "my mind is full of them. But I can give you no hint until we are there and doing. Be quick at the uptake, follow me in all I do, but if necessary act thyself, and remember that we are desperate men upon an adventure as desperate. Let nothing stand in the way, as I shall not."

For answer he heard a low mutter, almost a growl, and they rode on in silence.

Both were cool and calm, strung up to the very highest point, every single faculty of mind and body on the alert and poised to strike.

One, the Spanish blood within him turning to that cold icy fury which would stick at nothing in this world to achieve his ends, the while his trained intelligence and high mental powers sat, as it were, upon his frozen anger and rode it as a horse; the other, a volcano of hidden snarling fury, seeing red at each step of his way through the dark, but subordinate and disciplined by the master mind.

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They came to the entrance to Duck Lane, walked their horses quietly down it—once more it was in silence—until under the lamp above the big red door of the House of Shame, they saw two horses tethered to a ring in the wall, and a man in a cloak walking up and down in front of the house.

He looked up sharply as they came into the circle of lamp-light, and Johnnie saw, with a fierce throb of exultation, that it was Torromé, the King's valet.

"It is you, Señor," the man said in a low voice of relief.

Johnnie nodded curtly as he dismounted.

"Yes," he said, in a voice equally low, putting something furtive and sly into the tones, for he was a consummate actor. "Yes, it is I, Torromé. I must see His Grace at once on matters of high importance."

"His Grace said nothing," the man began.

"I know, I know," Johnnie answered. "It was not thought that I should have to come, but as events turn out"—he struck with his hand upon the door as he spoke—"I am to see His Highness at once."

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"I trust Her Grace——" the man whispered in a frightened voice.

"Not a word," Commendone replied. "Take our horses and keep watch over them also. My man cometh in with me. Word will be sent out to you anon what to do."

The man bowed, and gathered up the bridle of the two new horses on his arm; while as he did so, the big red door swung open a little, and a thin face, covered with a mask of black velvet, peered out at the newcomers.

"It is all right," the valet said, in French. "This gentleman is of the suite of His Highness."

The peering, masked face scrutinised Johnnie for a second, then nodded, and the red lips below twisted into a sinister smile.

"Enter, sir," came in a soft, cooing voice. "I remember you three nights back...."

Johnnie entered, closely followed by Hull, and the door was closed behind him. They stood once more in the quiet carpeted passage, with its sense of mystery, its heavily perfumed air, and once again the tall nondescript figure flitted noiselessly in front of them, and scratched upon a panel of the big door at the end of the passage. There was the tinkle of a bell within. The door was opened. Johnnie pushed aside the curtains and entered the room, hung with crimson arras, powdered with the design of gold bats, lit with its hanging silver lamps, and reeking with the odour of the scented gums which were burning there.

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Madame La Motte rose from her chair behind the little table as they entered. The big, painted face was quite still and motionless, like a mask, but the eyes glanced with quick, cunning brightness at Commendone and his companion—the only things alive in that huge countenance. She recognised Johnnie in a moment, and then her eyebrows went up into her forehead and the lower part of her face moved down a little, as if the whole were actuated by the sudden pull of a lever.

"*Mon gars*," she said, in French, "and what brings you here to-night? And who is this?..."

Her eyes had fallen upon the broad figure of the serving-man in his leather coat, his short sword hanging from his belt, his hand upon his dagger.

She might well look in alarm, this ancient, evil woman, for the keen brown face of the servant was gashed and lined with a terrible and quiet fury, the lips curled away from the teeth, the fore part of the body was bent forward a little as if to spring.

Johnnie took two steps up to the woman.

"Madam," he said, in a voice so low that it was hardly more than a whisper, but every syllable of which was perfectly distinct and clear, "a lady has been stolen from her friends, and brought to this hell. Where is she?"

The woman knew in a moment why they had come. She gave a sudden swift glance towards the door in the arras at the other side of the room, which told Commendone all he wanted to know. [Pg 195]

"It is true, then?" he said. "Thou cat of hell, bound mistress of the fiend, she is here?"

The huge body of the woman began to tremble like a jelly, slowly at first in little shivers, and then more rapidly until face and shapeless form shook and swayed from side to side in a convulsion of fear, while all the jewels upon her winked and flashed.

As the young man bent forward and looked into her face, she found a voice, a horrid, strangled voice. "I know nothing," she coughed.

There was a low snarl, like a wakened panther, as Commendone, shuddering as he did so, gripped one bare, powdered shoulder.

"Silence!" he said.

With one convulsive effort, the woman shot out a fat hand, and rang the little silver bell upon the table.

Almost immediately the door swung open; there was a swish of curtains, and the tall, fantastic figure of the creature who had let them into the house stood there.

"*Allez—la maison en face—viens toi vite,—Jules, Louis.*"

Commendone clapped his hand over the woman's mouth, just as the eel-like creature at the door, realising the situation in a moment, was gliding through the curtains to summon the bullies of the house. [Pg 196]

But John Hull was too quick for him. He caught him by the arm, wrenched him back into the room, sent him spinning into the centre of it, and took two steps towards him, his right fist half raised to deal him a great blow.

The creature mewed like a cat, ducked suddenly and ran at the yeoman, gripping him round the waist with long, thin arms.

There was no sound as they struggled—this long, eel-like thing, in its mask and crimson robe twining round his sturdy opponent like some parasite writhing with evil life.

John Hull rocked, striving to bend forward and get a grip of his antagonist. But it was useless. He could do nothing, and he was being slowly forced backwards towards the door.

There was horror upon the man's brown face, horror of this silent, clinging thing which fought with fury, and in a fashion that none other had fought with him in all his life.

Then, as he realised what was happening, he stood up for a moment, staggering backwards as he did so, pulled out the dagger from his belt and struck three great blows downwards into the thin scarlet back, burying the steel up to the hilt at each fierce stroke.

There was a sudden "Oh," quite quiet and a little surprised, the sort of sound a man might make when he sees a friend come unexpectedly into his room....

That was all. It was over in some thirty seconds, there was a convulsive wriggle on the floor, and the man, if indeed it was a man, lay on its back stiff in death. The mask of black velvet had been torn off in the struggle, and they saw a tiny white face, painted and hairless, set on the end of a muscular and stringy neck—a monster lying there in soulless death. [Pg 197]

"Have you killed it?" Commendone asked, suddenly.

"Yes, master." Hull's head was averted from what lay upon the carpet, even while he was pushing it towards the heap of cushions at the side of the room. Leaning over the body, he took a cushion from the heap—a gaudy thing of green and orange—and wiped his boot.

"Listen!" Johnnie said, still with his hand covering the woman's face.

They listened intently. Not a sound was to be heard.

"As I take it," Commendone answered, "there are no men in the house except only those two we have come to seek. The alarm hath not been given, and that *eunuque* is dead. We must settle Madame here." He laughed a grim, menacing laugh as he spoke.

Immediately the figure in his hands began to writhe and tremble, the feet beat a dull tattoo upon the carpet, the eyes protruded from their layers of paint, a snorting, snuffling noise came from beneath Commendone's hand. He caught it away instantly, shuddering with disgust. [Pg 198]

"Kill me not! kill me not!" the old woman gasped. "They are upstairs, the King and his friend. The girl is there. I know nothing of her, she was brought to me in the dark by the King's servants. Kill me not; I will stay silent." Her voice failed. She fell suddenly back in her chair, and looked at them with indescribable horror in her eyes.

"I'll see to her, master," Hull said in a quiet voice, his face still distorted with mastiff-like fury.

He caught up his blood-stained dagger from the floor, stepped to the stiffened corpse, curved by tetanus into a bow, and ripped up a long piece of the gown which covered it. Quickly and silently

he tied the old woman's ankles together, her hands behind her back—the podgy wrists would not meet, nor near it—and again he went to the corpse for further bonds.

"And now to stop her mouth," he said, "or she will be calling."

Commendone took out his handkerchief. "Here," he said. In an instant Hull had rolled it into a ball, pressed it between the painted lips, and tied it in its place with the last strip of velvet.

All this had taken but hardly a minute. Then he stood up and looked at his master. "The time comes," he said.

Johnnie nodded, and walked slowly, with quiet footsteps, towards the door in the arras at the other side of the room.

He felt warily for the handle, found it, turned it gently, and saw a narrow stairway stretching upwards, and lit by a lamp somewhere above. The stair was uncarpeted, but it was of old and massive oak, and, drawing his sword, he crept cautiously up, Hull following him like a cat. [Pg 199]

They found themselves in a corridor with doors on each side, each door painted with a big white number. It was lit, warm, and very still.

Johnnie put his fingers to his lips, and both men listened intently.

The silence was absolute. They might have been in an empty house. No single indication of human movement came to them as they stood there.

For nearly a minute they remained motionless. Their eyes were fixed and horror-struck, their ears strained to an intensity of listening.

Then, at last, they heard a sound, quite unexpectedly and very near.

It came from the door immediately upon their right, which was painted with the number "3," and was simply the click of a sword in its scabbard. Johnnie took two noiseless steps to the door, settled his sword in his hand, flung it open, and leapt in.

He was in a large low room panelled round its sides, the panels painted white, the beadings picked out in crimson. A carpet covered the floor, a low fire burnt upon a wide open hearth. There were two or three padded sofa lounges here and there, and in front of the fire-place in riding clothes, though without his hat or gloves, stood Sir John Shelton. [Pg 200]

There was a dead silence for several seconds, only broken by the click of the outer door, as Hull pushed it into its place, and shot the bolt.

Shelton grew very white, but said nothing.

With his sword ready to assume the guard, Johnnie walked to the centre of the room.

The bully's face grew whiter still. Little drops of moisture glistened on his forehead, and on his blonde moustache.

Then he spoke.

"Ah! Mr. Commendone!" he said, with a horrid little laugh. "News from Court, I suppose? Is it urgent? His Grace is engaged within, but I will acquaint him. His Grace is engaged——" There came a titter of discovery and fear from his lips. His words died away into silence.

Johnnie advanced towards him, his sword pointed at his heart.

"What does this mean, Mr. Commendone?"

"Death."

The man's sword was out in a moment. The touch of it seemed to bring the life back to him, and with never a word, he sprang at Commendone. He was a brave man enough, a clever fencer too, but he knew now that his hour had come. He read it in the fixed face before him, that face of frozen fury. He knew it directly the blades touched. Indeed he was no match for Commendone, with his long training, and clean, abstemious life. But even had he been an infinitely superior swordsman, he knew that he would have had no chance in that moment. There was something behind the young man's arm which no Sir John Shelton could resist. [Pg 201]

The blades rattled together and struck sparks in the lamp-light. Click! Clatter! Click!—"Ah!" the long-drawn breath, a breath surging up from the very entrails—Click! Clatter! Click!

The fierce cold fury of that fight was far beyond anything in war, or the ordinary duello. It was à *outrance*, there was only one end to it, and that came very swiftly.

Commendone was not fighting for safety. He cared not, and knew nothing, of what the other might have in reserve. He did not even wait to test his adversary's tricks of fence, as was only cautious and usual. Nothing could have withstood him, and in less than two minutes from the time the men had engaged, the end came. Commendone made a half-lunge, which was parried by the dagger in Sir John's left hand, and then, quick as lightning, his sword was through Shelton's throat, through and through.

The Captain fell like a log, hiccoughed, and lay still.

"Two," said John Hull.

Johnnie withdrew his sword, holding it downwards, watching it drip; then he turned to his servant. "Sir John was here on guard," he said; "this is the ante-room to where She is. But I see no door, save only the one by which we entered."

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"Hist!" Hull replied, almost before his master had finished speaking.

He pointed to the opposite wall, and both men saw a long, narrow bar of orange light, a momentarily widening slit, opening in a panel.

The panel swung back entirely, forming a sort of hatch or window, and through it, yellow, livid, and terror-struck, looked the face of the King.

Without a word John Hull rushed towards that part of the wall. When he was within a yard of it he gathered himself up and leapt against it, like a battering-ram. There was a crash, as the concealed door was torn away from its hinges. Hull lay measuring his length upon the floor, and Johnnie leaped over the prostrate form into the room beyond.

This is what he saw:

In one corner of the room, close to a large couch covered with rich silks, Elizabeth Taylor stood against the wall. They had dressed her in a long white robe of the Grecian sort, with a purple border round the hem of the skirt, the short sleeves and the low neck. Her face was a white wedge of terror, her arms were upraised, the palms of her hands turned outwards, as if to ward off some horror unspeakable.

King Philip, at the other corner of the room, standing by the débris of the broken door, was perfectly motionless, save only for his head, which was pushed forward and moved from side to side with a slow reptilian movement.

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He was dressed entirely in black, his clothes in disarray, and the thin hair upon his head was matted in fantastic elf-locks with sweat.

He saw the set face of Commendone, his drawn and bloody sword. He saw the thick leathern-coated figure of the yeoman rise from the floor. Both were confronting him, and he knew in a flash that he was trapped.

Johnnie looked at his master for a moment, and then turned swiftly. "Elizabeth," he said, "Elizabeth!"

At his voice the girl's hands fell from her face. She looked at him for a second in wild amazement, and then she cried out, in a high, quavering voice of welcome, "Johnnie! Johnnie! you've come!"

He put his arms about her, soothing, stroking her hair, speaking in a low, caressing voice, as a man might speak to a child. And all the time his heart, which had been frozen into deadly purpose, was leaping, bounding, and drumming within him so furiously, so strongly, that it seemed as if his body could hardly contain it. This mortal frame must surely be dissolved and swept away by such a tumult of feeling.

She had only seen him once. She had never received his little posy of white flowers, but he was "Johnnie" to her.

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"They have not hurt you, my maid?" he said. "Tell me they have not harmed you."

She shook her head. Happiness sponged away the horror which had been upon her face. "No, Johnnie," she answered, clinging, her fingers clutching for a firmer hold of him. "No, Johnnie, only they took me away, and Alice, that is my maid. They took me away violently, and I have been penned up here in this place until that man came and said strange things to me, and would embrace me."

"Sit you here, my darling maid," the young man said, "sit you here," guiding her to the couch hard by. "He shall do you no harm. Thou art with me, and thy good friend there, thy father's yeoman."

She had not seen John Hull before, but now she looked up at him over Johnnie's arm, and smiled. "'Tis all well now," she murmured, drooping and half-faint. "Hull is here, and thou also, Johnnie."

Even in the wild joy of finding her, and knowing instinctively that she was to be his, that she had thought of him so much, Commendone lost nothing of his sang-froid.

He knew that desperate as had been his adventure when he started out from the Tower, it was now more desperate still. He and Hull had taken their lives in their hands when they went to Duck Lane. Their enterprise had so far been successful, their rescue complete, but—and he was in no way mistaken—the enterprise was not over, and his life was worth even a smaller price than it had been before.

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With that, he turned from the girl, and strode up to the King, before whom John Hull had been standing, grimly silent.

Commendone's sword was still in his hand; he had not relinquished it even when he had embraced Elizabeth, and now he stood before his master, the point upon the floor, his young face set into judgment.

"And now, Sire?" he said, shortly and quickly.

Philip's face was flushed with shame and fear, but at these sharp words, he drew himself to his full height.

"Señor," he said, "you are going to do something which will damn you for ever in the sight of God and Our Lady. You are going to slay the anointed of the Lord. I will meet death at your hands, and doubtless for my sins I have deserved death; but, nevertheless, you will be damned."

Then he threw his arms out wide, and there came a sob into his voice as the liquid Spanish poured from him.

"But to die thus!" he said. "Mother of God! to die thus! unshrived, with my sins upon me!"

Johnnie tapped impatiently with the point of his sword upon the floor.

"Kill you, Sire?" he said. "I have sworn the oath of allegiance to Her Grace, the Queen, and eke to you. I break no oaths. Kill you I will not. Kill you I cannot. I dare not raise my hand against the King."

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He dropped on one knee. "Sire," he said again, "I am your Gentleman, and you will go free from this vile house as you came into it."

Then he rose, took his sword, snapped it across his knee—staining his hands in doing so—and flung it into the corner of the room.

"And that is that," he said, with a different manner. "So now as man to man, as from one gentleman to another, hear my voice. You are a gentleman of high degree, and you are King also of half this globe, named, and glad to be named His Most Catholic Majesty. Of your kingship I am not at this moment aware. I am not Royal. But as a gentleman and a Christian, I tell you to your face that you are low and vile. You deceive a wife that loveth you. You take maidens to force them to your will. If you were a simple gentleman I would kill you where you stood. No! If thou wert a simple gentleman, I would not cross swords with thee, because thou art unworthy of my sword. I would tell my man here to slit thee and have done. But as thou art a King"—he spat upon the floor in his disgust—"and I am sworn to thee, I cannot punish thee as I would, thou son of hell, thou very scurvy, lying, and most dirty knave."

The King's face was a dead white now. He lifted his hands and beat with them upon his breast. "*Mea culpa! Mea culpa!* What have I done that I should endure this?"

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"What no King should ever do, what no gentleman could ever do."

The King's hands dropped to his side.

"I am wearing no sword," he said quietly, "as you see, Señor, but doubtless you will provide me with one. If you will meet me here and now, as a simple gentleman, then I give you licence to kill me. I will defend myself as best I am able."

Johnnie hesitated, irresolutely. All the training of his life was up in arms with the wishes and the emotions of the moment—until he heard the voice of common sense.

John Hull broke in. The man had not understood one word of the Spanish, but he had realised its meaning, and the keen, untutored intelligence, focused upon the flying minutes, saw very clearly into the future.

"Master," he said, "cannot ye see that all this is but chivalry and etiquette of courts? Cannot ye see that if ye kill His Highness, England will not be big enough to hide thee? Cannot ye see, also, that if thou dost not kill him, but let him go, England will not be big enough to hide thee either? Master, we must settle this business with speed, and get far away before the hue and cry, for I tell thee, that this bloody night's work will bring thee, and Mistress Elizabeth, and myself to the rack and worse torture, to the stake, and worse than that. Haste! speed! we must be gone. There is but one thing to be done."

"And what is that, John Hull?"

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"Why, thou art lost in a dream, master! To tie up His Highness so that he cannot move or speak for several hours. To send that Spaniard which is his man, away from the door outside, and then to fly from this accursed house, you, I, and the little mistress, and hide ourselves, if God will let us, from the wrath to come."

The quick, decisive words were so absolutely true, so utterly unanswerable, that Johnnie nodded, though he shuddered as he did so.

Upon that, John Hull strode up to the King.

"Put your hands behind you, Sire," he said.

The King was wearing a dagger in his belt. As Hull came up to him, his face was transfixed with fury. He drew it out and lunged at the man's heart.

Hull was standing a little obliquely to the blow, the dagger glanced upon his leather surcoat, cut a long groove, and glanced harmlessly away.

With that, Hull raised his great brown fist and smote King Philip in the face, driving him to the floor. He was on him in a moment, crouching over him with one hand upon the Royal throat.

"Quick, master; quick, master! Quick, master! Bonds! Bonds! We must e'en truss him up, as we did her ladyship below."

It was done. The King was tied and bound. It was done as gently as possible, and they did not gag him.

Together they laid him upon the floor.

Slow, half-strangled, and venomous words came, came in gouts of poisonous sound, which made the sweet Spanish hideous.... [Pg 209]

"The whole world, Mr. Commendone, will not be wide enough to hide you, your paramour, and this villain from my vengeance."

Johnnie would have heard anything but that one word—that shameful word. At the word "paramour," hardly knowing what he did, he lifted his hand and struck the bound and helpless King upon the face.

A timepiece from the next room beat. It was one o'clock in the morning.

Johnnie turned to Elizabeth. "Come, sweetheart," he said, in a hurried, agitated voice, "come away from this place."

He took her by the arm, half leading, half supporting her, and together they passed out of the room, without so much as a backward glance at the bound figure upon the floor. As they went through the broken doorway in the ante-room, John Hull pressed after them, and walked on the other side of Elizabeth, talking to her quickly in a cheery voice.

As he looked over the girl's head at his servant, Johnnie knew what Hull was doing. He was hiding the corpse of Sir John Shelton from the girl's view.

They came into the corridor, and descended the stairs. Just as they were about to open the door in the arras, Hull stopped them upon the lowest step. [Pg 210]

"I will go first, master," he said, and again Johnnie realised what was meant.

When a few seconds afterwards, he and Elizabeth entered the tapestry-hung room; the great pile of cushions upon the left-hand side was a little higher, but that was all.

The girl raised her hands to her throat. "Oh," she said, "Johnnie, thank God you came! I cannot bear it. Take me home, take me home now, to Mr. Cressemer and Aunt Catherine."

Johnnie took her hands in his own, holding her very firmly by the wrists, and looked full into her face.

"Dear," he said, "you cannot go to Mr. Cressemer's. You know nothing of what has happened this night. You do not realise anything at all. Will you trust in me?"

"Yes," she faltered, though her eyes were firm.

"Then, if you do that, and if God helps us," he said, with a gasp in his throat, "we may yet win to safety and life, though I doubt it. Sweetheart, it is right that I should tell you that man upstairs in the room is the King Consort, husband of Her Grace the Queen."

The girl gave a loud, startled cry, and instantly Commendone saw comprehension flash into her face.

"Sit here," he said to her, putting a chair for her.

Then he turned. Behind the ebony table, motionless, vast, and purple in the face, was the great mummy of the procuress. [Pg 211]

"What shall we do?" he said to Hull.

"The first thing, master, is to send the Spanish valet away; that you must do, and therein lies our chance."

Johnnie nodded. He passed out into the passage, went to the front door, pulled aside three huge bolts which worked with a lever very silently, for they were all oiled, and let in a puff of fresh wind from the street.

For a moment he could see nothing in the dark. He called in Spanish: "Torromé, Torromé, where are you? Come here at once." He had hardly done so when the cloaked figure of the valet came out from behind a buttress.

"Ah, Señor," he said, "I am perished with this cold wind. His Highness is ready, then?"

Johnnie shook his head. "No," he answered, "His Highness and Sir John are still engaged, but I am sent to tell you that you may go home. I and my man will attend His Highness to the Tower, but we shall not come until dawn. Go you back to the King's lodging, and if His Highness doth not come in due time, keep all inquiries at bay. He will be sick—you understand?"

Torromé nodded.

"Then get you to horse, leave His Highness's horse with ours, and speed back to the Tower as soon as may be."

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Commendone waited until the man had mounted, very glad to be relieved of his long waiting, and was trotting towards London Bridge. Then he closed the door, pulled the lever, and went back into the red, scented room.

He saw that Hull had cut the strips of red velvet that bound Madame La Motte, the gag was taken from her mouth, and he was holding a goblet of wine to the thick, swollen, and bleeding lips.

There was a long deep sigh and gurgle. The woman shuddered, gasped again, and then some light and understanding came into her eyes, and she stared out in front of her.

"What are we to do?" Johnnie asked his servant once more.

"What have ye done, masters?" came in a dry whisper from the old woman—it was like the noise a man makes walking through parched grass in summer. "What have ye done, masters?"

Hull answered: "We have killed your servitor, as ye saw," he said, with a half glance towards the piled cushions against the wall. "Sir John Shelton is dead also; Mr. Commendone killed him in fair fight."

"And the King, the King?"—the whisper was dreadful in its anxiety and fear.

"He lieth bound in that room of shame where you took my lady."

There was silence for a moment, and the old woman glanced backwards and forwards at Hull and Commendone. What she read in their faces terrified her, and again she shook horribly.

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"Sir," she said to Commendone, "if this be my last hour, then so mote it be, but I swear that I knew nothing. I was told at high noon yesterday that a girl was to be sent here, that Sir John and the valet of His Highness would bring her. I knew, and know nothing of who she is. I did but do as I have always done in my trade. And, messieurs, it was the King's command. Now ye have come, and there is the lady unharmed, please God."

"Please God!" Johnnie said brutally. "You hag of hell, who are you to use that name?"

The fat, artificially whitened hands, with their glittering rings fell upon the table with a dull thud.

"Who am I, indeed?" she said. "You may well ask that, but I tell you others of my women received this lady. I have not seen her until now."

"Indeed she hath not," came in a low, startled voice from Elizabeth.

"Sir," La Motte went on, "I see now that this is the end of my sinful life. Kill me an ye wish, I care not, for I am dead already, and so also are you, and the young mistress there, and your man too."

"What mean you?" Johnnie said.

"What mean I? Why, upstairs lieth the King, bound. We all have two or three miserable hours, and then we shall be found, and what we shall endure will pass the bitterness of death before death comes. That, messieurs, you know very well."

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"So what matters it," she continued, her extraordinary vitality overcoming everything, her voice growing stronger each moment, "what matters it! Let us drink wine one to the other, to death! in this house of death, in this house to which worse than death cometh apace."

She reached out for the flagon of wine before her with a cackle of laughter.

It was too true. Commendone knew it well. He looked at Hull, and together they both looked at Elizabeth Taylor.

The girl, in the long white robe which they had put on her, rose from her seat and came between them, tall, slim, and now composed. She put one hand upon Johnnie's shoulder and laid the other with an affectionate gesture upon Hull's arm.

"Look you," she said, "Mr. Commendone, and you, John Hull, my father's friend, what matters it at all? I see now all that hath passed. There is no hope for us, none at all. Therefore let us praise God, pray to Him, and die. We shall soon be with my father in heaven; and, sure, he seeth all this, and is waiting for us."

John Hull's face was knitted into thought. He hardly seemed to hear the girl's voice at all.

"Mistress Lizzie," he said, almost peevishly, "pr'ythee be silent a moment. Master, look you. 'Tis this way. They will come again and find His Highness when he returneth not to the Tower, but he will dare do nothing against us openly for fear of the Queen's Grace. Were it known that he had come to such a stew as this, the Queen would ne'er give him her confidence again. She would ne'er forgive him. Doubtless the vengeance will pursue us, but it cannot be put in motion for some hours until the King is rescued, and has had time to confer with his familiars and think out a plan. After that, when they catch us, nothing will avail us, because nothing we can say will be believed. But we are not caught yet."

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Johnnie, who for the last few moments had been quite without hope, looked up quickly at his servant's words.

"You are right," he said, "in what you say; there speaketh good sense. Very well, then we must get away at once. But where shall we go? If we go to His Worship's house, we shall soon be discovered, and bring His Worship and Mistress Catherine with us to the rack and stake. If we go to my father's house in Kent, he will not be able to hide us; it will be the first place to which they will look."

He spread his arms out in a gesture of despair.

"You see," he said, "we in this room to-night have no refuge nor harbour. For a few hours, a day it may be, we can lie lost from vengeance. But after that no earthly power can save us. We have done the thing for which there is no pardon."

"I don't like, master, to wait for death in this way," Hull answered. "But art wiser than I, and so it must be. But pr'ythee let us have a little course. The hounds may come, but let us run before them, and then, if death is at the end of it, well—well, there's an end on't; and so say I." [Pg 216]

There was a voice behind them, a voice speaking in broken but fluent English.

"You have broken into my house, you have killed my servant, you have prevented me from calling for help from you, a King lies bound in my upper chamber, *v'la!* And now you go to run a little course, to scurry hither and thither before the dogs are at your throats. You are all prepared to die. I also am ready to die if it must be so, but it need not be so if you will listen to me."

"What mean you?" Johnnie said.

As he spoke he saw, with a mingling of surprise and disgust, that the big painted face of Madame La Motte was full of animation and excitement. She seemed as if the events of the last hour had but stirred her to endeavour, had given a fillip to her sluggish life.

More astonishing than all, she rose from her chair, gathering together her vast, unwieldy bulk, came round from behind the table, and joined their conference almost with vivacity.

"*Tiens,*" she said, "there are other countries than this. An army beaten in an engagement is not always routed. Retreat is possible within friendly frontiers."

The horrible old creature had such a strength and personality about her that, with her blood-stained mouth, her great panting body, her trembling jewelled hands, she yet in that moment dominated them all. [Pg 217]

"There is one last chance. At dawn—and dawn is near by—the ship *St. Iago* sails from the Thames for foreign parts. The master of the ship, Clark, is"—she lowered her voice and spoke only to Commendone—"is a client of mine here. He is much indebted to me in many ways, and ere day breaks we may all be aboard of her and sailing away. What is't to be, messieurs?"

They all looked at each other for a moment in silence.

Then Elizabeth put her arms round the old woman's neck and kissed her.

"Madame," she said, "surely God put this into your heart to save us all. I will come with you, and Johnnie will come, and good John Hull withal, and so we may escape and live."

The old Frenchwoman patted the slim girl upon the back. "*Bien, chérie,*" she said, "that's a thing done. I will look after you and be a mother to you, and so we will all be happy."

Commendone and his servant looked on in amazement. At this dreadful hour, in this moment of extremest peril, the wicked old woman seemed to take charge of them all. She did not seem wicked now, only genial and competent, though there was a tremor of fear in her voice and her movements were hurried and decisive. [Pg 218]

"Jean-Marie," she called suddenly, and then, "Phut! I forgot. It is under the cushions. Well, we must even do without a messenger. Have you money, Master Commendone?"

Johnnie shook his head. "Not here."

"*Mais, mon Dieu!* I have a plenty," she answered, "which is good for all of us. Wait you here."

She hurried away, and went up the stair towards the rooms above.

"Shall I follow her, master?" Hull said, his hand upon his dagger.

Johnnie shook his head.

"No," he answered, "she is in our boat. She must sink or swim with us."

They waited there for five or ten minutes, hearing the heavy noise of Madame's progress above their heads. They waited there, and as they did so the room seemed to become cold, their blood ran slowly within them, the three grouped themselves close together as if for mutual warmth and consolation.

Then they heard a high-pitched voice at the top of the stairs.

"Send your man up, Monsieur, send your man up. I have no strength to lift this bag."

At a nod from Johnnie, Hull ran up the stairs. In a moment more he came down, staggering under the burden of a great leather wallet slung over his shoulder, and was followed by Madame La Motte, now covered in a fur cloak and hood.

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She held another on her arm. "Put it on, put it on," she said to Elizabeth, "quickly. We must get out of this. The dawn comes, the wind freshens, we have but an hour."

And then in the ghostly dawn the four people left the House of Shame, left it with the red door open to the winds, and hurried away towards the river.

None of them spoke. The old dame in her fur robe shuffled on with extraordinary vitality, past straggling houses, past inns from which nautical signs were hung, for a quarter of a mile towards the mud-marsh which fringed the pool of Thames. She walked down a causeway of stones, sunk in the mud and gravel, to the edge of the water.

It was now high tide and the four came out in the grey light upon a little stone quay where some sheds were set.

In front of one of them, heavily covered with tar, a lantern was still burning, wan and yellow in the coming light of day.

Madame La Motte kicked at the door of this shed with her high-heeled shoe. There was no response. She opened the door, burst into a stuffy, foetid place where two men were lying upon coils of rope. She stirred them with her foot, but they were in heavy sleep, and only groaned and snored in answer.

"I'll wake them, Madame," Johnnie said, "I'll stir them up," his voice full of that thin, high note which comes to those who feel themselves hunted. He clapped his hand to his side to find his sword; his fingers touched an empty scabbard. Then he remembered.

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"I am swordless," he cried, forgetting everything else as he realised it.

Behind him there was a thud and a clanking, as John Hull dropped the leathern bag he held.

"Say not so, master," he said, and held out to the young man a sword in a scabbard of crimson leather, its hilt of gold wire, its guard set with emeralds and rubies, the belt which hung down on either side of the blade, of polished leather studded with little stars and bosses of gold.

"What is this?"

"Look you, sir, as we passed out of Madame's room, I saw this sword leaning in a corner of the wall by the door. His Highness had left it there, doubtless, ere he went upstairs. 'So,' says I to myself, 'this is true spoil of war, and in especial for my master!'"

Johnnie took the sword, looked at it for a moment, and then unbuttoned his own belt and girded it on.

"So shall it be for a remembrance to me," he said, "for now and always."

But he did not need to use it. Madame's exertions had been sufficient. Her shrill, angry voice had wakened the watermen. They rose to their feet, wiped their eyes, and, seeing persons of quality before them, they hastened down the little hard and embarked the company in their wherry. Then they pulled out into the stream. The tide was running fast and free towards the Nore, but they made for a large ship of quite six hundred tons, which was at anchor in mid-stream. When they came up to it, and caught the hanging ladder upon the quarter with a boat-hook, the deck was already busy with seamen in red caps, and a tarry, bearded old salt, his head tied up in a woollen cloth, was standing on the high poop, and cursing the men below. Madame La Motte saw him first. She put two fat fingers in her mouth and gave a long whistle, like a street boy.

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The captain looked round him, up into the rigging where the sailors were already busy upon the yards, looked to his right, looked to his left, and then straight down from the poop upon the starboard quarter, and saw Madame La Motte. He stumbled down the steps on to the main deck, and peered over the bulwarks. "Mother of God!" he cried, "and what's this, so early in the morning?"

The old Frenchwoman shrieked up at him in her broken English. "*Tiens! Tiens!* Send your men to help us up, Captain Clark. Thou art not awake. Do as I tell you."

The captain rubbed his eyes again, called out some orders, and in a moment or two Johnnie had mounted the ladder, and stood upon the deck.

"Now the ladies," he said in a quick, authoritative voice.

Elizabeth came up to the side, and then it was the question of Madame La Motte. John Hull stood in the tossing, heaving wherry, and gave the woman her first impetus. She clawed the side ropes, cursing and spitting like a cat as she did so, mounting the low waist of the ship like a great black slug. As soon as she got within arm's length of the captain and a couple of sailors, they caught her and heaved her on board as if she had been a sack, and within ten seconds afterwards John Hull, with the leather bag over his shoulder, stood on the deck beside them. Johnnie felt in his pocket and found some coins there. He flung them over to the watermen, and they fell in the centre of the boat as it sheered off.

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Mr. Clark, captain of the *St. Iago*, was now very wide awake.

"I will thank ye, Madame," he said, "to explain your boarding of my ship with your friends."

The quick-witted Frenchwoman went up to him, put her fat arms round his neck, pulled his head down, and spoke in his ear for a minute. When she had finished the captain raised his head, scratched his ear, and looked doubtfully at Commendone, Elizabeth, and John Hull.

"Well," he said, in a thick voice, "since you say it, I suppose I must, though there is little accommodation on board for the likes of you. You pay your passage, Madame, I suppose?"

"Phut! I will make you rich."

The captain's eyes contracted with leery cunning.

"There is more in this than meets mine eye—that ye should be so eager to leave London. What have ye done, that is what I would like to know? I must inquire into this, though we are due to sail. I must send a man ashore to speak with the Sheriff—"

"The Sheriff! And where would any of your dirty sailors find the Sheriff at this hour of the morning? You'll lose the tide, Master Clark, and you'll lose your money, too."

The captain scratched his head again.

"Natheless, I am not sure," he began.

Then Johnnie stepped forward.

"Captain Clark?" he said, in short, quick accents of authority.

"That am I," said the captain.

"Very good. Then you will take these ladies and bestow them as well as you are able, and you will set sail at once. This ship, I believe, belongs to His Worship the Alderman, Master Robert Cressemer?"

The captain touched his forehead.

"Yes, sir, indeed she does," he answered, in a very different voice.

Johnnie, from where he had been standing, had looked down into the waist, and had seen the great bags of wool with the Alderman's trade-mark upon them. "Very well," he said, "you'll heave anchor at once, and this is my warrant."

He put his hand into his doublet and pulled out the Alderman's letter. He showed him the last paragraph of it.

It was enough.

"I crave your pardon, master," the captain said. "I did not know that you came from His Worship. That old Moll, I was ready to oblige her, though it seemed a queer thing her coming aboard just as we were setting sail. Why did you not speak at first, sir? Well, all is right. The wind is favourable, and off we go."

Turning away from Johnnie, he rushed up to the poop again, put his hand to his mouth, and bellowed out a crescendo of orders.

The yards swarmed with men, there was a "Heave ho and a rumbelow," a clanking of the winch as the anchor came up, a flapping of unfurled topsails at the three square-rigged masts, and in five minutes more the *St. Iago* began to move down the river.

Johnnie walked along the open planking of the waist, mounted to the poop, and heard the "lap, lap" and ripple of the river waves against the rudder. He turned and saw not far away to his left the White Tower growing momentarily more distinct and clear in the dawn.

The whole of the Palace and Citadel was clear to view, the two flags of England and Spain were just hoisted, running out before the breeze. To his left, as he turned right round, were huddled houses at the southern end of London Bridge. In one of them, empty, lit and blown through by the morning winds, His Most Catholic Majesty was lying, silent and helpless.

He turned again, looked forward, and took in a great breath of the salt air.

The cordage began to creak, the sails to belly out, the hoarse voice of the pilot by Johnnie's side to call directions. Presently Sheppey Island came into view, and the sky above it was all streaked with the promise of daylight.

Regardless of Captain Clark and two other men, who were busied coiling ropes and making the poop ship-shape for the Channel, Johnnie fell upon his knees, brought the cross-belt of the King's sword to his lips, and thanked God that he was away with his love.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHY, WHO BUT YOU, JOHNNIE!"

Three weeks and two days had passed, and the *St. Iago* was off Lisbon, and at anchor.

The sun beat down upon the decks, the pitch bubbled in the seams, but now and then a cool breeze came off the land. The city with its long white terraces of houses shimmered in a haze of heat, but on the west side of the valley in which the city lay, the florid gothic of the great church of St. Jerome, built just five-and-fifty years before, was perfectly clear-cut against the sapphire sky—burnt into a vast enamel of blue, it seemed; bright grey upon blue, with here and there a twinkling spot of gold crowning the towers.

Twenty-three days the ship had taken to cut through the long oily Atlantic swell and come to port. There had been no rough winds in the Bay, no tempests such as make it terrible for mariners at other times of the year.

When they had arrived on board, and the ship had got out of the Thames, none of the four fugitives had the slightest idea as to where they were going—Madame La Motte least of all. The relief at their escape had been too great; strangely enough, they had not even enquired.

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The old Frenchwoman, as soon as the ship was under way, and Captain Clark could attend to her, had gone below with him for half an hour; while Johnnie, Hull, and Elizabeth remained upon the poop.

When La Motte returned, the captain was smiling. There was a genial twinkle in his eye. He came up to the others in a very friendly fashion.

"S'death," he said, "I am in luck's way. Here you are, Master Commendone, that are my owner's friend and bear a letter from him; and here is Mistress La Motte, whom I have known long ago. By carrying ye to Cadiz I shall be earning the Alderman's gratitude, and also good red coins of the Mint, which Madame hath now paid me."

"Cadiz?" Johnnie said. "Cadiz in Spain?"

"That fair city and none other," the captain answered. "Heaven favouring us, we shall bowl along to the city of wine, of fruit, and of fish. You shall sip the sherries of Jerez and San Lucar, and eke taste the soup of lobsters—langosta, they call it—and *bouillabaisse* in the southern parts of France—upon the island of San Leon, where the folk do go upon a Sunday for that refection. But now come you down below and see to your quarters. I have given up my cabin to the ladies, and you, sir," he turned to Johnnie, "must turn in with me, to which end I have commandeered the cabin of Master Mew, that is my chief officer, and a merry fellow from the Isle of Wight, who will sing you a right good catch of an evening, I'll warrant. And as for this your servant, the bo'son will look to him, and he will not be among the men."

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They had gone below, and everything was arranged accordingly. The quarters were more comfortable than Commendone had expected, and as far as this part of the expedition was concerned all was well.

Nevertheless, as Johnnie came up again upon the poop with the captain, he was in great perturbation. They were sailing to Spain! To the very country which was ruled by the man he had so evilly entreated. Might it not well be that, escaping Scylla, they were sailing into the whirlpool of Charybdis?

The captain seemed to divine something of the young man's thoughts. He sat down upon a coil of rope and looked upward with a shrewd and weather-beaten eye.

"Look you here, master," he said. "Why you came aboard my ship I know not. You caught me as I was weighing anchor. Thou art a gentleman of condition, and yet you come aboard with no mails, and nothing but that in which you stand up. And you come aboard in company with that old Moll of Flanders, La Motte—no fit company for a gentleman upon a voyage. And furthermore, you have with you a young and well-looking lady, who also hath no baggage with her. I tell you truly that I would not have shipped you all had it not been for the letter of His Worship the Alderman—whose hand of write I know very well upon bills of lading and such. I like the look of you, and as Madame there has paid me well, 'tis no business of mine what you are doing or have done. But look you here, if that pretty young mistress is being forced to come with you against her will—and what else can I think when I see her in the company of old Moll?—then I will be a party to nothing of the sort. I am not a married man, not regular church-sworn, that is, though I have a woman friend or two in this port or that. And moreover, I have been oft-times to visit the house with the red door. So you'll see I am no Puritan. But at the same time I will be no help to the ravishing of maids of gentle blood, and that I ask you well to believe, master."

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Johnnie heard him patiently to the end.

"Let me tell you this, captain," he said, "that in what I am doing there is no harm of any sort. Mistress Taylor, which is the name of the younger lady, is the ward of Mr. Robert Cressemere. The Alderman is my very good friend. My father, Sir Henry Commendone, of Commendone in Kent, is his constant friend and correspondent. The young lady was taken away yesterday from her guardian's care, taken in secret by some one high about the Court—from which I also come,

being a Gentleman in the following of King Philip. Late last night, I received a letter from the Alderman, telling me of this, upon which I and my servant immediately set out for where we thought to find the stolen lady, in that we might rescue her. She had been taken, shame that it should be said, to the house of Madame La Motte in Duck Lane. From there we took her, but in the taking I slew a most unknighly knight of the Court, and offered a grave indignity to one placed even more highly than he was. Of necessity, therefore, we fled from that ill-famed house. Madame La Motte brought us to your ship, knowing you. Her we had to take with us, for if not, vengeance would doubtless have fallen upon her for what I did. And that, Captain Clark, is my whole story. As regards the future, Madame La Motte, you say, hath paid you well. I have no money with me, but I am the son of a rich man, and moreover, I can draw upon Mr. Cressemer for anything I require. Gin you take us safely to Cadiz, I will give you such a letter to the Alderman as will ensure your promotion in his service, and will also be productive of a sum of money for you. I well know that Master Cressemer would give a bag of ducats more than you could lift, to secure the safety of Mistress Taylor."

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The captain nodded. "Hast explained thyself very well, sir," he replied. "As for the money, I am already paid, though if there is more to come, the better I shall be pleased. But now that I know your state and condition, and have heard your story, rest assured that I will do all I can to help you. We touch at Lisbon first. There you can purchase proper clothing for yourself and those who are with you, and there also you can indite a letter to the Alderman, which will go to him by an English ship very speedily. You have told your tale, and I ask to know no more. I would not know any more, i' faith, even if thou wert to press the knowledge on me. Now do not answer me in what I am about to say, which, in brief, is this: We of the riverside have heard talk and rumours. We know very well who hath now and then been a patron of La Motte. It may be that you have come across and offered indignity to the person of whom I speak—I am no fool, Mr. Commendone, and gentlemen of your degree do not generally come aboard a vessel in the tideway at early dawn in company of a mistress of a house with a red door! If what I say is true—and I do not wish you to deny or to affirm upon the same—then you are as well in Cadiz as anywhere else. It is, indeed, a far cry from the Tower of London, and no one will know who you are in Spain."

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Instinctively Johnnie held out his hand, and the big seaman clasped it in his brown and tarry fist.

"Yes," he said slowly, in answer, weighing his words as he did so, "doubtless we shall be safe in Spain for a time, until advices can reach us from England with money and reports of what has happened."

"I said so," Captain Clark answered, "and now you see it also. Mark you, any vengeance that might fall upon you could only be secret, because—if it is as I think, and, indeed, well believe—the person who has suffered indignity at your hands could not confess to it, for reason of his state, and where it was he suffered it. In Spain it would be different, but who's to know that you are in Spain—for a long time, at any rate?"

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"And by that time," Johnnie replied, "I shall hope to have gone farther afield, and be out of the fire of any one to hurt me. But there is this, captain, which you must consider, sith you have opened your mind to me as I to you. Enquiry will be made; the wharfingers who brought us aboard may be discovered, and will speak. It will be known—at any rate it *may* be known—that you and your ship were the instruments of our escape. And how will you do then?"

"I like you for saying that," said the captain, "seeing that you are, as it were, in my power. But alarm yourself not at all, Master Commendone."

He rose from the coil of hemp where he had been sitting and spat out into the sea.

"By'r Lady," he cried, "and dost think that an honest British seafaring man fears anything that a rascally, yellow-faced, jelly-gutted lot of Spanish toads, that have fastened them on to our fair England, can do? Why! as thinking is now, in the City of London, my owner, Master Cressemer, and three or four others with him, could put such pressure upon Whitehall that ne'er a word would be said. It is them that hath the money, and the train bands at their back, that both pay the piper and call the tune in London City."

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"I'm glad you take it that way, captain," Commendone said, "but I felt bound in duty to put your risk before you. Yet if it is as you say, and the power of the merchant princes of the City is so great, why do those about the Queen burn and throw in prison so many good men for their religion?"

"Ah, there you have me," said the captain. "Religion is a very different thing—a plague to religion, say I—though I would not say it unless I were walking my own deck and upon the high seas. But, look you, religion is very different. They can burn a man for his religion in England, but if he is in otherwise right, according to the powers that be, they cannot make religion a mere excuse for burning him. Now I myself am a good Catholic mariner"—he put his tongue in his cheek as he spoke—"when I am ashore I take very good care—these days—to be regular at Mass. And this ship hath been baptised by a priest withal! Make your mind at rest; they cannot touch me in England for taking of you away. There is too much at my back! And they cannot touch me in Spain because no one will know anything about it there. And now 'tis time for dinner. So come you down. There's a piece of pickled beef that hath been in the pot this long time, and good green herbs with it too—the want of which you will feel ere ever you make the Tagus."

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It is astonishing—although the observation is trite—how soon people adapt themselves to entirely new conditions of life. The environment of yesterday seems like the experience of another life; that of to-day, though we have but just experienced it, becomes already a thing of use and wont.

It was thus with the fugitives. They were not three days out from London River before they had shaken down into their places and life had become normal to them all.

It was not, of course, without its discomforts. Hull, messing with the bo'son, was very well off and speedily became popular with every one. The brightness and cheeriness of the fellow's disposition made him hail and happy met with all of them, while his great personal strength and general handiness detracted nothing from his popularity. Madame La Motte, wicked old soldier of fortune as she was, adapted herself to her surroundings with true and cynical French philosophy. She, who was used to live in the greatest personal luxury, put up with the rough fare, the confined quarters, with equanimity, though it was fortunate that their passage was smooth, and that all the time the sea was tranquil as a pond. She was accustomed to drink fine French and Italian wines—and to drink a great deal of them. Now she found, perforce, consolation in Captain Clark's puncheons of Antwerp spirit, the white fiery *schiedam*. She was a drunkard, this engaging lady, and imbibed great quantities of liquor, much to the satisfaction of the captain, who was paid for it in good coin of the realm.

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The woman never became confused or intoxicated by what she drank. Towards the end of the day she became a little sentimental, and was wont to talk overmuch of her good birth, to expatiate upon the fallen glories of her family. Nevertheless, no single word escaped her which could shock or enlighten the sensitive purity of the young girl who was now in her charge. There must have been some truth in her stories, because Commendone, who was a thoroughly well-bred man, could see that her manners were those of his own class. There was certainly a free-and-easiness, a rakish *bonhomie*, and a caustic wit which was no part of the attributes of the great ladies Johnnie had met—always excepting the wit. This side of the old woman came from the depths into which she had descended; but in other essentials she was a lady, and the young man, with his limited experience of life, marvelled at it, and more than once thanked God that things were no worse.

It was during this strange voyage that he learnt, or began to learn, that great lesson of *tolerance*, which was to serve him so well in his after life. He realised that there was good even in this unclean old procuress; that she had virtues which some decent women he had known had lacked. She tended Elizabeth with a maternal care; the girl clung to her, became fond of her at once, and often said to Johnnie how kind the woman was to her and what an affection she inspired.

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Reflecting on these things in the lonely watches of the night, Commendone saw his views of life perceptibly changing and becoming softened. This young man, so carefully trained, so highly educated, so exquisitely refined in thought and behaviour, found himself feeling a real friendship and something akin to tenderness for this kindly, battered jetsam of life.

She spoke frankly to him about her dreadful trade of the past, regarding it philosophically. There was a demand; fortune or fate had put her in the position of supplying that demand. *Il faut vivre*—and there you were! And yet it was a most singular contradiction that this woman, who for so long had exploited and sold womanhood, was now as kind and tender, as scrupulous and loving to Elizabeth Taylor as if the girl was her own daughter.

It was not without great significance, Johnnie remembered, that the soul of the Canaanitish harlot was the first that Christ redeemed.

With Elizabeth—and surely there was never a stranger courting—Johnnie sank at once into the position of her devoted lover. It seemed inevitable. There was no prelude to it; there were no hesitations; it just happened, as if it were a thing pre-ordained.

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From the very first the girl accepted him as her natural protector; she looked up to him in all things; he became her present and her horizon.

It was on one lovely night, when the moon was rising, the winds were soft and low, and the stars came out in the dark sky like golden rain, that he first spoke to her of what was to happen.

It was all quite simple, though inexpressibly sweet.

They were alone together in the forward part of the ship, and suddenly he took her slim white hand—like a thing of carved and living ivory—and held it close to his heart.

"My dear," he said, in a voice tremulous with feeling, "my dear Lizzie, you are my love and my lady. When first I saw you outside St. Botolph his Church, so slim and sorrowful in the grey dawning, my heart was pierced with love for you, and during the sad day that came I vowed that I would devote my life to loving you, and that if God pleased thou shouldst be my little wife. Wilt marry me, darling? nay, thou *must* marry me, for I need you so sore, to be mine for ever both here in this mortal world and afterwards with God and His Angels. Tell me, sweetheart, wilt marry me?"

She looked up in his face, and the little hand upon his heart trembled as she did so.

"Why, Johnnie," she answered at length, "why, Johnnie, who could I marry but you?"

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He gathered the sweet and fragrant Simplicity to him; he kissed the soft scarlet mouth, his strong arms were a home for her.

"Or ever we get to Seville," he said, "we will be married, sweetheart, and never will we part from that day."

She echoed him. "Never part!" she said. "Oh, Johnnie, my true love; my dear and darling Johnnie!"

At Lisbon, where they lay five days, Madame La Motte and Elizabeth went ashore, and purchased suitable clothes and portmanteaux, while Johnnie also fitted himself out afresh. Madame La Motte had brought a very large sum with her in carefully hoarded gold, while she had also carried away all her jewels, which, in themselves, were worth a small fortune. She placed the whole of her money at Commendone's disposal, and made him take charge of it, with an airy generosity which much touched the young man. He explained to her that in the course of three months or so any money that he needed would reach him from England, and that she would be repaid, but she hardly seemed to hear him and waved such suggestion away. And it is a most curious thing that not till a long time afterward did it ever occur to the young man how and in what way the money he was using had been earned. The realisation of that was to come to him later; the time was not yet.

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At Lisbon the passengers on board the *St. Iago* were added to. A small yellow-faced Spaniard of very pleasant manners—Don Pedro Perez by name—bought a passage to Cadiz from Captain Clark, and there was another fellow of the lower classes, a tall, athletic young man, very much of Johnnie's build, though with a heavy and rather cruel face, who also joined the vessel. This person, who paid the captain a small sum to be carried to the great port, lived with the sailors, and interfered nothing with the life of the others.

Don Perez proved himself an amusing companion and was very courteous to the ladies.

From him Johnnie made many enquiries and learnt a good deal of what he wanted to know. It will be remembered that Commendone's mother was a Spaniard, a girl of the Senebria family of Seville. Johnnie knew little of his relations on his mother's side, but old Sir Henry still kept up some slight intercourse with Don José Senebria, the brother of his late wife. Now and again a cask of wine and some pottles of olives arrived at Commendone, and occasionally the knight returned the present, sending out bales of Flemish cloth. It was Johnnie's purpose to immediately proceed from Cadiz to Seville after their arrival at the port. He learnt with satisfaction that Don José still inhabited the old family palace by the Giralda, and he felt that he would at least be among friends and sure of a welcome.

While the *St. Iago* lay at Lisbon, two days before she set sail from there, an English ship arrived, and from that time until she weighed anchor Johnnie and none of his companions went ashore. It was extremely unlikely that they would incur any danger, for the *Queen Mary*, which was the name of the ship, must have sailed at very much the same time as they did. It was as well, however, to undergo no unnecessary risks.

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On the day before the *St. Iago* sailed for Cadiz a great Spanish galley came up the Tagus, a long and splendid ship, gliding swiftly up the river with its two banks of oars. It was the first galley Johnnie had ever seen, and he shuddered as he thought of the chained slaves below, who propelled that sort of vessel, which was spoken of in England as a floating hell. The galley lay at Lisbon for several hours, and then at evening left the wharf where she had been tied and once more went down the river for the open sea.

Johnnie was on deck as she passed, just about sunset, and watched with great interest, for the galley crossed the stern of the *St. Iago* only fifty yards away from him.

He heard the regular machine-like chunking of the oars; he heard also a sharper, more pistol-like sound, which he knew was none other than the cracking of the overseers' whips, as they flogged the slaves to greater exertions.

He did not see that among a little group of people upon the high castellated poop of the galley there was one figure, a tall figure, muffled in a cloak, and with a broad-brimmed Spanish hat low upon its face, who started and peered eagerly at him as the ship went by.

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Nor did he hear a low chuckle of amusement which came from that cloaked figure.

Elizabeth was standing by his side. He turned to her.

"Let us go below," he said; "they will be bringing supper. Sweetheart, I feel sad to think of those wretched men that pull that splendid ship so swiftly through the seas."

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CHAPTER IX

"MISERICORDIA ET JUSTITIA"

(The ironic motto of the Spanish Inquisition)

They had passed Cape de St. Vincent, and, under a huge copper-coloured moon which flooded the sea with light and seemed like a chased buckler of old Rome, were slipping along towards Faro, southwards and eastwards to Cadiz.

The night was fair, sweet, and golden. The airs which filled the sails of the square-rigged ship were soft and warm. The "lap, lap" of the small waves upon the cutwater was soothing and in harmony with the hour.

Elizabeth had been sleeping in the cabin long since, but Commendone, old Madame La Motte, and the little weazened Don Perez were sitting on the forecastle deck together, among the six brass carronades which were mounted there, ready loaded, in case of an attack by the pirates of Tangier.

"You were going to tell us, Señor," Johnnie said, "something of the Holy Office, and why, when you leave Seville, you leave Spain for ever."

Don Perez nodded. He rose to his feet and peered round the wooden tower of the forecastle, which nearly filled the bow-deck.

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"There is nobody there," he said, with a little sigh of relief. "That fellow we took aboard at Lisbon is down in the waist with the mariners."

"But why do you fear him?" Johnnie answered in surprise.

The little yellow man plucked at his pointed black beard, hesitated for a moment, and then spoke.

"Have you noticed his hands, Señor?" he asked.

"Since you say so," Johnnie replied, with wonder in his voice, "I have noticed them. He is a proper young man of his inches, strong and an athlete, though I like not his face. But his hands are out of all proportion. They are too large, and the thumbs too broad—indeed, I have never seen thumbs like them upon a hand before."

Don Pedro Perez nodded significantly. "*Ciertamente*," he answered dryly. "It is hereditary; it comes of his class. He is a sworn torturer of the Holy Office."

Johnnie shuddered. They had been speaking in Spanish. Now he exclaimed in his own tongue. "Good God!" he said, "how horrible!"

Perez grinned sadly and cynically as the moonlight fell upon his yellow face. "You may well start, Señor," he said, "but you know little of the land to which you are going yet."

There came a sudden, rapid exclamation in French. Madame La Motte, speaking in that slow, frightened voice which had been hers throughout the voyage, was interposing.

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"I don't understand," she said, "but I want to hear what the gentleman has to say. He speaks French; let us therefore use that language."

Don Perez bowed. "I am quite agreeable," he said; "but I doubt, Madame, that you will care to hear all I was going to tell the Señor here."

"Phut!" said the Frenchwoman. "I know more evil things than you or Don Commendone have ever dreamed of. Say what you will."

Don Perez drew a little nearer to the others, squatting down, with his head against the bow-men's tower.

"You have asked me about the Inquisition, Monsieur and Madame," he said in a low voice, "and as ye are going to Seville, I will tell you, for you have been courteous and kind to me since I left Lisbon, and you may as well be warned. I am peculiarly fitted to tell you, because my brother—God and Our Lady rest his blood-stained soul!—was a notary of the Holy Office at Seville. We are, originally, Lisbon people, and my brother was paying a visit to his family, being on leave from his duties. He caught fever and died, and I am bearing back his papers with me to Seville, from which city I shall depart as soon as may be. It is only care for my own skin that makes me act thus as executor to my brother, Garcia Perez. Did I not, they would seek me out wherever I might be."

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"You go in fear, then?" Johnnie asked curiously.

"All Spaniards go in fear," Perez answered, "under this reign. It is the horror of the Inquisition that while any one may be haled before it on a complaint which is anonymous, hardly any one ever escapes certain penalties. Señor," his voice trembled, and a deep note of feeling came into it, "if the fate of that wretch is heavy who, being innocent of heresy, will not confess his guilt, and is therefore tortured until he confesses imaginary guilt, and is then burned to death, hardly less is the misery of the victim who recants or repenteth and is freed from the penalty of death."

"*Tiens!*" said La Motte, shuddering. "I have heard somewhat of this in Paris; but continue, Monsieur, continue."

"No one knows," the little man answered, "how the Holy Office is striking at the root of all

national life in my country. And no one has a better knowledge of it all at second hand—for, thank Our Lady, I have never yet been suspected or arraigned—than I myself, for my brother being for long notary and secretary to the Grand Inquisitor of Seville, I have heard much. Now I must tell you, that the place of torture is generally an underground and very dark room, to which one enters through several doors. There is a tribunal erected in it, where the Inquisitor, Inspector, and Secretary sit. When the candles are lighted, and the person to be tortured is brought in, the executioner, who is waiting for him, makes an astonishing and dreadful appearance. He is covered all over with black linen garments down to his feet and tied close to his body. His head and face are all hidden with a long black cowl, only two little holes being left in it for him to see through. All this is intended to strike the miserable wretch with greater terror in mind and body, when he sees himself going to be tortured by the hands of one who thus looks like the very Devil."

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Johnnie moved uneasily in his seat and struck the breech of a carronade with his open hand. "Phew! Devil's tricks indeed," he said.

"Whilst," Don Perez went on, "whilst the officers are getting things ready for the torture, the Bishop and Inquisitor by themselves, and other men zealous for the faith, endeavour to persuade the person to be tortured freely to confess the truth, and if he will not, they order the officers to strip him, who do it in an instant.

"Whilst the person to be tortured is stripping, he is persuaded to confess the truth. If he refuses it, he is taken aside by certain men and urged to confess, and told by them that if he confesses he will not be put to death, but only be made to swear that he will not return to the heresy he hath abjured. If he is persuaded neither by threatenings nor promises to confess his crime, he is tortured either more lightly or grievously according as his crime requires, and frequently interrogated during the torture upon those articles for which he is put to it, beginning with the lesser ones, because they think he would sooner confess the lesser matters than the greater."

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"Criminals are racked in England," Johnnie said, "and are flogged most grievously, as well they deserve, I do not doubt."

Perez chuckled. "Aye," he said, "that I well know; but you have nothing in England like the Holy Office. But let me tell you more as to the law of it, for, as I have said, my brother was one of them."

He went on in a low regular voice, almost as if he were repeating something learned by rote....

"What think you of this? The Inquisitors themselves must interrogate the criminals during their torture, nor can they commit this business to others unless they are engaged in other important affairs, in which case they may depute certain skilful men for the purpose.

"Although in other nations criminals are publicly tortured, yet in Spain it is forbidden by the Royal Law for any to be present whilst they are torturing, besides the judges, secretaries, and torturers. The Inquisitors must also choose proper torturers, born of ancient Christians, who must be bound by oath by no means to discover their secrets, nor to report anything that is said.

"The judges also shall protest that if the criminal should happen to die under his torture, or by reason of it, or should suffer the loss of any of his limbs, it is not to be imputed to them, but to the criminal himself, who will not plainly confess the truth before he is tortured.

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"A heretic may not only be interrogated concerning himself, but in general also concerning his companions and accomplices in his crime, his teachers and his disciples, for he ought to discover them, though he be not interrogated; but when he is interrogated concerning them, he is much more obliged to discover them than his accomplices in any other the most grievous crimes.

"A person also suspected of heresy and fully convicted may be tortured upon another account, that is, to discover his companions and accomplices in the crime. This must be done when he hesitates, or it is half fully proved, at least, that he was actually present with them, or he hath such companions and accomplices in his crime; for in this case he is not tortured as a criminal, but as a witness.

"But he who makes full confession of himself is not tortured upon a different account; whereas if he be a negative he may be tortured upon another account, to discover his accomplices and other heretics though he be full convicted himself, and it be half fully proved that he hath such accomplices.

"The reason of the difference in these cases is this, because he who confesses against himself would certainly much rather confess against other heretics if he knew them. But it is otherwise when the criminal is a negative.

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"While these things are doing, the notary writes everything down in the process, as what tortures were inflicted, concerning what matters the prisoner was interrogated, and what he answered.

"If by these tortures they cannot draw from him a confession, they show him other kind of tortures, and tell him he must undergo all of them, unless he confesses the truth.

"If neither by these means they can extort the truth, they may, to terrify him and engage him to confess, assign the second or third day to continue, not to repeat, the torture, till he hath undergone all those kinds of them to which he is condemned."

"It is bitter cruel," Madame La Motte said, "bitter cruel. It is not honest torture such as we have in Paris."

Commendone shuddered. "Honest torture!" he said. "There is no torture which is honest, nor could be liked by Christ our Lord. I saw a saint burned to his death a few weeks ago. It taught me a lesson."

The little Spaniard tittered. "It must be! It must be!" he said; "and who are you and I, Señor, to flout the decrees of Holy Church? The burning doth not last for long. I have seen a many burned upon the Quemadero, and twenty minutes is the limit of their suffering. It is not so in the dungeons of the Holy Office."

"What then do they do?" Madame La Motte asked eagerly, though she trembled as she asked it— [Pg 250]
morbid excitement alone being able to thrill her vicious, degenerate blood.

"The degrees of torture are five, which are inflicted in turn," Perez answered briskly. "First, the being threatened to be tortured; secondly, being carried to the place of torture; thirdly, by stripping and binding; fourthly, the being hoisted on the rack; fifthly, squassation.

"The stripping is performed without any regard to humanity or honour, not only to men, but to women and virgins, though the most virtuous and chaste, of whom they have sometimes many in their prison at Seville. For they cause them to be stripped even to their very shifts, which they afterwards take off, forgive the expression, and then put on them straight linen drawers, and then make their arms naked quite up to their shoulders.—You ask me what is squassation?"

Nobody had asked him, but he went on:

"It is thus performed: The prisoner hath his hands bound behind his back and weights tied to his feet, and then he is drawn up on high till his head reaches the very pulley. He is kept hanging in this manner for some time, that by the greatness of the weight hanging at his feet, all his joints and limbs may be dreadfully stretched, and on a sudden he is let down with a jerk by slacking the rope, but kept from coming quite to the ground, by the which terrible shake his arms and legs are all disjointed, whereby he is put to the most exquisite pain; the shock which he receives by the sudden stop of the fall, and the weight at his feet, stretching his whole body more intently and cruelly." [Pg 251]

Johnnie jumped up from the deck and stretched his arms. "What fiends be these!" he cried. "Is there no justice nor true legal process in Spain?"

"Holy Church! Holy Church, Señor!" the Don replied. "But sit you down again. Sith you are going to Seville, as I understand you to say, let me tell you what happened to a noble lady of that city, Joan Bohorquia, the wife of Francis Varquius, a very eminent man and lord of Highuera, and daughter of Peter Garcia Xeresius, a most wealthy citizen. All this I tell you of my personal knowledge, in that my brother was acquainted with it all and part of the machinery of the Holy Office. And this is a most sad and pitiful story, which, Señor Englishman, you would think a story of the doings of devils from hell! But no! 'Twas all done by the priests of Jesus our Lord; and so now to my story.

"Eight days after her delivery they took the child from her, and on the fifteenth shut her close up, and made her undergo the fate of the other prisoners, and began to manage her with their usual arts and rigour. In so dreadful a calamity she had only this comfort, that a certain pious young woman, who was afterwards burned for her religion by the Inquisitors, was allowed her for her companion." [Pg 252]

"This young creature was, on a certain day, carried out to her torture, and being returned from it into her jail, she was so shaken, and had all her limbs so miserably disjointed, that when she laid upon her bed of rushes it rather increased her misery than gave her rest, so that she could not turn herself without most excessive pain.

"In this condition, as Bohorquia had it not in her power to show her any or but very little outward kindness, she endeavoured to comfort her mind with great tenderness.

"The girl had scarce begun to recover from her torture, when Bohorquia was carried out to the same exercise, and was tortured with such diabolical cruelty upon the rack, that the rope pierced and cut into the very bones in several places, and in this manner she was brought back to prison, just ready to expire, the blood immediately running out of her mouth in great plenty. Undoubtedly they had burst her bowels, insomuch that the eighth day after her torture she died.

"And when, after all, they could not procure sufficient evidence to condemn her, though sought after and procured by all their inquisitorial arts, yet as the accused person was born in that place, where they were obliged to give some account of the affair to the people, and, indeed, could not by any means dissemble it, in the first act of triumph appointed her death, they commanded her sentence to be pronounced in these words: 'Because this lady died in prison (without doubt suppressing the causes of it), and was found to be innocent upon inspecting and diligently examining her cause, therefore the holy tribunal pronounces her free from all charges brought against her by the fiscal, and absolving her from any further process, doth restore her both as to her innocence and reputation, and commands all her effects, which had been confiscated, to be restored to those to whom they of right belonged, etc.' And thus, after they had murdered her by torture with savage cruelty, they pronounced her innocent!" [Pg 253]

"I will not go to Spain! They'll have me; they're bound to have me! I dare not go!" La Motte spluttered.

"Hush, Madame!" said Perez. "Even here on the high seas you do not know who hears you—there is that man...."

Again Johnnie leapt to his feet; he paced up and down the little portion of the deck between the forecastle and bowsprit.

Elizabeth was sleeping quietly down below. He had seen her father die. His mind whirled. "Jesus!" he said in a low voice, "and is this indeed Thy world, when men who love Thee must die for a shadow of belief in their worship! Surely some savage pagan god would not exact this from his votaries."

He swung round to Perez, still sitting upon the deck.

"And may not we love God and His Mother in Spain?" he asked, "without definitions and little tiny rules? Then, if this is so, God indeed hides His face from Christian countries." [Pg 254]

"*Chiton!*" the Spaniard said. "Hush! if you said that, Señor, or anything like it, where you are going, you would not be twelve hours out of the prisons of the Holy Office. If that hang-faced dog who is down below with the mariners had heard you, you might well look to your landing in the dominions of his Most Catholic Majesty."

He laughed, a bitter and cynical laugh. "Well," he said, "for my part, I shall soon be done with it. Hitherto I have been protected by my brother, who, as I have told you, is but lately dead; but, knowing what I know, I dare no longer remain in Spain. 'Tis a wonder to me, indeed, that men can go about their business under the sun in the fashion that they do. But I am not strong enough to endure the strain, and also I know more than the ordinary—I know too much. So when I have delivered the papers that I carry of my brother's to the authorities in Seville, I sail away. I have enough money to live in ease for the rest of my life, and in some little vineyard of the Apeninnes I shall watch my grapes ripen, live a simple life, and meditate upon the ferocity of men.—But you have not heard all yet, Señor."

Johnnie leant against the forecastle, tall and silent in the moonlight.

"Then tell me more, Señor," he said; "it is well to know all. But"—he looked at Madame La Motte. [Pg 255]

"*Continuez,*" the old creature answered in a cracked voice; "I also would hear it all, if, indeed, there is worse than this."

"Worse!" Perez answered. "Let me tell you of the fate of a man I knew well, and liked withal. He was a Jew, Señor, but nevertheless I liked him well. We had dealings together, and I found him more honest in his walking than many a Christian man. Orobio was his name—Isaac Orobio, doctor of physic, who was accused to the Inquisition as a Jew by a certain Moor, his servant, who had, by his order, before this been whipped for thieving. Orobio conformed to religion, but the Moor accused him, and four years after this he was again accused by an enemy of his, for another fact which would have proved him a Jew. But Orobio obstinately denied that he was one."

"I like not Jews," Commendone said, with a little shudder, voicing the popular hatred of the day.

"Art young, Señor," the Spaniard replied, "and doubtless thou hast not known nor been friends with members of that oppressed race. I have known many, and have had sweet friends among them; and among the Ebrews are to be found salt of the earth. But I will give you the story of Orobio's torture as I had it from his own mouth.

"After three whole years which he had been in jail, and several examinations, and the discovery of the crimes to him of which he was accused, in order to his confession and his constant denial of them, he was, at length, carried out of his jail and through several turnings and brought to the place of torture. This was towards evening." [Pg 256]

"It was a large, underground room, arched, and the walls covered with black hangings. The candlesticks were fastened to the wall, and the whole room enlightened with candles placed in them. At one end of it there was an enclosed place like a closet, where the Inquisitor and notary sat at a table—that notary, Señor, was my brother. The place seemed to Orobio as the very mansion of death, everything appearing so terrible and awful. Here the Inquisitor again admonished him to confess the truth before his torment began.

"When he answered he had told the truth, the Inquisitor gravely protested that since he was so obstinate as to suffer the torture, the Holy Office would be innocent if he should shed his blood, or even expire in his torments. When he had said this, they put a linen garment over Orobio's body, and drew it so very close on each side as almost to squeeze him to death. When he was almost dying, they slackened, at once, the sides of the garment, and after he began to breathe again, the sudden alteration put him to most grievous anguish and pain. When he had overcome this torture, the same admonition was repeated, that he would confess the truth in order to prevent further torment.

"And as he persisted in his denial, they tied his thumbs so very tightly with small cords as made the extremities of them greatly swell, and caused the blood to spurt out from under his nails. After this, he was placed with his back against the wall and fixed upon a little bench. Into the wall were fastened little iron pulleys, through which there were ropes drawn and tied round his [Pg 257]

body in several places, and especially his arms and legs. The executioner drawing these ropes with great violence, fastened his body with them to the wall, so that his hands and feet, and especially his fingers and toes, being bound so straitly with them, put him to the most exquisite pain, and seemed to him just as though he had been dissolving in flames. In the midst of these torments, the torturer of a sudden drew the bench from under him, so that the miserable wretch hung by the cords without anything to support him, and by the weight of his body drew the knots yet much closer.

"After this a new kind of torture succeeded. There was an instrument like a small ladder, made of two upright pieces of wood and five cross ones, sharpened before. This the torturer placed over against him, and by a certain proper motion struck it with great violence against both his shins, so that he received upon each of them, at once, five violent strokes, which put him to such intolerable anguish that he fainted away. After he came to himself they inflicted on him the last torture.

"The torturer tied ropes round Orobio's wrists, and then put those ropes about his own back, which was covered with leather to prevent his hurting himself. Then, falling backwards, and putting his feet up against the wall, he drew them with all his might till they cut through Orobio's flesh, even to the very bones; and this torture was repeated thrice, the ropes being tied about his arms, about the distance of two fingers' breadth from his former wound, and drawn with the same violence.

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"But it happened to poor Orobio that as the ropes were drawing the second time they slid into the first wound, which caused so great an effusion of blood that he seemed to be dying. Upon this, the physician and surgeon, who are always ready, were sent for out of a neighbouring apartment, to ask their advice, whether the torture could be continued without danger of death, lest the ecclesiastical judges should be guilty of an irregularity if the criminal should die in his torments.

"Now they, Señor, who were very far from being enemies to Orobio, answered that he had strength enough to endure the rest of the torture. And by doing this they preserved him from having the torture he had already endured repeated on him, because his sentence was that he should suffer them all at one time, one after another, so that if at any time they are forced to leave off, through fear of death, the tortures, even those already suffered, must be successively inflicted to satisfy the sentence. Upon this the torture was repeated the third time, and then was ended. After this Orobio was bound up in his own clothes and carried back to his prison, and was scarce healed of his wounds in seventy days, and inasmuch as he made no confession under his torture, he was condemned, not as one convicted, but suspected of Judaism, to wear for two whole years the infamous habit called the *sanbenito*, and it was further decreed that after that term he should suffer perpetual banishment from the kingdom of Seville."

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The Frenchwoman, who had been listening with strained attention, broke in suddenly. "*Nom de Dieu!*" she cried; "to be banished from there would surely be like entering into paradise!"

Perez went on. He took a morbid pleasure in the telling of these hideous truths. It was obvious that he had long suffered mentally under the obsession that some day some such horrors might happen to himself. Connected with it all by family ties, absolutely unable to say a word for many years, now, under the sweet skies of heaven, in the calm and splendid night, he was disembodying himself of that which had been pent within him for so long.

He seemed impatient of interruption, anxious to say more....

"Ah," he whispered, "but the *Tormento di Toca*, that is the worst, that would frighten me more than all—that, the *Chafing-dish*, and the *Water-Cure*. The *Tormento di Toca* is that the torturer—that fellow down there with the sailors has doubtless performed it full many a time—the torturer throws over the victim's mouth and nostrils a thin cloth, so that he is scarce able to breathe through it, and in the meanwhile a small stream of water, like a thread, not drop by drop, falls from on high upon the mouth of the person lying in this miserable condition, and so easily sinks down the thin cloth to the bottom of his throat, so that there is no possibility of breathing, the mouth being stopped with water, and his nostrils with the cloth, so that the poor wretch is in the same agony as persons ready to die, and breathing out their last. When the cloth is drawn out of his throat, as it often is, that he may answer to the questions, it is all wet with water and blood, and is like pulling his bowels through his mouth."

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"What is the *Chafing-dish*?" Madame La Motte asked thinly.

"They order a large iron chafing-dish full of lighted charcoal to be brought in and held close to the soles of the tortured person's feet, greased over with lard, so that the heat of the fire may more quickly pierce through them. And as for the *Water-Cure*, it was done to William Lithgow, an Englishman, Señor, upon whom my brother saw it performed. He was taken up as a spy in Malaga, and was exposed to most cruel torments as an heretic. He was condemned in the beginning of Lent to suffer the night following eleven most cruel torments, and after Easter to be carried privately to Granada, there to be burned at midnight, and his ashes to be scattered into the air. When night came on his fetters were taken off. Then he was stripped naked, put upon his knees, and his head lifted up by force, after which, opening his mouth with iron instruments, they filled his belly with water till it came out of his jaws. Then they tied a rope hard about his neck, and in this condition rolled him seven times the whole length of the room, till he almost quite strangled. After this they tied a small cord about both his great toes, and hung him up thereby with his head down, letting him remain in this condition till the water discharged out of his

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mouth, so that he was laid on the ground as just dead, and had his irons put on him again."

"Is this true, Señor?" Commendone asked in a low voice; but even while he asked it he knew how true it was—had he not seen Dr. Taylor beaten to the stake?

"True, Señor?" the little man said. "You do not doubt my word? I see you do not. It was but a natural expression. You are fortunate to be a citizen of England—a citizen of no mean country—but still, as I have heard, now that His Most Catholic Majesty is wedded to your kingdom there are many burnings."

"At any rate," Johnnie answered hotly, "we have no Holy Office."

"Aye, but you will, Señor, you *will!* if the Queen Maria liveth long enough, for they tell me she is sickly, and not like to make a goodly age. But still, to come from England is most deadly unwise, and I cannot think why a *caballero* should care to do so."

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Johnnie did not answer him for a moment. He knew very well why he had cared, or dared, to do so. He looked at Madame La Motte with a grim little smile.

The woman took him on the instant.

"A chevalier, such as Monsieur here, hath his own reasons for where he goes and what he does," she said. "Take not upon you, Monsieur Perez, to enquire too much...."

Johnnie stopped her with a sudden exclamation.

"But touching the Holy Office, Señor," he said, "what you have told me is all very well. I am a good Catholic, I trust and hope; but surely these circumstances are very occasional. You describe things which have doubtless happened, but not things which happen every day. It is impossible to believe that this is a system."

"Think you so?" said the little man. "Then I will very soon disabuse you of any such idea. I have papers in my mails, papers of my brother's, which—why, who comes here?"

His voice died away into silence, as round the other side of the wooden tower of the forecastle—with which all big merchantmen were provided in those days for defence against the enterprise of pirates—a black shadow, followed by a short, thick-set form, came into their view.

Johnnie recognised Hull.

"I thought you had been asleep," he said, "but thou art very welcome. We are talking of grave matters dealing with the foreign parts to which we go, and the Señor Don here hath been telling us much. Still, thou wouldst not have understood hadst thou been with us, for Don Perez speaks naught but the Spanish and the French."

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The little Spaniard, standing up against the bulwarks, looked uneasily towards Commendone and his servant, comprehending nothing of what was said.

"This man is safe?" he asked in a trembling voice.

"Safe!" Johnnie answered. "This is my faithful servant, who would die for me and the lady who is sleeping below."

A freakish humour possessed him, a bitter, freakish humour, in this fantastic, brilliant moonlight, this ironic comedy upon the southern-growing seas.

"Take him by the hand, Señor," he said in Spanish, "take him by his great, strong right hand, for I'll wager you will not easily shake a hand so honest in the dominions of the King of Spain to which we sail."

The little man looked round him as if in fear. There was an obvious suggestion in his eyes and face that he was somehow trapped.

"Hold out thy hand, John Hull, and shake that of this honest gentleman," Johnnie said.

The big brown hand of the Englishman went out, the little yellow fingers of the Spaniard advanced tentatively towards it.

They shook hands.

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Johnnie watched it with amusement. These dreadful stories of unthinkable cruelty had stirred up something within him. He was not cruel, but very tender-hearted, yet this little play upon the doubting Spaniard was welcome and fitted in with his mood.

Then he saw an astonishing thing, and one which he could not explain.

The two men, the huge, squat John Hull of Suffolk, the little weazened gentleman from Lisbon, shook hands, looked at each other earnestly in the face, and then, wonder of wonders, linked arms, turned their backs upon Johnnie and the sleepy old Frenchwoman by the carronade, and spoke earnestly to each other for a moment.

Their forms were silhouetted against the silver sea. There was an inexplicable motion of arms, a word whispered and a word exchanged, and then Don Perez wheeled round.

In the moonlight and the glimmer from the lantern on the forecastle, Johnnie saw that his face,

which had been twitching with anxiety, was now absolutely at rest. It was radiant even, excited, pleased—it wore the aspect of one alone among enemies who had found a friend.

"'Tis all right, Señor," Perez said. "I will go and fetch you the papers of which I spoke. You may command me in any way now. You are not yourself—by any chance...."

John Hull shook his head violently, and the little Spaniard skipped away with a chuckle.

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"What is this?" John Commendone asked. "How have you made quick friends with the Don? What is't—art magic, or what?"

"'Tis nothing, sir," Hull answered, with some embarrassment, "'tis but the Craft."

"The Craft?" Johnnie asked. "And what may that be?"

"We're brethren, this man and I," Hull answered; "we're of the Freemasons, and that is why, master."

Johnnie nodded. He said no more. The whole thing was inexplicable to him. He knew, of course, of the Freemasons, that such a society existed, but no evidence of it had ever come to his knowledge before this night. The persecution of Freemasonry which was to ensue in Queen Elizabeth's reign was not yet, and the Brethren were a very hidden people in 1555.

There was a patter of feet upon the ladder leading up to the fore-castle-deck. Perez appeared again with a bundle of papers in his hand.

"Now, then, Señor," he said, "you shall see if this of which I have told you is a *system* or is not. These are documents, forms, belonging to my brother's business as Notary of the Holy Office. Thus thou wilt see."

He handed a piece of parchment, printed parchment, to Commendone.

Johnnie held it up under the light of the lantern, and read it, with a chilling of the blood.

It was "The Proper Form of Torture for Women," and it was one of many forms left blank for convenience to record the various steps.

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As he glanced through it, his lips grew dry, his eyes, straining in the half-sufficient light, seemed to burn.

There was something peculiarly terrible in the very omission of a special name, and the consequent thought of the number of wretches whose vain words and torments had been recorded upon forms like this—and were yet to be recorded—froze the young man into a still figure of horror and of silence.

And this is what he read:

"She was told to tell the truth, or orders would be given to strip her. She said, etc. She was commanded to be stripped naked.

"She was told to tell the truth, or orders would be given to cut off her hair. She said, etc.

"Orders were given to cut off her hair; and when it was taken off she was examined by the doctor and surgeon, who said there was not any objection to her being put to the torture.

"She was told to tell the truth or she would be commanded to mount the rack. She said, etc.

"She was commanded to mount, and she said, etc.

"She was told to tell the truth, or her body would be bound. She said, etc. She was ordered to be bound.

"She was told to tell the truth, or, if not, they would order her right foot to be made fast for the trampazo. She said, etc. They commanded it to be made fast.

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"She was told to tell the truth, or they would command her left foot to be made fast for the trampazo. She said, etc. They commanded it to be made fast. She said, etc. It was ordered to be done.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the binding of the right arm to be stretched. She said, etc. It was commanded to be done. And the same with the left arm. It was ordered to be executed.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the fleshy part of her right arm to be made fast for the garrote. She said, etc. It was ordered to be made fast.

"And by the said lord inquisitor, it was repeated to her many times, that she should tell the truth, and not let herself be brought into so great torment; and the physician and surgeon were called in, who said, etc. And the criminal, etc. And orders were given to make it fast.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the first turn of mancuerta. She said, etc. It was commanded to be done.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would command the garrote to be applied again to the right arm. She said, etc. It was ordered to be done.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the second turn of mancuerta. She said, etc. It was commanded to be done. [Pg 268]

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the garrote to be applied again to the left arm. She said, etc. It was ordered to be done.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the third turn of mancuerta. She said, etc. It was commanded to be done.

"She was told to tell the truth, or they would order the trampazo to be laid on the right foot. She said, etc. It was commanded to be done.

"For women you do not go beyond this."

Johnnie finished his reading. Then he tore it up into four pieces and flung it out upon the starboard bow.

The yellow parchment fluttered over Madame La Motte's head like great moonlit moths.

Then he turned and stared at Don Pedro, almost as if he would have sprung at him.

"'Tis nothing of mine, Señor," the little man said. "You asked me to tell you, and that I have done. I am no enemy of yours, so look not at me in that way. Here"—he put his hand out and touched John Hull—"here I have a very worthy brother, eke a Master of mine, who will answer for me in all that I do."

The old Frenchwoman began to gather her vast bulk together to descend into the cabin for sleep.

Johnnie helped her to her feet, and as he did so a sweet tenor voice shivered out beneath the belying sails, and there was the thrud of a lute accompanying it: [Pg 269]

*"I sail, I sail the Spanish seas,
Hey ho, in the sun and the cloud
To bring fair ladies
Wool to Cadiz,
To deck their bodies that are so proud,
In the ship of St. James a mariner I"....*

Suddenly the voice of the singer ceased, shut off into silence.

There was a half-frightened shout, a flapping of the sails as the square-rigged ship fell out of the night wind for a moment, and then a clamour of loud voices.

"Over the side! Over the side! The man from Lisbon's gone."

Johnnie had jumped to the port taffrail at the noise, and he saw what had happened. He saw the whole of it quite distinctly. A long, lithe figure had been balancing itself upon the bulwarks, giving its body to the gentle motion of the ship.

Suddenly it fell backwards, there was a resounding splash in the quiet sea, and something black was struggling and threshing in a pool of silver water. From the sea came a loud cry—"Socorro! Socorro!"

From the time the splash was heard and the cry came up to the fore-castle the ship had slipped a hundred yards through the still waters.

Johnnie jumped up upon the bulwarks, held his hands above his head for a moment, judged his distance—ships were not high out of the water in that day—and dived into the phosphorescent sea. [Pg 270]

He was lightly clad, and he swam strongly, with the long left-arm overhand stroke—conquering an element with joy in the doing of it—glad to be in wild and furious action, happy to throw off the oppression of the dreadful things which the little Spaniard had droned upon the deck. He got up to the man easily enough, circled round him, as he rose splashing for the third time, and caught him under the arm-pits, lying on his back with the other above him.

The man began to struggle, trying to turn and grip.

Johnnie raised his head a little from the water, sinking as he did so, and pulling down the other also, and shouted a Spanish curse into his ear.

"Be quiet," he said; "lie still! If you don't I'll drown you!"

Commendone was a good swimmer. He had swam and dived in the lake at Commendone since he was a boy. He knew now exactly what to do, and his voice, though half-strangled with the salt water, and his grip of the drowning man's arm-pits had their effect.

There was a half-choked, "*Si, Señor,*" and in twenty to thirty seconds Johnnie lay back in the

warm water of the Atlantic, knowing that for a few minutes, at any rate, he could support the man he had come to save.

It was curious that at this moment he felt no fear or alarm whatever. His whole mind was directed towards one thing—that the man he had dived to rescue would keep still. His mouth and nose were just out of the water, when suddenly there came into his mind the catch of an old song. [Pg 271]

He heard again the high, delicate notes of the Queen's lute—"Time hath to silver turn'd..."

Hardly knowing what he did, he even laughed with pleasure at the memory.

As that was heard, a strong, lusty voice came to him.

"I'm here, master, I'm here! We shall not be long now. Ah—ah-h-h!"

Hull, blowing like a grampus, had swam up to them.

"I'll take him, master," he said; "do you rest for a moment. They'll have us out of this 'fore long."

There were no life-belts invented in those days, and to lower a boat from the ship was long in doing. But the *St. Iago* was brought up with all sails standing, the boat at the stern was let down most gingerly into the sea, and four mariners rowed towards the swimming men. It was near twenty minutes before Hull and Commendone heard the chunk of the oars in the rowlocks. But they heard it at last. The tub-like galley shadowed them, there was a loud cry of welcome and relief, and then the two men, still grasping the inert figure of him who had fallen overboard, caught hold of the stern of the boat. Willing hands hauled the half-drowned man into the boat. Johnnie and Hull clambered over the broad stern, sat down amid-ships, and shook themselves. [Pg 272]

The moonlight was still extraordinarily powerful, and gave a fallen day to this southern world.

As Commendone shot the water out of his ears, he looked upon the limp, prone figure of the man he had rescued.

"*Dame!*" he cried; "it is the torturer that we've been overboard for. Pity we didn't let him drown."

John Hull had turned the figure of the Spaniard upon its stomach and was working vigorously at the arms, using them like pump-handles, as the sailors got their oars into the rowlocks again, and pulled back towards the shivering, silver ship near quarter of a mile away.

"I'll bring the life back to him, master," said John Hull. "He's warm now—there! He's vomited a pint or more of sea-water as I speak."

"I doubt he was worth saving," Johnnie said in a low voice to his servant's ear. "Still, he is saved, and I suppose a man like this hath a soul?"

Hull looked at Commendone in surprise. He knew nothing about the man they had rescued; he could not understand why his master spoke in this way.

But with his usual dog-like fidelity he nodded an assent, though he did not cease the pumping motion of the half-drowned man's arms.

"Perhaps he hath no soul, master," Hull said, "you know better than I. At any rate, we have got him out of this here sea, and so praise God Who hath given us the sturdiness to do it." [Pg 273]

Commendone looked at his henchman and then at the slowly reviving Spaniard.

"Amen," he said. [Pg 274]

CHAPTER X

THE SILENT MEN IN BLACK

"Sing to us, Johnnie."

"*Mais oui, chantez, Monsieur,*" said Madame La Motte.

Johnnie took up a chitarrone, the archlute, a large, double-necked Spanish instrument, which lay upon a marble table by his side in the courtyard.

He looked up into the sky, the painted sunset sky of Spain, as if to find some inspiration there.

The hum of Seville came to them in an almost organ-like harmony. Bells were tolling from the cathedral and the innumerable churches; pigeons were wheeling round the domes and spires; occasionally a faint burst of music reached them where they sat.

The young man looked gravely at the two women. His face at this moment was singularly tranquil and refined. He was dressed with scrupulous care—the long journey over, his natural habits resumed. He had all the air and grace of a gallant in a Court.

He bowed to Madame La Motte and to his sweetheart, smiling gently at them.

"By your patience, ladies," he said, "I will make endeavour to improvise for you upon a theme. We have spent this day in seeing beauties such as sure I never thought to see with my mortal eyes. We are in the land of colour, of sweet odours; the balmy smells of nard and cassia are flung about the cedarn alleys where we walk. We have sucked the liquid air in a veritable garden of the Hesperides, and, indeed, I looked to see the three fair daughters of Hesperus along those crisped shades and bowers. And we have seen also"—his voice was almost dreaming as he spoke—"the greatest church e'er built to God's glory by the hand of man. 'Tis indeed a mountain scooped out, a valley turned upsides. The towers of the Abbey Church at Westminster might walk erect in the middle nave; there are pillars with the girth of towers, and which appear so slender that they make one shudder as they rise from out the ground or depend them from the gloomy roof like stalactites in the cave of a giant."

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Madame La Motte nodded, purred, and murmured to herself. The whimsical and studied Court language did not now fall upon her ears for the first time. In the fashion of that age all men of culture and position learnt to talk in this fashion upon occasion, with classic allusion and in graceful prose.

But to sweet Elizabeth it was all new and beautiful, and as she gazed at her lover her eyes were liquid with caressing wonder, her lips curved into a bow of pride at such dear eloquence.

Johnnie plucked the strings of the chitarrone once or twice, and then, his eyes half closed, began a simple improvisation in a minor key, the while he lifted his voice and began to sing his ballad of evening colours:

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See! limner Phœbus paints the sky
Vermilion and gold
And doth with purple tapestry
The waning day enfold.
—The royal, lucent, Tyrian dye
King Philip wore in Thessaly.

The Lord of Morning now doth keep
Herald for Lady Night,
Whose robes of black and silver sweep
Before his tabard bright.
—All silver-soft and sable-deep,
As when she brought Endymion sleep!

Now honey-coloured Luna she
Hath lit her lamp on high;
And paleth in her Majestie
The twin Dioscuri.
—Set in gold-powdered samite, she—
Queen of the Night! Queen of the Sea!

His voice faded away into silence; the mellow tenor ceasing in an imperceptible diminuendo of sound.

There was a silence, and then Lizzie's hand stole out and touched her lover's. "Oh, Johnnie," she said, "how gracious! And did those lovely words come into thy head as thou sangst them?"

"In truth they did, fairest lady of evening," he answered, bending low over her hand. "And sure 'twas thy dear presence that sent them to me, the musick of thy voice hath breathed a soul into this lute."

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... They had arrived safely in Seville the night before, spending three days upon the journey from Cadiz, but travelling in very pleasant and easy fashion.

Mr. Mew, the mate of the *St. Iago*, had business in the city, and while the vessel was discharging its cargo at Cadiz he went up to Seville and took the four travellers with him on board an *alijador*—a long barge with quarters for passengers, and a hold for cargo, which was propelled partly by oars in the narrower reaches of the river, but principally by a large lug sail.

Don Perez had remained in Cadiz, but the tall and sinister young fellow whom Hull and Johnnie had rescued from the Atlantic came in the barge also. The fugitives from England had little to say to him, knowing what he was. Alonso—which was the man's name—had been profuse in his gratitude. His profuseness, however, had been mingled with a continuous astonishment, a brutish wonder which was quite inexplicable to Elizabeth.

"He seemeth," she said once to her esquire, "to think as if such a deed of daring as thou didst in thy kindness for a fellow-creature in peril hath never been known in the world before!"

Madame La Motte and Commendone, however, had said nothing. They knew very well why this poor wretch, who gained his food by such a hideous calling, was amazed at his rescue. They said nothing to the girl, however, dreading that she should ever have an inkling of what the man was.

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On the voyage to Seville, a happy, lazy time under the bright sun, Johnnie could not quite understand an obvious friendship and liking which seemed to have sprung up between Alonso and Mr. Mew, who spoke Spanish very adequately.

"I cannot understand," he said upon one occasion to the sturdy man from the Isle of Wight, "I cannot understand, sir, how you that are an English mariner can talk and consort with this tool of hell."

Mr. Mew looked at him with a dry smile. "And yet, master," he said in the true Hampshire idiom and drawl, "bless your heart, you jumped overboard for this same man!"

"The case is different," Johnnie said; "'twas a fellow-creature, and I did as behoved me. But that is no reason to be friendly with such a wretch."

"Look you, Master Commendone," said Mr. Mew, "every man to his trade. I would burn both hands, myself, before I'd live by sworn torturing. But, then, 'tis not my trade. This man's father and his brother have been doing of it almost since birth, and they do it—and sure, a good Catholic like yourself," here he smiled dryly, "cannot but remember that 'tis done under the shield and order of Holy Church! The damned old Pope hath ordered it."

Johnnie crossed himself. "The sovereign Pontiff," he said, "hath established the Holy Office for punishment of heretics. But the punishment is light and without harshness in the states of His Holiness. In Spain 'tis a matter very different. It was under the Holy Father Innocent IV that this tribunal was created, and the Holy Office in Spain differed in no wise from the comparatively innocuous——"

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"What is that, master? That word?"

"It meaneth 'harmless,' Master Mew. What was I saying? Oh, that it differed nothing at all in Spain from the harmless Council which was to detect heresy and reprove it. But during the reign of our good King Edward IV the Holy Office was changed in Spain. The Ebrews were plotting, or said to be plotting, against the realm, and they had come to much wealth and power. Pope Sixtus made many protests, but the right of appointing inquisitors and directing the operation of the Holy Office in Spain was reserved to the Spanish Crown. And from this date, Master Mew, Holy Church at any rate hath disclaimed to be responsible for it. That was then and is now the true feeling of Rome. 'Tis true that in Spain the Church tolerates the Inquisition, but its blood-stained acts are from the Crown and such priests as are ministers of the Crown."

Father Chilches had taught Johnnie his history, truly enough. But it seemed to make very little impression upon the mate.

"Art a gentleman," he said, "and know doubtless more than I, but such peddling with words and splicing of facts are not to my mind. The damned old Pope say I, and always shall, when it's safe to speak! But the pith of our talk, Master Commendone, was that you would not have me give comradeship with this Alonso. I see not your point of view. He is of his time and must do his duty."

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The mate snapped a tarry thumb and finger with a tolerant smile. "You've saved him, so that he may go on with his torturin'," he said, "and I like to talk with him because I find him a good fellow, and that is all about it, Master Commendone."

Johnnie had not got much small change from his conference with the mate, but when they arrived at Seville, he saw him and the man called Alonso no more, and his mind was directed upon very other things.

They arrived at the city late at night, and their mails were taken to the great inn of Seville known as the Posada de las Muñecas, or house of puppets, so called from the fact that in days gone by, at the great annual Seville fair, a famous performance of marionettes had taken place in front of it.

The Posada was an old Moorish palace, as beautiful under the sunlight as an Oriental song, and when they rose in the morning and Johnnie had despatched a serving-man to find if Don José Senebria was in residence, he and his companions wakened to the realisation of a loveliness of which they had never dreamed.

The sky was like a great hollow turquoise; the sun beat down upon the Pearl of Andalusia with limpid glory, and played perpetually upon the white and painted walls. The orange trees, only introduced into Spain some five-and-twenty years before from Asia, were globed with their golden fruit among the dark, jade-like leaves of polished green; feathery palms with their mailed trunks rose up to cut the blue, and on every side buildings which glowed like immense jewels were set to greet the unaccustomed northern eye. The Posada was a blaze of colour, half Moorish, half Gothic, fantastic and alluring as a rare dream.

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Johnnie heard early in the morning that Don José would be away for two days, having travelled to his vineyards beyond the old Roman village of Sancios. The day therefore, and the morrow also, was left to them for sight-seeing. Both he and Elizabeth had in part forgotten the cloud of distress under which they had left their native land. The child often talked to him of her father, making many half-shy confidences about her happy life at Hadley, telling him constantly of that brave and stalwart gentleman. But she now accepted all that had happened with the perfect innocence and trustfulness of youth. Upon her white and stainless mind what she had undergone had left but little trace. Even now she only half realised her ravishment to the house with the red door, and that Madame La Motte was not a pattern of kindness, discretion, and fine feeling would never have entered Lizzie's simple mind. She was going to be married to Johnnie!—it was to be arranged almost at once—and then she knew that there need be no more trouble, no weariness,

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no further searchings of heart. She and Johnnie would be together for ever and ever, and that was all that mattered!

Indeed, under these bright skies, among the gay, good-humoured, and heedless people of Seville, it would have been very difficult for much older and more world-weary people than this young man and maid to be sad or apprehensive.

It had all been a feast, a never-ending feast for eye and ear. They had stood before pictures which were world-famous—they had seen that marvellous allegory in pigment, where "a hand holds a pair of scales, in which the sins of the world—set forth by bats, peacocks, serpents, and other emblems—are weighed against the emblems of the Passion of Christ our Lord; and eke in the same frame, which is thought to be the finer composition, Death, with a coffin under one arm, is about to extinguish a taper, which lighteth a table bespiced with crowns, jewels, and all the gewgaws of this earthly pomp. 'In Ictu Oculi' are the words which circle the taper's gleaming light, while set upon the ground resteth a coffin open, the corpse within being dimly revealed."

They had walked through the long colonnade in the palace of the Alcazar, to the baths of Maria de Padilla, the lovely mistress of Pedro the Cruel, "at the Court of whom it was esteemed a mark of gallantry and loyalty to drink the waters of the bath after that Maria had performed her ablutions. Upon a day observing that one of his knights refrained from this act of homage, the King questioned him, and elicited the reply, 'I dare not drink of the water, Sire, lest, having tasted the sauce, I should covet the partridge.'" [Pg 283]

All these things they had done together in their love and youth, forgetting all else but the incomparable beauties of art and nature which surrounded them, the music and splendour of Love within their hearts.

... A serving-man came through the patio.

"*Puedo cenar?*" Johnnie asked. "*A qué hora es el cenar?*"

The man told him that supper was ready then, and together with the ladies Johnnie left the courtyard and entered the long *comedor*, or dining-hall, a narrow room with good tapestries upon the walls, and a ceiling decorated with heads of warriors and ladies in carved and painted stucco.

It was lit by candle, and supper was spread for the three in the middle of one great table, an oasis of fruit, lights, and flowers.

"*Este es un vino bueno*," said the waiter who stood there.

"It is all good wine in Spain," Johnnie answered, with a smile, as the man poured out *borgoña*, and another brought them a dish of grilled salmon.

They lifted their glasses to each other, and fell to with a good appetite. Suddenly Johnnie stopped eating. "Where is John Hull?" he said. "God forgive me, I have not thought of him for hours."

"He will be safe enough," Madame La Motte answered, her mouth full of *salmón asado*. "*Mon Dieu!* but this fish is good! Fear not, Monsieur, thy serving-man can very well take care of himself." [Pg 284]

"I suppose so," Johnnie replied, though with a little uneasiness.

"But, Johnnie," Elizabeth said, "Hull told me that he was to be with Master Mew, the mate of our late ship, to see the town with him, so all will be well."

Johnnie lifted his goblet of wine; he had never felt more free, careless, and happy in his life.

"Here," he said, "is to this sweet and hospitable land of Spain, whither we have come through long toils and dangers. 'Tis our Latium, for as the grandest of all poets, Vergil yclept, hath it, '*Per varios casus, per tot discrimina rerum, tendimus in Latium, sedes ubi fata quietas ostendunt.*'"

"And what may that mean, Monsieur?" asked Madame La Motte, pulling the *botella* towards her. "My Credo, my Paternoster, and my Ave are all my Latin."

"It means, Madame," Johnnie answered, "that we have gone through many troubles and trials, through all sorts of changes in affairs, but we approach towards Latium, which the poet meaneth for Imperial Rome, where the fates will let us live in peace."

"In peace!" Elizabeth whispered.

"Aye, sweetheart mine," the young man answered; "we have won to peace at last. Thou and I together!" [Pg 285]

For a moment or two they were all silent, and then the door of the *comedor* was suddenly opened, not quietly, as for the entrance of a serving-man, but flung open widely and with noise.

They all turned and looked towards the archway of the door.

In a moment more six or seven people pressed into the room—people dressed in black, people whose feet made no noise upon the floor.

Ere ever any of them at the table realised what was happening, they found themselves gripped by strong, firm hands, though there was never a word spoken.

Before he could reach the dagger in his belt—for he was not wearing his sword—Johnnie's arms were bound to his side, and he was held fast.

It was all done with strange deftness and silence, Elizabeth and the Frenchwoman being held also, each by two men, though their arms were not bound.

Johnnie burst out in indignant English, then, remembering where he was, changed to Spanish. "In God's name," he cried, "what means this outrage upon peaceable and quiet folk?"

His voice was loud and angry, but there was fear in it as he cried out. The answer came from a tall figure which came noiselessly through the door, a figure in a cassock, with a large gold cross hung upon its breast, and followed by two others in the dress of priests.

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"Ah, Mr. Commendone, we meet again," came in excellent English, as the man removed his broad-brimmed felt hat.

"You have come a long way from England, Mr. Commendone, you and your—friends. But the arm of the King, the hand of the Church, which are as the arm of God Himself, can stretch swiftly and very far."

Johnnie's face grew dead white as he heard the well-remembered voice of Father Diego Deza. In a flash he remembered that King Philip's confessor and confidential adviser had told him that he was to leave England for Spain on the morning of the very day when he had rescued Elizabeth from shame.

His voice rattled in his throat and came hoarsely through parched lips. He made one effort, though he felt that it was hopeless.

"Don Diego," he said, "I am very glad to see you in Spain"—the other gave a nasty little laugh. "Don Diego," Johnnie continued, "I have offended nothing against the laws of England. What means this capture and durance of myself and my companions?"

"You are not in England now, Mr. Commendone," the priest replied; "but you are in the dominion of His Most Catholic Majesty; you are not accused of any crime against the civil law of England or of this country, but I, in my authority as Grand Inquisitor of the Holy Office in Seville—to do which duty I have now come to Spain—arrest you and your companions on charges which will be afterwards disclosed to you.

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"Take them away," he said in Spanish to his officers.

There was a horrid wail, echoing and re-echoing through the long room and beating upon the ear-drums of all who were there....

Madame La Motte had heard all that the priest had said in English. She shrieked and shrieked again.

"Ah-h-h! *C'est vrai alors! L'inquisition! qui lance la mort!*"

With extraordinary and sudden strength she twisted herself away from the two sombre figures which held her. She bent forward over the table, snatched up a long knife, gripped the handle firmly with two fat white hands, and plunged it into her breast to the hilt.

For quite three seconds she stood upright. Her face of horror changed into a wonder, as if she was surprised at what she had done. Then she smiled foolishly, like a child who realises that it has made a silly mistake, coughed loudly like a man, and fell in heavy death upon the floor.

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CHAPTER XI

IN THE BOX

"Devant l'Inquisition, quand on vient à jubé,
Si l'on ne soit rôti, l'on soit au moins flambé."

It was not light that pressed upon the retina of the eye. There was no vibration to the sensitive lenses. It was a sudden vision not of the eye, but in the memory-cells of the brain which now and then filled the dreadful blackness with a fierce radiance, filled it for an infinitesimal fraction of a second.

And then all was dark again.

It was not dark with the darkness that ordinary men know. At no time, in all probability, has any man or woman escaped a long sleepless night in a darkened room. The candle is out; the silence begins to nibble at the nerves; there is no sound save but the uneasy tossing upon the bed. It seems, one would rather say, that there is no sound save only that made by the sufferer. At such hours comes a dread weariness of life, a restlessness which is but the physical embroidery upon despair. The body itself is at the lowest pitch of its vitality. Through the haunted chambers of the mind fantastic thoughts chase each other, and evil things—evil *personalities* it almost seems—uncoil themselves and erect their heads.

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But it is not really darkness, not really despair, as people know when the night has gone and dawn begins. Nor is it really *silence*. The ear becomes attuned to its environment; a little wind moans round the house. There is the soft patter of falling rain—the distant moaning of the sea.

Furniture creaks as the temperature changes; there are rustlings, whispers, unexplained noises—the night is indeed full of sound.

Nor is it really *darkness*, as the mind discovers towards the end of the sick and restless vigil. The eye also is attuned to that which limits and surrounds its potentialities. The blinds are drawn, but still some faint mysterious greyness creeps between them and the window. The room, then, is a real room still! Over there is the long mirror which will presently begin to stir and reflect the birth-pangs of light. That squat, black monster, which crouches in the corner of the dark, will grow larger, and become only the wardrobe after all. And soon the air of the chamber will take on a subtle and indefinable change. It will have a new savour, it will tell that far down in the under world the sun is moaning and muttering in the last throes of sleep. The blackness will go. Dim, inchoate nothingness will change to wan dove-coloured light, and with the first chirpings of half-awakened birds the casement will show "a slowly glimmering square," and the tortured brain will sink to rest.

Day has come! There is no longer any need for fear. The nervous pain, more terrible than all, has gone. The heart is calmed, the brain is soothed, utter prostration and despair appears, mercifully, a thing of long ago. [Pg 290]

Some such experience as this all modern men have endured. To John Commendone, in the prison of the Inquisition where he had been put, no such alleviation came.

For him there was no blessed morning; for him the darkness was that awful negation of light—of physical light—and of hope, which is without remedy.

He did not know how long it had been since he was caught up suddenly out of the rich room where he was dining with his love—dining among the scent of flowers, with the echo of music in his ears, his whole heart suffused with thankfulness and peace.

He did not know how long it had been; he only remembered the hurried progress in a closed carriage from the hotel to the fortress of the Triana in the suburbs, which was the prison and assize of the Holy Office.

In all Europe in this era prisons were dark, damp holes. They were real graves, full of mould, animal filth, the pest-breeding smells. It was the boast of the Inquisition, and even Llorente speaks of it, that the prisons were "well-arched, light and dry rooms where the prisoners could make some movement."

This was generally true, and Commendone had heard of it from Don Perez. [Pg 291]

It was not true in his case. He had been taken hurriedly into the prison as night fell, marched silently through interminable courtyards and passage-ways—corridors which slanted downwards, ever downwards—until in a dark stone passage, illuminated only by the torches which were carried by those who conducted him, he had come to a low door, heavily studded with iron.

This had been opened with a key. The wards of the lock had shot back with a well-oiled and gentle click. He had bent his head a little as they pushed him into the living tomb—a box of stone five feet square exactly. He was nearly six feet in height; he could not stand erect; he could not stretch himself at full length. The thing was a refinement of the dreadful "little-ease" of the Tower of London and many other secular prisons where wretches were tortured for a week before their execution. He had heard of places like them, but he realised that it was not the design of those who had him fast to kill him yet. He knew that he must undergo an infinity of mental and bodily torture ere ever the scarred and trembling soul would be allowed to wing its way from the still, broken body.

He was in absolute, complete darkness, buried in a box of stone.

The rayless gloom was without any relief whatever; it was the enclosing sable of death itself; a pitchy oblivion that lay upon him like a solid weight, a thing obscene and hopeless. And the silence was a real silence, an utter stillness such as no modern man ever knows—save only the few demoniac prisoners in the *cachot noir* of the French convict prisons of Noumea. [Pg 292]

Once every two days—if there indeed were such things as days and hours in this still hell—the door of the cell was noiselessly opened. There was a dim red glow in the stone corridor without, a pitcher of water, some black bread, and every now and then a few ripe figs, were pushed into the box.

Then a clang, the oily swish of the bolts, and another eternity of silence.

The man's brain did not go. It was too soon for that. He lay a fortnight—ten thousand years it seemed to him—in this box of horror.

He was not to die yet. He was not even to lose his mind; of that he was perfectly aware. He was no ordinary prisoner. No usual fate was in store for him; that also he knew. A charge of heresy in his case was absurd. No witnesses could be brought who, speaking truth, could condemn him for heresy. But what Don Perez had told him was now easily understood. He was in a place where there was no appeal, a situation with no egress.

There was not the slightest doubt in his mind that a dreadful vengeance was to be taken upon him for his treatment of the King of Spain. The Holy Office was a royal court provided with ecclesiastical weapons. Its familiars had got him in their grip; he was to die the death.

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As he lay motionless day after day, night after night, in the silence—the hideous silence without light—the walls so close, pressing on him, forbidding him free movement, at every moment seeming as if they would rush together and crush him in this night of Erebus, he began to have visitors.

Sometimes a sulphurous radiance would fill the place. He would see the bowing, mocking figure of King Philip, the long yellow face looking down upon him with a malign smile. He would hear a great hoarse voice, and a little woman with a shrivelled face and covered with jewels, would squeak and gibber at him. Then, with a clank of armour, and a sudden fresh smell of the fields, Sir Henry Commendone would stand there, with a "How like you this life of the pit, Johnnie?" ... "How like you this blackness, my son?"

Then he would put up his hands and press these grisly phantoms out of the dark. He would press them away with one great effort of the will.

They would go, and he remained trembling in the chill, damp negation of light, which was so far more than darkness. He would grope for the pieces of his miserable food, and search the earthen pitcher for water.

And all this, these tortures beyond belief, beyond understanding of the ordinary man, were but as soft couches to one who is weary, food to one hungered, water to lips parched in a desert—compared with the deepest, unutterable descent of all.

The cold and stinking blackness which held him tight as a fossil in a bed of clay was not the worst. His eyes that saw nothing, his limbs that were shot with cramping pain, his nostrils and stomach that could not endure this uncleaned cage, were a torture beyond thinking.

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Many a time he thought of the mercy of Bishop Bonner and Queen Mary—the mercy that let a gentleman ride under the pleasant skies of England to a twenty minutes' death—God! these were pleasant tortures! His own present hopelessness, all that he endured in body—why, dear God! these were but pleasant tortures too, things to bite upon and endure, compared with the Satanic horror, the icy dread, the bitter, hopeless tears, when he thought of Elizabeth.

He had long since ceased praying for himself. It mattered little or nothing what happened to him. That he should be taken out to torture would be a relief, a happiness. He would lie in the rack laughing. They could fill his belly with water, or strain the greasy hempen ropes into his flesh, and still he would laugh and forgive them—Dr. Taylor had forgiven less than they would do to him, he would forgive more than all for the sake of Christ and His Maid-Mother. How easy that would be! To be given something to endure, to prove himself a man and a Christian!

But to forgive them for what they might be doing, they might have done, to his dear lady—how could he forgive *that* to these blood-stained men?

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Through all the icy hours he thought of one thing, until his own pains vanished to nothingness.

Perchance, and the dreadful uncertainty in his utter impotence and silence swung like a bell in his brain, and cut through his soul like the swinging pendola which they said the familiars of the Holy Office used, Elizabeth had already suffered unspeakable things.

He saw again a pair of hands—cruel hands—hands with thick thumbs. Had hands like these grasped and twisted the white limbs of the girl he loved? Divorced from him, helpless, away from any comfort, any kind voice, was it not true—*was* it true?—that already his sweetheart had been tortured to her death?

He had tried over and over again to pray for Elizabeth, to call to the seat where God was, that He might save the dear child from these torments unspeakable.

But there was always the silence, the dead physical blackness and silence. He beat his hands upon the stone wall; he bruised his head upon the roof of darkness which would not let him stand upright, and he knew—as it is appointed to some chosen men to know—that unutterable, unthinkable despair of travail which made Our Lord Himself call out in the last hour of His passion, [Greek: Êli, Êli lamà sabachthani]

There was no response to his prayers. Into his heart came no answering message of hope.

And then the mind of this man, which had borne so much, and suffered so greatly, began to become powerless to feel. A bottle can only hold a certain amount of water, the strings of an instrument be plucked to a certain measure of sound, the brain of a man can endure up to a certain strain, and then it snaps entirely, or is drowsed with misery.

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Physically, the young man was in perfect health when they had taken him to his prison. He had lived always a cleanly and athletic life. No sensual ease had ever dimmed his faculties. And therefore, though he knew it not, the frightful mental agony he had undergone had but drawn upon the reserve of his physical forces, and had hardly injured his body at all. The food they gave him, at any rate for the time of his disappearance from the world of sentient beings, was enough to support life. And while he lay in dreadful hopelessness, while his limbs were racked with pain, and it seemed to him that he stood upon the very threshold of death, he was in reality physically

competent, and a few hours of relief would bring his body back to its pristine strength.

There came a time when he lay upon his stone floor perfectly motionless. The merciful anodyne that comes to all tortured people when either the brain or body can bear no more, had come to him now.

It seemed but a short moment—in reality it was several hours—since his jailors, those masked still-moving figures, had brought him a renewal of his food. He could not eat the bread, but two figs upon the platter were grateful and cooling to his throat, though he was unconscious of any physical gratification. He knew, sometime after, that sustenance had been brought to him, and that he had a great thirst. He stretched out his hand mechanically for the pitcher, rising from the floor and pressing the brim to his lips.

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He drank deeply, and as he drank became suddenly aware that this was not the lukewarm water of the past darkness, but something that ran through his veins, that swiftly ran through them, and as the blood mounted to his brain gave him courage, awoke him, fed the starved nerves. It was wine he was drinking! wine that perhaps would be red in the light; wine that once more filled him with endeavour, and a desperate desire which was not hope but the last protest against his fate.

He lay back once more, by no means the same man he had been some little time ago, and as he reclined in a happy physical stupor—the while his brain was alive again and began to work—he said many times to himself the name of Jesus.

"Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!"—it was all he could say; it was all he could think of, it was his last prayer. Just the name alone.

And very speedily the prayer was answered. Out of the depths he cried—"De profundis clamavit"—and the door opened, as it opened to the Apostle Paul, and the place where he was was filled with red light.

For a moment he was unable to realise it. He passed one wasted and dirty hand before his eyes. "Jesus!" he said again, in a dreamy, wondering voice.

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He felt himself lifted up from where he lay. Two strong hands were under his arms; he was taken out of the stinking *oubliette* into the corridor beyond.

He stood upright. He stretched out his arms. He breathed another air. It was a damp, foetid, underground air, but it seemed to him that it came from the gardens of the Hesperides.

Then he became conscious of a voice speaking quietly, quickly, and with great insistence.

The voice in his ear!

... "Señor, we have had to wait. You have had to lie in this dungeon, and I could do nothing for you—for you that saved my life. It hath taken many days to think out a plan to save you and the Señorita. But 'tis done now, 'tis cut and dried, and neither you nor she shall go to the death designed for you both. It hath been designed by the Assessor and the Procurator Fiscal, acting under orders of the Grand Inquisitor, that you shall be tortured to death, or near to it, and that to the Señorita shall be done the same. Then you are to be taken to the Quemadero—that great altar of stone supported by figures of the Holy Apostles—and there burnt to death at the forthcoming *auto da fé*."

"Then what,"—Johnnie's voice came from him in a hollow whisper.

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"Hush, hush," the other voice answered him; "'tis all arranged. 'Tis all settled, but still it dependeth upon you, Señor. Will you save your lady love, and go free with her from here, and with your servant also, or will you die and let her die too?"

"Then she hath not been tortured?"

"Not yet; it is for to-night. You come afterwards. But you do not know me, Señor; you do not realise who I am."

At this Johnnie looked into the face of the man who supported him.

"Ah," he said, in a dreamy voice, "Alonso!—I took you from the sea, did not I?"

Everything was circling round him, he wanted to fall, to lie down and sleep in this new air...

The torturer saw it—he had a dreadful knowledge of those who were about to faint. He caught hold of Johnnie somewhere at the back of the neck. There was a sudden scientific pressure of the flat thumb upon a nerve, and the sinking senses of the captive came back to him in a flood of painful consciousness.

"Ah!" he cried, "but I feel better now! Go on, go on, tell me, what is all this?..."

One big thumb was pressed gently at the back of Johnnie's head. "It is this," said the voice, "and now, Señor, listen to me as if you had never listened to any other voice in this whole world. In the first place, you have much money; you have much money to be employed for you, in the hands of your servant, and from him I hear that you are noble and wealthy in England. I myself am a young man, but lately introduced to do the work I do. I am in debt, Señor, and neither my father nor my brother will help me. There is a family feud between us. Now my father is the head sworn-

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torturer of the Holy Office; my brother is his assistant, and I am the assistant to my brother. The three of us do rack and put to pain those who come before us. But I myself am tired of this business, and would away to a country where I can earn a more honest and kindly living. Therefore if thou wilt help me to do this, all will be well. There is a carrack sailing for the port of Rome this very night, and we can all be aboard of it, and save ourselves, if thou wilt do what we have made a plan of."

"And what is that?" Johnnie asked.

"'Tis a dangerous and deadly thing. We may win a way to safety and joy, or it may be that we perish. I'll put it upon the throw of the die, and so must you, Señor."

Johnnie clutched Alonso by the arm. "Man! man!" he said, "there is some doubt in your voice. What is it? what is it? I would do anything but lose my immortal soul to save the Señorita from what is to be done to her to-night."

"'Tis well," the other answered briefly. "Then now I will tell you what you must do. 'Tis now the hour of sunset. In two hours more the Señorita will be brought to the rooms of the Question. Thy servant is of the height and build of my father. Thou art the same as regards my brother. If you consent to what I shall tell you, you and your servant will take the place of my brother and father. No one will know you from them, because we wear black linen garments and a hood which covereth our faces. I will go away, and I will put something in their wine which will send my father and my brother to sleep for long hours—sometimes we put it in the water we give to drink to those who come to us for torture, and who are able, or their relatives indeed, to pay well for such service. My people will know nothing, and you, with Juan thy servant, will take their places. Nor will the Inquisitor know. It hath been well thought out, Señor. I shall give you your directions, and understanding Spanish you will follow them out as if you were indeed my blood-brother. As for the man Juan, it will be your part to whisper to him what he has to do, for I cannot otherwise make him understand."

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Suddenly a dreadful thought flashed into Johnnie's mind. This man understood no word of English. How, then, had he plotted this scheme of rescue and escape with John Hull? Was this not one of those dreadful traps—themselves part of a devilish scheme of torture—of which he had heard in England, and of which Don Perez had more than hinted?

"And how dost *thou* understand my man John," he said, "seeing that thou knowest no word of his language?"

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The other made an impatient movement of his hands. "Señor," he said, "I marked that you did not seem to trust me. I am here to adventure my life, in recompense for that you did so for me. I am here also to get away from Spain with the aid of thy money—to get away to Rome, where the Holy Office will reach none of us. In doing this, I am risking my life, as I have said. And for me I am risking far more than life. I, that have done so many grievous things to others, am a great coward, and go in horrid fear of pain. I could not stand the least of the tortures, and if I am caught in this enterprise, I shall endure the worst of all. In any case, thou hast nothing to lose, for if I am indeed endeavouring to entrap you, you will gain nothing. The worst is reserved for you—as we have previous orders—for it is whispered that yours is not so much a matter of heresy, but that you did things against King Philip's Majesty in England."

Johnnie nodded. "'Tis true," he said; "but still, tell me for a further sign and token of thy fidelity how thou camest to be in communication with John Hull."

"Did I not tell thee?" the man answered, in amazement. "Why, 'twas through the second captain of the *St. Iago*, I cannot say his name, who hath been with Juan these many days, and speakest Spanish near as well as you."

Johnnie realised the truth at once, surprised that it had not come to him before. It was Mr. Mew, whom he had tackled for his friendship with Alonso! "Then what am I to do?" he said.

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Alonso began to speak slowly and with some hesitation.

"The work to do to-night," he said, "is to put a Carthusian monk, Luis Mercader, to the torture of the *trampezo*. After that, the Señorita will be brought in, interrogated, and is to be scourged as the first of her tortures."

The man started away—Johnnie had growled in his throat like a dog....

"It will not be, it will not be, Señor," Alonso said. "When Luis is finished with, he will be taken away by the surgeon and afterwards by the jailors. Then they will bring the Señorita and retire. There will be none in the room of the Question but thou, Juan, and myself, wearing our linen hoods, and Father Deza, that is the Grand Inquisitor newly come from England, his notary, and the physician. The doors leading to the prisons will be locked, for none must see the torture save only the officials concerned therein—as hath long been the law. It will be easy for us three to overpower the Inquisitor, the surgeon, and the notary. Then we can escape through the private rooms of us torturers, which lead to the back entrance of the fortress. The *caballeros* will not be discovered, if bound—or killed, indeed—for some hours, for none are allowed to approach the room of Question from the prisons until they are summoned by a bell. I shall have everything ready, and mules waiting, so that we may go straight to the *muelle*—the wharf to which the carrack is tied. The captain thereof is the Italian mariner Pozzi, who hath no love towards Spain, and we shall be upon the high seas before even our absence is discovered."

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"Good," Johnnie answered, his voice unconsciously assuming the note of command it was wont to use, the wine having reanimated him, his whole body and brain tense with excitement, ready for the daring deed that awaited him.

"My friend," he said, "I will not only take you away from all this wickedness and horror, but you shall have money enough to live like a gentleman in Italy. I have—now I understand it—plenty of money in the hands of my servant to bring us well to Rome. Once in Rome, I can send letters to my friends in England, and be rich in a few short months. I shall not forget you; I shall see to your guerdon."

The man spat upon his hands and rubbed them together—those large prehensile hands. "I knew it," he said, half to himself, "I pay a debt for my life, as is but right and just, and I win a fortune too! I knew it!"

"Tell me exactly what is to happen," Johnnie said.

In the flickering light of the torch, once more Alonso looked curiously at Commendone. He hesitated for a moment, and then he spoke.

"There is just the business of the heretic Luis," he said. "He must be tortured before ever the Señorita is brought in. And you and Juan must help in the torture to sustain your parts." [Pg 305]

Johnnie started. Until this very moment he had not realised that hideous necessity. He understood Alonso's hesitation now.

There was a dead silence for a moment or two. Alonso broke it.

"I shall do the principal part, Señor," he said hurriedly. "It is nothing to me. I have done so much of it! But there are certain things that thou must do and thy servant also, or at least must seem to do. There is no other way."

Johnnie put his poor soiled hands to his face. "I cannot do it," he said, in a low voice, from which hope, which had rung in it before, had now departed. "I cannot do it. I will not stain my honour thus."

"So said Juan to me at first," the other answered. "They have been hunting high and low for Juan, but he hath escaped the Familiars, in that I have hid him. For himself, Juan said he would do nothing of the sort, but for you he finally said he would do it. 'For, look you,' Juan said to me, 'I love the gentleman that is my master, and I love my little mistress better, so that I will even help to torture this Spaniard, and let no word escape me in the doing of it that may betray our design.' That was what thy servant said, Señor. And now, what sayest thou?"

"She would not wish it," Commendone half said, half sobbed. "If she knew, she would die a thousand deaths rather than that I should do it." [Pg 306]

"That may be very sure, Señor, but she will never know it if we win to safety. And as for this Luis Mercader, he must die, anyhow. There is no hope for him. He *must* be tortured, if not by you, Juan, and I, then by myself, my father, and my brother. It is remediless."

"I cannot do evil that good may come," Johnnie replied, in a whisper.

Alonso stamped upon the ground in his impatience. He could not understand the prisoner's attitude, though he had realised some possibility of it from his conferences with John Hull. He had half known, when he came to Commendone, that there would be something of this sort. If the rough man of his own rank turned in horror and dislike from the only opportunity presented for saving the Señorita, how much more would the master do so?

For himself, he could not understand it. He did his hideous work with the regularity of a machine, and with as little pity. Outside in his private life, he was much as other men. He could be tender to a woman he loved, kindly and generous to his friends. But business was business, and he was hardly human at his work.

Habit makes slaves of us all, and this mental attitude of the sworn torturer—horrible as it may seem at first glance—is very easily understood by the psychologist, though hardly by the sentimentalist, who is always a thoroughly illogical person. Alonso tortured human beings. In doing this he had the sanction and the order of his social superiors and his ecclesiastical directors. In 1910 one has not heard, for example, that a pretty and gentle girl refuses to marry a butcher because he plunges his knife into the neck of the sheep tied down upon the stool, twists his little cord around the snout of some shrieking pig and cuts its throat with his keen blade.... [Pg 307]

Alonso could not understand the man whom he hoped to save, but he recognised and was prepared for his point of view.

"Señor," he said, in a thick, hurried voice, "I will do it all myself. You will have to help in the binding, and to stand by. That is all. Think of the little Señorita whom you love. That French lady drove a table-knife into her heart, rather than endure the torments. Think of the Señorita! You will not let her die thus? For you, it is different; I well know that you would endure all that is in store, if it were but a question of saving your own life. But you must think of her, and you must remember always that the man Luis is most certainly doomed, and that no action of yours can stay that doom. You will have to look on, that is all—to *seem* as if you approved and were helping."

He had said enough. His cause was won. Johnnie had seen Dr. Rowland Taylor die in pious agony, and had neither lifted voice nor drawn sword to prevent it.

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"I thank you, I thank you, Alonso," he said. "I must endure it for the sake of the Señorita. And more than all I thank you that you will not require me to agonise this unhappy wretch myself."

"Good; that is understood," Alonso answered. "We have already been talking too long. Get you back, Señor, into your prison, for an hour or more. Then I will come to you. Indeed, more depends upon this than upon any other detail of what we purpose. We who are sworn to torture are distinct and separate from the prison jailors. We are paid a larger salary, but we have no jurisdiction or power within the prisons themselves, save only what we make by interest. But the man who bringeth you your food is a friend of my family, and hath cast an eye upon my sister, though she as yet has responded little to his overtures. I have made private cause with Isabella, and she hath given him a meeting this very night outside the church of Santa Ana. He could not meet with her this night, were it not for my intervention. He came to me in great perplexity, longing before anything to meet Isabella. I told him, though I was difficult to be approached on the point, that I would myself look after the prisoners in this ward, and that he must give me his keys. This he hath done, and I am free of this part of the prison. So that, Señor, in an hour or two I shall come to you again with your dress of a tormentor. I shall take you through devious ways out of the prison proper, and into our room on the other side of the Chamber, so all will be well."

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Johnnie took the huge splay hand in his, and stumbled back into the stone box. There was a clang as the door closed upon him, and he sank down upon the floor.

He sank down upon the floor no longer in absolute despair. The darkness was as thick and horrible as ever, but Hope was there.

Then he knelt, placed his hands together, recited a Paternoster, and began to pray. He prayed first of all for the soul of the man—the unknown man—whose semi-final torture he was to witness, and perchance help in. Then he prayed to Our Lord that there might be a happy issue out of these present afflictions, that if it pleased Jesus he, Elizabeth, the stout John Hull might yet sail away over the tossing seas towards safety.

Then he made a prayer for the soul of Madame La Motte—she who had traded upon virtue, she who had taken her own life, but in whom was yet some germ of good, a well and fountain of kindness and sympathy withal.

After that he pulled himself together, felt his muscle, stretched himself to see that his great and supple strength had not deserted him, and remained with a placid mind, waiting for the opening of his prison door again.

The anguish of his thoughts about Elizabeth was absolutely gone. A cool certainty came to him that he would save her.

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He was waiting now, alert and aware. Every nerve was ready for the enterprise. With a scrutiny of his own consciousness—for he perfectly realised that death might still be very near—he asked himself if he had performed all his religious duties. If he were to die in the next hour or so, he would have no sacramental absolution. That he knew. Therefore, he was endeavouring to make his *private* peace with God, and as he looked upon his thoughts with the higher super-brain, it did not seem to him that there was anything lacking in his pious resignation to what should come.

He was going to make a bold and desperate bid for Lizzie's freedom, his own, and their mutual happiness.

As well as he was able, he had put his house in order, and was waiting.

But for Don Diego Deza he did not pray at all. He was but human. That he lacked power to do, and in so far fell away from the Example.

But as he thought of It, and the words so sacrosanct, he remembered that the torturers of Christ knew not what they did. They were even as this man Alonso.

But Don Diego, cultured, highly sensitive, a brilliant man, knew what he did very well.

Even the young man's wholly contrite and more than half-broken heart could send no message to the Throne for the Grand Inquisitor of Seville.

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CHAPTER XII

"TENDIMUS IN LATIUM"

It was very hot.

Commendone stood in the ante-chamber of the torturers.

He wore the garment of black linen, the hood of the same, with the two circular orifices for his eyes.

John Hull kept touching him with an almost caressing movement—John Hull, a grotesque and terrible figure also in his torturer's dress.

Alonso moved about the place hurriedly, putting this and that to rights, looking after his instruments, but with a flitting, bird-like movement, showing how deeply he was excited.

The room was a long, low place. The ceiling but just above their heads. A glowing fire was at one end, and shelves all round the room. At one side of the fire was a portable brazier of iron, glowing with coals, and on the top of it a shape of white-hot metal was lying.

Alonso came up to Commendone, a dreadful black figure, a silently moving figure, with nothing humanly alive about him save only the two slits through which his eyes might be seen.

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"Courage, Señor," he whispered, "it will not be long now."

Johnnie, unaware that he himself was an equally hideous and sinister figure, nodded, and swallowed something in his throat.

John Hull, short, broad, and dreadful in this black disguise, sidled up to him.

"Master," he whispered, "it will soon be over, and we shall win away. We have been in a very evil case before, and that went well. Now that we are dressed in these grave-clothes and must do bitter business, we must make up our minds to do it. 'Tis for the sake of Mistress Elizabeth, whom we love—Jesus! what is that hell-hound doing?"

The broad figure shuddered, and into the kindly English voice came a note of horror.

Johnnie turned also, and saw that the torturer was tumbling several long-handled pincers into a wooden tray. Then the torturer took one of them up, and turned the glowing *something* in the brazier, quietly, professionally, though the red glow that fell upon his horrible black costume gave him indeed the aspect of a devil from the pit—the bloody pantomime which was designed!

The two Englishmen stood shoulder to shoulder and shuddered, as they saw this figure moving about the glowing coals.

Johnnie took a half-step forward, when Hull pressed him back.

"God's death, master," Hull said. "*We* look like that; we are even as he is in aspect; we have to do our work—now!"

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A door to the right suddenly swung open. Two steps led up to it, and a face peeped round. It was the face of a bearded man, with heavy eyebrows and very white cheeks. Upon the head was a biretta of black velvet.

The head nodded. "We are ready," came the voice from it. The door fell to again.

Then Alonso came up to Johnnie. "The work begins," he said, in a gruff voice, from which all respect had gone with design. "You and Juan will carry in that brazier of coals."

He went to the door, mounted the two stone steps, and held it open. Johnnie and Hull bore in the brazier up the steps, and into a large room lit, but not very brightly, with candles set in sconces upon the walls.

Following the directions of Alonso, they placed the brazier in a far corner, and stood by it, waiting in silence.

They were in a big, arched dungeon, far under ground, as it seemed. At one end of it there was an alcove, brilliantly lit. In the alcove was a daïs, or platform. On the platform was a long table draped with black, and set with silver candlesticks. On the wall behind was a great crucifix of white and black—the figure of the Christ made of plaster, or white painted wood, the cross of ebony. In the centre of the long table sat Don Diego Deza. On one side of him was a man in a robe of velvet and a flat cap. On the other, the person who had peeped through the door into the room of the torturers.

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There came a beating, a heavy, muffled knock, upon a door to the left of the alcove.

Alonso left the others and hurried to the door. With some effort he pulled back a lever which controlled several massive bolts. The door swung open, there was a red glare of torches, and two dark figures, piloted by the torturer, half-led, half-carried the bound figure of a man into the room.

They placed this figure upon an oak stool with a high back, a yard or two away from the daïs, and then quietly retired.

As the door leading to the prison closed, Alonso shot the bolts into their place, and, returning, stood by the stool on which was the figure.

The notary came down from the platform, followed by the physician. In his hand was a parchment and a pen; while a long ink-horn depended from his belt. Father Deza was left alone at the table above.

"I have read thy depositions," the Inquisitor said, speaking down to the man, "wherein thou hast not refuted in detail the terrible blasphemies of Servetus, and therefore, Luis Mercader, I thank

the Son of God, Who deputeth to me the power to sentence thee at the end of this thy struggle between Holy Church and thine own obstinate blasphemies. In accordance with justice of my brother inquisitors, I now sign thy warrant for death, which is indeed our right and duty to execute a blasphemous person after a regular examination. Thou art to be burnt anon at the forthcoming Act of Faith. Thou art to be delivered to the secular arm to suffer this last penalty. Thy blood shall not be upon our heads, for the Holy Office is ever merciful. But before thou goest, in our kindness we have ordained that thou shalt learn something of the sufferings to come. For so only, between this night and the day of thy death, shalt thou have opportunity to reason with thyself, perchance recant thy errors, and make thy peace with God."

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He had said this in a rapid mutter, a monotone of vengeance. As he concluded he nodded to the black figure by the prisoner's chair.

Alonso turned round. With shaking footsteps, Hull and Johnnie came up to him, carrying ropes.

There was a quick whisper.

"Tie him up—*thus—yes, the hands behind the back of the stool*; the left leg bound fast—it is the right foot upon which we put the *trampezo*."

They did it deftly and quietly. Under the long linen garments which concealed them, their hearts were beating like drums, their throats were parched and dry, their eyes burnt as they looked out upon this dreadful scene.

The notary went back to the daïs, and sat beside Father Deza. The surgeon took Alonso aside. Johnnie heard what he said....

"It will be all right; he can bear it; he will not die; in any case the *auto da fé* will be in three days; he *must* endure it; have the water ready to bring him back if he fainteth."

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The chirurgion went back to the alcove and sat on the other side of the Inquisitor.

"Bring up the brazier," Alonso said to Commendone.

Together Johnnie and Hull carried it to the chair.

"Now send Juan for the pincers...."

There came a long, low wail of despair from the broken, motionless figure on the stool. The long pincers, like those with which a blacksmith pulls out a shoe from the charcoal, were produced....

The torturer took the glowing *thing* on the top of the brazier, and pulled it off, scattering the coals as he did so.

Close to the foot of the bound figure he placed the glowing shoe. Then he motioned to Hull to take up the other side of it with his pincers, and put it in place so that the foot of the victim should be clamped to it and burnt away.

John Hull took up the long pincers, and caught hold of one side of the shoe.

Johnnie turned his head away; he looked straight through his black hood at the three people on the daïs.

The notary was quietly writing. The surgeon was looking on with cool professional eye; but Don Deza was watching the imminent horror below him with a white face which dripped with sweat, with eyes dilated to two rims, gazing, gazing, *drinking the sight in*. Every now and again the Inquisitor licked his pallid lips with his tongue. And in that moment of watching, Johnnie knew that Cruelty, for the sake of Cruelty, the mad pleasure of watching suffering in its most hideous forms, was the hidden vice, the true nature, of this priest of Courts.

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At the moment, and doubtless at many other moments in the past, Father Deza was compensating, and had compensated, for a life of abstinence from sensual indulgence. He was giving scope to the deadlier vices of the heart, pride, bigotry, intolerance, and horrid cruelty—those vices far more opposed to the hope of salvation, and far more extensively mischievous to society, than anything the sensualist can do.

The bitterness of it; the horror of it—this was the wine the brilliant priest was drinking, had drunk, and would ever drink. Into him had come a devil which had killed his soul, and looked out from his narrow twitching eyes, rejoicing that it saw these things with the symbol of God's pain high above it, with the cloak of God's Church upon his shoulders.

As Johnnie watched, fascinated with an unnameable horror, he heard a loud shout close to his ear. He saw a black-hooded, thick figure pass him and rush towards the daïs.

In the hands of this figure was a long pair of blacksmith's pincers, and at the end of the pincers was a shoe of white-hot metal.

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There was another loud shout, a broad band of white light, as the mass of glowing metal shot through the air in a hissing arc, and then the face of the Inquisitor disappeared and was no more.

At that moment both Commendone and the sworn torturer realised what had happened. They leapt nimbly on to the daïs. From under his robe Alonso took a stiletto and plunged it into the throat of the notary; while Johnnie, in a mad fury, caught the physician by the neck, placed his

open hand upon the man's chin, and bent his head back, slowly, steadily, and with terrible pressure, until there was a faint click, and the black-robed figure sank down.

The *tramepezo* was burning into the wooden floor of the daïs. Alonso ran back into the room, caught up a pail of water, and poured it upon the gathering flames. There was a hiss, and a column of steam rose up into the alcove.

He turned his head and looked at the motionless form of the Inquisitor. The face was all black and red, and rising into white blisters.

He turned to Commendone. "He's dead, or dying," he said, "and now, thou hast indeed cast the die, and all is over. Thy man hath spoilt it all, and nothing remains for us but death."

"Silence!" Johnnie answered, captain of himself now, and of all of them there. "How is the next prisoner to be summoned?"

The torturer understood him. "Why," he said, "we may yet save ourselves!—that bell there"—he pointed to a hanging cord. "That summons the jailors. They are waiting to bring the Señorita for judgment. Don Luis, there, who was to undergo the *tramepezo*, would not have been taken back into the prison at once, but into our room, where the surgeon would have attended him. Therefore, we will ring for the Señorita. She will be pushed into this place very gently. The door will not be opened wide. Doors are never widely opened in the Holy Office. The jailors will see us taking charge of her, and all will be well. If not, get your poignard ready, Señor, and you, too, Juan, for 'twill be better to die a fighting death in this cellar than to wait for what would come hereafter."

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He stretched out his hand and pulled down the bell-cord.

They stood waiting in absolute silence, Alonso and John Hull, in their dreadful disguise, standing close to the door.

There was not a sound in the brilliantly lit room. The victim that was to be had fainted away, and lay as dead as the three corpses upon the daïs. There was a smell of hot coal, of burning wood, and still there came a little sizzling noise from the half-quenched glowing iron upon the platform.

Thud!

A quiet answering knock from Alonso. Another thud—the heave of the lever, the slither of the bolts, the door opening a little, murmured voices, and a low, shuddering cry of horror, as a tall girl, in a long woollen garment, a coarse garment of wool dyed yellow, was pushed into the embrace of the black-hooded figures who stood waiting for her.

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Clang—the bolts were shot back.

Then a tearing, ripping noise, as Hull pulled the black hood from his face and shoulders.

"My dear, my dear," he cried, "Miss Lizzie. 'Tis over now. Fear nothing! I and thy true love have brought thee to safety."

The girl gave a great cry. "Johnnie! Johnnie!"

He rushed up to her, and held her in his arms. He was still clothed in the dreadful disguise of a torturer. It had not come into his mind to take it off. But she was not frightened. She knew his arms, she heard his voice, she sank fainting upon his shoulder.

Once more it was John Hull speaking in English who brought the lovers to realisation. His strong and anxious voice was seconded by the Spanish of Alonso.

"Quick! quick!" both the men said. "All hath gone well. We have a start of many hours, but we must be gone from here at once."

Johnnie released Elizabeth from his arms, and then he also doffed the terror-inspiring costume which he wore.

"Sweetheart," he said, "go you with John Hull and this Alonso into the room beyond, where they will give you robes to wear. I will join you in less than a minute."

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They passed away with quick, frightened footsteps.

But as for Commendone, he went to the centre of the alcove, and knelt down just below the long black table.

The three bodies of the men they had slain he could not see. He could only see the black form of the tablecloth, and above it the great white Crucifix.

He prayed that nothing he had done upon this night should stain his soul, that Jesus—as indeed he believed—had been looking on him and all that he did, with help and favour.

And once more he renewed his vow to live for Jesus and for the girl he loved.

Crossing himself, he rose, and clapped his hands to his right side. Once more he found he was

without a sword. He bowed again to the cross. "It will come back to me," he said, in a quiet voice.

He turned to go, he had no concern with those who lay dead above him; but as he went towards the door leading to the place of the torturers, his eye fell upon the oak stool in the middle of the room—the oak chair by which the brazier still glowed, and in which a silent, doll-like figure was bound.

He stepped up to the chair, and immediately he saw that Don Luis was dead.

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The shock had killed him. He lay back there with patches of grey marked in his hair, as if fingers had been placed upon it—a young face, now prematurely old, and writhed into horror, but with a little quiet smile of satisfaction upon it after all....

And so they sailed away to the Court of Rome, to take a high part in what went forward in the palace of the Vatican. They were to be fused into that wonderful revival of Learning and the Arts known as the Renaissance.

God willing, and still seeing fit to give strength to the hand and mind of the present chronicler, what they did in Rome, all that befell them there, and of Johnnie's friendship and adventures with Messer Benvenuto Cellini will be duly set out in another volume during the year of Grace to come.

*Et veniam pro laude peto: laudatus abunde
Non fastiditus si tibi, lector, ero.*

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