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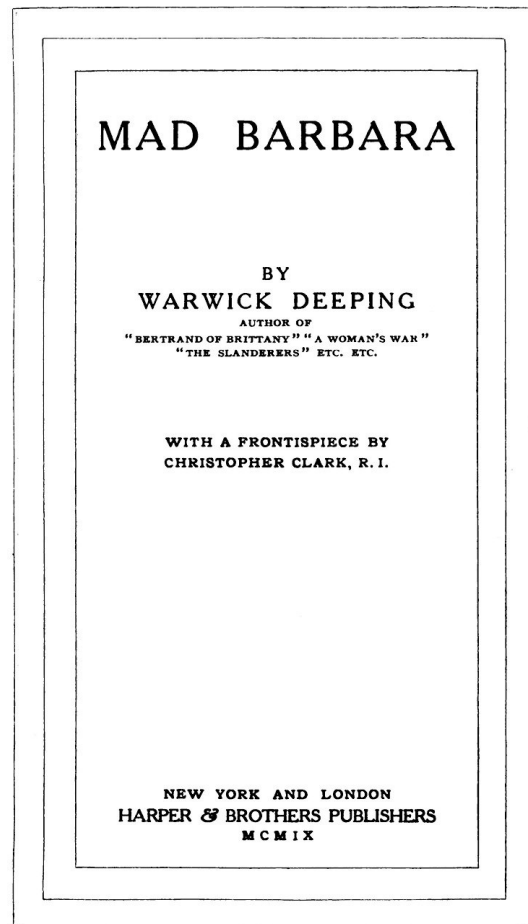
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BARBARA FELL BACK AGAINST THE WALL

MAD BARBARA

BY

WARWICK DEEPING

AUTHOR OF
"BERTRAND OF BRITTANY" "A WOMAN'S WAR"
"THE SLANDERERS" ETC. ETC.

WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY
CHRISTOPHER CLARK, R. I.

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MAD BARBARA

I

In the little music-house in his garden overlooking the Park of St. James's, Sir Lionel Purcell—Knight—lay dead, with his cloak half thrown across his face and one hand still gripping the hilt of his sword. The door of the music-room stood ajar, giving a glimpse of the autumn garden, the grass silvered with heavy dew, yellow leaves flaking it, like splashes of gold on a green shield. The curtains were drawn across the windows, so that a few stray shafts of light alone streamed in, giving a sense of some mystery unrevealed as yet, some riddle of human passion waiting to be read.

The silent room seemed all shadows, save where those Rembrandtesque strands of sunlight slanted upon the floor. And there, as though touched by light from another world, the dead man's forehead gleamed out above the black folds of his cloak. His sword, a streak of silver, joined him to the surrounding shadows, a last bond between him and the past.

Without—an autumn morning, with the clocks chiming the hour of six, and the water-fowl calling from the decoy in the park. A golden mist swimming in the east; the grass white with dew; the trees still sleeping, though the yellow leaves fell slowly, softly from the silent branches overhead. A virginal gray-eyed wonder in the eyes of the day. Freshness and fragrance everywhere, with the spires of Westminster striking upward into pearly haze, and the broad river catching the sunlight that sifted through the ragged vapor.

Dawn may be the egotist's hour of smug self-congratulation, or the poet's moment for praising solitude, even though like Thomson he buries his head in a nightcap, and wallows in bed till noon. The dead man had no one as yet to question his quietude, though there was a sense of stirring everywhere—attic windows opening, milk frothing into jugs at kitchen steps, carts lumbering lazily over the cobbles. The sun ascended, the mist began to rise, the sunflowers in a row along the wall had their broad faces made splendid by the day. A couple of thrushes were hopping to and fro over the grass. An inquisitive robin came perking in through the half-shut door, to stand twittering with one black, beady eye cocked curiously at the motionless figure on the floor. In one dark corner a harpsichord showed the ivory of its key-board with something suggestive of a sinister smile.

Had that ingenious connoisseur of feminine beauty—Mr. Pepys—taken an early stroll in the park that morning, he might have derived infinite contentment from the sight of a young girl, a "comely black wench," standing at her open window with nothing but a red cloak to hide the whiteness of her night-gear. She was binding her hair, her eyes gazing over the empty park, a little table at the window beside her full of ribbons, pins, trinkets, and laces. She was wondering whether her father would walk early in the park that morning. She had fallen asleep before he had returned from supping at my Lord Montague's the night before, though Mrs. Jael—her mother's woman, had sat up to watch for the flare of links along the street.

The garden looked innocent enough in the morning sunlight, with its gravel walks, sleek grass, and quaint bay-trees trimmed into the likeness of pinnacles. The music-room, with its diminutive classic portico, lyre, mask, and trumpets in gilt upon the tympanum, seemed, with its white pillars, no place where tragedy might watch and wait.

Whatever impulse drew the girl to the music-room that autumn morning, she had caught no prophetic gleam of the thing that waited to be known. A few steps across the grass, a moment's surprise at finding the door ajar, a startled pause upon the threshold. Then, the lights and shadows of that Rembrandtesque interior burning themselves in upon the brain, the limning of that motionless figure in lines of fire against a background of imperishable memories.

That he was dead, a touch of the hand betrayed without one moment's hope. The reason of his death blazoned in gules, with a red rose over the heart. The face set in a smile of infinite sadness. An overturned candle with the wax spilled upon the table, a bowl of flowers broken upon the floor. And in the left hand, held by the stiff fingers, a short chain of gold with a knot of pearls, for a button, like a loop torn from a man's cloak.

It was thus that Barbara Purcell, child that she yet was, found her father lying dead with a sword-thrust through the heart. He had been a silent man, no courtier, a man whose life had hoped more from the quiet corners of the world than from the pageantry of state. He had had no enemies, so far as the child knew; yet the world might have warned her that a man may be grudged the possession of a handsome wife. Even the Bible might have told her that.

As for the short curb of gold with its knot of pearls, she took it from the dead hand, and hid the thing in her bosom under her dress. To blazon the truth abroad, to run shrieking into the house, that was not the way the passion of her grief expressed itself. The curb of gold was the one link that might join the future to the past. She would show it to no one. That right should be hers to watch and to discover.

II

"Listen!"

She touched his shoulder suddenly, and their eyes met in a questioning stare, the eyes of two people who have some secret to be guarded.

"I heard some one in the gallery."

"A coach stopped in the yard two minutes ago."

"It is Barbara come home. The girl moves about like a ghost."

They drew aside from each other; my lord, bland, buxom, imposing, in periwig, and black coat brodered with gold; my lady, plump, luscious, yet a little furtive about the eyes, her flowered gown in green and blue pleated into a hundred folds over her camlet petticoat. She wore her dark hair low upon her neck, with a rose over the left ear, and a mass of exquisite lace upon her bosom.

Lord Stephen Gore cleared his throat, and began speaking with discreet distinctness on some

wholly impersonal topic. The pair were decorously distant when the door of the great parlor opened, the man standing at the window, as though watching the people passing in the street beneath; the woman seated, almost primly, in a high-backed chair, a book in her lap, mild apathy upon her face.

My lord at the window turned on his heel abruptly, as though he had just become aware of the presence of a third person in the room. He was a man of poise, of genial aplomb, one of those complacent gods who are never out of countenance or at loss for a trick of the tongue.

The girl's eyes seemed to sweep from one to the other with a momentary gleam of distrust. She still wore her mourning, a gown of plain black velvet with a circle of lace at the throat. The expression on her face was one of tired nonchalance. But for that evanescent gleam of the eyes she might have passed as a bloodless and languid girl whose vitality lacked the stimulus of perfect health.

My lord met her with a bow that expressed unnecessary condescension. He had reached an age when it is possible to be fatherly, and even officious in a frank, twinkling, stately fashion.

"And how is my Proserpine? Still in the pensive droops? And yet Mr. Herrick preaches the gathering of roses!"

He put forward a chair for her with the tolerance of an amiable gentleman of the world. She took it without thanking him, her cold, colorless face masking an instinctive repulsion, an impatience that his urbanity seemed fated to inspire.

The lord and the lady exchanged glances. It was as though the girl had brought a frost with her into the midst of June. Her silence and her almost sullen apathy embarrassed them. It was like being in the presence of a statue that had eyes and ears but no tongue.

Anne Purcell clapped her book to, and jerked it aside on to an oak table.

"Where did you drive—in the park?"

"Drive?"

"Good lack! girl, are you torpid? I could swear you have not noticed the color of a gown or the set of a hat. One might as well send out a mummy."

She glanced unconcernedly at the buckles on my lord's shoes.

"The park? Yes. A great business there, to see—and to be seen. Enough dust to stifle one; and too many people."

The words were the perfunctory words of one who would rather have remained silent. Her face seemed vacant and expressionless. My lord drew in a deep breath through his nostrils, and regarded her with philosophic pity.

"Eheu, holy Gemini, dust and ashes—at two-and-twenty!"

He nodded his head benignantly, yet with a cynical curving of the mouth, while the plump, well-complexioned mother studied her bantling with irritable contempt. There was some inherent antipathy between these two. Their attitude was one of vague distrust, as though the sun and the moon found themselves in miraculous juxtaposition at mid-day.

"You had better go to bed, girl; you look tired enough."

She met her mother's hard, inquisitive stare, and seemed to stiffen at it with a sensitive hatred of being watched.

"No, I am not tired."

"Fiddlesticks!"

My lord held up a bland white hand ruffled in Mechlin, immaculate to the finger-tips.

"Let her alone, Anne. These feather moods need a south wind."

His lofty compunction repelled her more than her mother's brusque contempt. The atmosphere of the room seemed overburdened with a sensuous flavor. The very roses suggested a rank and vivid worldliness, a fulsomeness of the flesh gotten of meat and wine.

She rose, pushing back her chair, with a languid drooping of the lids.

"Tell Jael to have supper sent to my room. Shall you be late to-night?"

Her face was turned toward her mother, as though the gentleman in the periwig were a mere negligible shadow.

"Go to bed, child, and don't trouble your head about healthy people. Nell is at The King's to-night. I wish you could catch some of the wench's devil."

"Oh—the Drury Lane woman! I have seen her at her window in her night-dress shouting at Moll Davis in the next house. She looked something of a drab with her hair done up in papers. Do the candles make such a difference?"

She looked listlessly over her shoulder at my lord, her lassitude giving her an air of tired vacuity. And the smile he gave her might have been the smile he would have given to a credulous child.

"We are all moths, coz, when the candles are lit. Which is a riddle that you need not be bothered with."

Her going relieved the two worldlings from an uncongenial feeling of oppression, and yet some uneasiness of spirit remained to trouble both. Miss Barbara had chilled the room for them with her wraithlike and sinister sickliness. The sleek self-content of the well-fed animal had been disturbed by impressions and by thoughts that neither cared to analyze. My Lord of Gore stood at the window, stroking his periwig with some such dissatisfaction on his face as he might have betrayed at the first hint that he was growing old.

"The girl looks ill."

Madam made a *moue*.

"Oh—that is nothing; she is always the color of sour cream. Lord, but I think I hate the child; she drags things into my mind that make me miserable."

The angles of the man's mouth twitched slightly.

"By the plague, Nan, why let yourself be overshadowed?"

"Why—indeed! We might understand that, you and I."

He turned to her sharply with a gleam of impatience in his eyes.

"Why not be rid of the little blight?"

"Yes, no doubt—and how? Are you ingenious enough to suggest a method?"

"Get her married."

"Lord! And who would have her?"

"She is something of a bargain—in movables. There are plenty of debtors and fools."

"The persuading would lie elsewhere. The girl has a sort of sullen stubbornness that is worse than temper."

Stephen Gore shook his periwig with the action of an impatient horse shaking its mane.

"I suppose these mopes were put on with her mourning. The girl wants the merry devil in her rousing. Jove, Nan, but she's your child; there must be blood somewhere."

Anne Purcell picked up a fan, spread it with an impatient whisk of the hand, and glanced uneasily at the closed door. She started up brusquely, crossed the room, flung the door open suddenly, and looked down the long gallery as though to prove that they were not being spied upon. Then she returned to her tapestried chair.

"Well, have you any plan?"

My lord licked his upper lip, a sly smile spreading over his healthy face.

"Will she go out with you?"

"Sometimes. To the old, dull houses where they wear starched aprons and have the servants in to prayers."

"And judge of godliness by the length of the jowl. Poor people! No—that is not the elixir, the juice of crab-apples. Take her to the Mancini, that witch who turns dross into sunshine. The woman would wake the merry devil in a Quaker. She has old Rowley kissing her very slippers."

"Hortense?"

"Who else, Nan? It is life, blood, mischief that the girl needs."

My lady's eyes flashed up at him mistrustfully for the moment. He caught the look and the significance thereof, and laughed.

"Oh, she is not my fortune, Nan! I am too old a moth for that candle. The woman is like a conduit of red wine let loose in the garden of White Hall. She makes all but the abstemious—drunk. And the marvel is that she is just as magical with women, is Hortense. Ask my Lord Sussex how he likes the transfiguration of his wife."

"Castlemaine's stupid brat!"

"Little whey face all turned into dimples, roguery, and mischief. She twinkles round the Mancini like a little Mercury with feathers at her heels. I will speak with Hortense; she has some sort of sisterly good-will to me, and a kind of pride in making sulky people merry. She'll set the girl's blood spinning, or I'm a fool."

Anne Purcell leaned back in her chair as though tired.

"Anything to get rid of that sour face. But it's her mawkishness, her squeamy, 'pray-with-me-or-I-shall-die' look, that makes me doubtful."

The gentleman nodded understandingly.

"Leave that to Hortense. The Italian has a veneer of softness; she is not like a Nell Gwyn. It is a question of subtleties. Nell would swear the girl into a fit in three minutes. The Mancini has a trick of seeming a saint—when necessary. If the Italian makes no romp out of her, then I will dub her nothing but a petticoated Hamlet."

My lady stretched her arms with a gesture of impatient ennui.

"Well we can try. Let us forget the ghost to-night. I feel I must laugh, or I shall have wrinkles round my mouth."

"Nell shall do that for you. You will come in my coach?"

"And the proprieties?"

He laughed with the true sardonic gayety of the Restoration.

"Sister Kate shall see to them. Though she is stone deaf she likes to see the dresses and the candles. There is one mistake that Mr. Milton made in that he did not tell us that the devil is deaf in one ear."

III

Had Lady Purcell, herself unseen, followed her daughter to her room, she would have been astonished by the sudden transformation that swept over her so soon as the door closed. The apathetic figure straightened into keen aliveness; the look of vacuity vanished from the face. It was like a sudden transition from damp, listless November to the starlit brilliance of a frosty night.

"Dust and ashes at two-and-twenty!"

My Lord Gore's echoing of Biblical pessimism seemed to have lost its appropriateness so far as Barbara Purcell was concerned. There was nothing listless about the intense and rather swarthy face that looked down into the garden with its white-pillared music-room and its October memories. It was more the face of some impassioned child of destiny striving to gaze into the mystery of the coming years.

The acting of a part to delude the world, and to make men ignore her as a spiritless girl. The merciless fanaticism of youth watching, and ever watching, behind all that assumption of listlessness and sloth. Then, in those solitary interludes when she had no part to play, the restrained passion in her breaking like lava to the surface, filling her eyes with a species of prophetic fire.

In a little carved cabinet of black oak she kept some of those relics that made for her a ritual of revenge—her father's shirt stained with blood, some of the dead flowers she had found beside him on the floor, a piece of the cloth that had covered him that autumn morning. Almost nightly she would take these things from their hiding-place, spread them upon her bed, and kneel before them

as a papist might kneel before a relic or the symbol of the Sacred Heart. As for the curb of gold with its knot of pearls, she carried it always in her bosom, sewn up in a case of scarlet silk. Distrusting every one, hardly sane in the personal passion of her purpose, she never parted with the talisman, but treasured its possible magic for herself.

Yet what had she discovered all these many months? The knowledge that her mother had put aside her black stuffs gladly, a growing sense of antipathy toward the man who had been her father's friend. She could remember the time when my Lord Stephen had carried her through the garden on his shoulder; bought her sweetmeats, green stockings, and jessamy gloves; and even served as her valentine with a big man's playful gallantry toward a child. She had thought him a splendid person then, but now—all had changed for her, and the analysis of her own instinctive repulsion left her obstinately baffled. She had no mandate from the past for hating him; on the contrary, facts might have stood to prove that she was his debtor. She remembered how she had caught him praying beside her father's coffin, and how he had risen up with a strange spasm of the face and blundered from the room. He had offered money for the discovery of the truth, importuned magistrates, petitioned the King, put his own servants in black. No man could have done more loyally as a friend.

Yet nothing had been discovered. Some unknown sword had passed through Lionel Purcell's body. The very motive remained concealed. The world had buried him, gossiped awhile, and then forgotten.

But Barbara had a heart that did not know how to forget. She had Southern blood, the passionate heirloom of an Elizabethan wooing. The Spanish wine of her ancestry had given her a flash of fanaticism and the swarthy melancholy of her comely face. And the whole promise of her youth had bent itself, like some dark-eyed zealot—to a purpose that had none of the softer and more sensuous moods of life in view.

Why should she hate this big, bland, stately mortal, this Stephen Gore who had no enemies and many friends? That was a question she often asked herself. Was it because she had been caught by the suspicion that he might console the widow for the husband's death? There was no palpable sin in the possibility, and yet it angered her, even though she had no great love for her mother. A supersensitive delicacy made her jealous for the dead. The very buxom effulgence of my lord's vitality seemed to insult the shadow that haunted the house for her.

As she sat at the window looking down upon the garden the sun sank low in the west, throwing a broad radiance under the branches of the trees. Their round boles were bathed in light. The figures that moved about the park were touched with a weird brilliance, so that a red coat shone like a ruby, a blue like a sapphire, a silver-gray like an opal iridescent in the sun. There was much of the charm of one of Watteau's pictures, yet with a greater significance of light and shadow.

Dusk began to fall. A hand fumbled at the latch of the door, and a figure in black entered bearing a tray. It was Mrs. Jael, her mother's woman, a stout little body with a florid face and an overpolite way with her that repelled cynics. She had amiable blue eyes that seemed to see nothing, a loose mouth, and a big bosom. Her personality appeared to have soaked itself in sentimentality as a stewed apple soaks itself in syrup.

Barbara did not turn her head.

"Why, dear heart, all in the dusk! Here's a little dish or two."

"Set them down on the table."

"You'll get your death chill—there, sitting at that window—"

The woman fidgeted officiously about the room, as though trying to insinuate her sympathy betwixt the girl's silence and reserve. Her dilatory habit only roused Barbara's impatience. Mrs. Jael's sly, succulent motherliness had lost its power of deceiving, so far as Anne Purcell's daughter was concerned.

"Light the candles."

She remained motionless while the woman bustled to and fro.

"Thanks. You can leave me, Jael."

The tire-woman could meet a snub with the most obtuse good temper.

"Should you be tired, Mistress Barbara, I can come and put you to bed, my dear, while my lady is at the playhouse."

"I am old enough to put myself to bed, am I not?"

Mrs. Jael laughed as though bearing with a peevish miss of twelve.

"Dear life, of course you are." And she broke into a fat giggle as though something had piqued her sense of humor.

Barbara's face remained turned toward the window.

"You can go, Jael."

The woman curtsied and obeyed.

Her face lost its good-humor, however, as quickly as a buffoon's loses its stage grin when he has turned his back upon the audience. She stood outside the door a moment, listening, and then went softly down the passage to my lady's room, with its stamped leather hangings in green and gold, its great carved bed and Eastern rugs.

Anne Purcell was seated before her mirror, her long, brown hair, of which she was mightily proud, falling about her almost to the ground. She had a stick of charcoal in her hand, and was leaning forward over the dressing-table, crowded with its trinkets, scent-flasks, and pomade-boxes, staring at her face in the glass as she heightened the expressiveness of her eyes.

Her glance merely shifted from the reflection of her own face to that of Mrs. Jael's figure as she entered the room. They were not a little alike, these two women, save that the one boasted more grace and polish; the other more pliability and unctuousness, and perhaps more cunning.

"Get me my red velvet gown from the cupboard, Jael."

"Yes, my lady."

"Have you seen the girl?"

Mrs. Jael's head and shoulders had disappeared into the depths of the carved-oak wardrobe. Her voice came muffled as from a cave.

"Yes, my lady."

"What was she doing with herself?"

"Sitting at her window, poor dear, and looking very low and sulky."

Anne Purcell turned her head to and fro as she scrutinized herself critically in the glass. She still looked young, with her high color and her sleek skin, her large eyes and full red mouth. Her style of comeliness seemed suited to the times, plump and pleasurable, full and free in outline and expression. My Lord of Gore had no reason to feel displeased at the prospect of possessing such a widow.

"What do you make of the girl, Jael?"

The tire-woman had turned from the wardrobe with the gown of red velvet over her arm.

"The child is strange, my lady, and out of health. You might say that she had been moon-struck, or that she was watching for a ghost."

Anne Purcell moved restlessly in her chair.

"Sometimes, Jael, I think that Barbara is a little mad. I am ready for you to dress my hair."

Mrs. Jael spread the gown upon the bed.

"She doesn't seem to have a spark of life in her, poor dear. I'm half scared often that she should do herself some harm."

My lady was watching the woman's face in the mirror.

"Oh—"

"She's always moping by herself like a sick bird. It often makes me wonder, my lady—"

"Well?"

"What Mistress Barbara does all those hours when she is alone. I have tried looking—"

"Through the key-hole, Jael?"

"Your pardon, but it is my concern for the child. I've started awake at night thinking I heard her cry out, and I have dreamed of seeing her in her shroud."

A flash of cynicism swept across Anne Purcell's face. But she did not rebuke the woman for her sentimental canting.

"The girl ought to be watched."

"Yes, my lady."

"She will not have Betty to sleep with her."

A sly suggestive smile on the face above hers in the mirror warned her that Mrs. Jael understood her in every detail.

"What were you going to say, Jael? There is no need for us to beat about the bush."

"There is the little closet, my lady."

"Yes, next to Mistress Barbara's room."

"It used to have a door—leading to the bedroom. But Sir Lionel—poor gentleman—had it filled in."

"Yes, I remember."

"Only with double panelling, my lady, and the woodwork has shrunk a little. I happened to notice it last night when I went in there in the dark to get a blanket, and Mistress Barbara's candle was burning."

The eyes of the two women met in the looking-glass. Mrs. Jael's face gave forth a sunny, insinuating smile.

"It is not my nature, my lady, to spy and shuffle, but—"

"If you scraped a little of the wood away with a knife?"

"I don't feel happy about Mistress Barbara, my lady. And if—"

"Be careful, Jael, you are pulling my hair."

"A hundred pardons, my lady."

"If you should see anything strange, it is well that I should know."

IV

If the divine Hortense ruled his Majesty the King that year, her sway spread itself over the majority of those ambitious gentlemen who were in quest of "place" and plunder. When women exploited the state, and burst the bubble of a reputation with a kiss, politicians baited their interests with some new "beauty," and pinned their petitions to the flounce of a petticoat.

Castlemaine had faded into France; Portsmouth watched from behind a cloud; even the irrepressible Nell had prophesied the splendor of the Mancini's conquest. Hortense had landed at Torbay, and, like the exquisite romanticist that she was, had ridden up to London in man's attire with seven servants, a maid, and a black boy in attendance. What was of more significance, she had ridden at a canter into the august heart of Whitehall. The palace of St. James had held her for a season, till the Duke of York, with commendable brotherly discretion, had purchased Lord Windsor's house for her in the park, that such a brilliant might shine upon them from a fitting setting.

There was a fascination in the fact that Cardinal Mazarin should have possessed such a sheaf of adventurous nieces. They were all beautiful, all romantically rebellious, all deliciously feminine. It was impossible not to fall in love with them, and often impossible not to forget the intoxication, for none of the Cardinal's kinswomen were mere sentimental fools. As for Hortense, she was a woman for whom a man might gamble away his soul, simply because she looked at him with those black, roguish, yet shrewd eyes of hers and made him feel that she was a desire beyond his reach.

The incarnation of all womanly mystery, her beauty seemed to have stolen some singular

inspiration from twenty different types. A Greek symmetry softened by a sensuous suppleness; the look of the gazelle, and yet of the falcon; the stateliness of the great lady torn aside on occasions by the nude audacity of a laughing Bacchic girl. Her sumptuousness made a man's glance drop instinctively to her bosom and watch the drawing of her breath. There was sheer magic about her, fire in the blood, color in the mind. When she entered a room the men looked at her, simply because they could not help but look.

As my Lord Gore had said, "there was a merry heavenly devil in Hortense." She loved youth and all the glamour of its irresponsible vitality, and would rather have seen some buffooning trick played upon a bishop than have listened to the most eloquent of sermons. For she herself was vital, magnetic, filled with all genius of sex. A mere glance at her enriched the consciousness with visions, the flush of sunsets, the heart of a rose, the redness of wine, the white curve of a woman's throat, moonlight and music, bridal casements opening upon foam.

My Lord of Gore heard the laughter in the great salon, even while the Mancini's footman in red and gold was taking his cane and hat. There was nothing autumnal in Hortense's house. Old men left their gout and their growls behind them on the staircase, for the exquisite art of fooling was a thing to be cherished and enjoyed.

The great salon had the brilliancy of color of a rose-garden in June. The brown floor reflected everything like a pool of woodland water that turns noonday into something vague and mystical. It caught the gleam of a satin slipper and threw it back with the imitative rendering of the gliding body of a fish. Like the villas of Pompeii, with its painted walls and ceilings, this salon enclosed sunny worldliness and picturesque realities. Its inmates were all sufficiently happy to be able to forget to analyze the nature of their sensations.

"Ready—ready all. Go!"

My lord paused in the doorway to watch an improvised chariot-race that offered any gentleman the chance of laying a wager. Three gallants had been harnessed with sashes to as many chairs, and in each chair sat a lady. Twice up and down the polished floor, with a turn at each end, and a forfeit for upsetting. It was much like a great Christmas romping-party for children.

A youth in blue satin with a fair-haired girl driving him came in an easy first. The other two chariots had collided at the last turn, with some slight damage to the furniture, and to the delight of the spectators. She who had driven the blue boy to victory frisked out joyfully, and performed a *pas seul* in the middle of the room.

"Bravo! bravo!"

"Hortense, I have won my necklace."

"Thanks, madam, to Tearing Tom."

One of the fallen gallants stood rubbing a bruised shin. He was a slim little fop with a weak face that pretended toward impudence, and a name—even Sir Marmaduke Thibthorp—that suited his personality.

"I protest. We were overweighted—"

The lady whom he had overturned retorted with an unequivocal "Sir!"

My Lord Gore, with the genius of an opportunist, introduced his wit as a fitting climax.

"The gibe may seem overstrained," he said, flicking a lace ruffle, "but surely the gentleman who claims to have been overweighted is hopelessly under-calved."

Nor was the joke visible till my lord pointed whimsically to Thibthorp's very ascetic shanks. Whereat they all laughed, more for the love of ridicule than out of courtesy to my lord's wit.

Hortense herself sat at one of the windows watching the youngsters at their romps with the air of a laughing philosopher, whose mature age of nine-and-twenty constituted her a fitting confidante either for children or for cynics. She was dressed in some brown stuff that shone with a reddish iridescence. The dress was cut low at the throat, so low as to show the white breadth of her bosom. A chain of pearls was woven to and fro amid the black masses of her hair.

My Lord Gore crossed the room to her and kissed her hand. They were very good friends were my lord and Hortense. Something more tangible than sentimental tendencies had drawn them together. Their worldly ambitions were identical; the petticoat and the periwig were allied in their campaign against the amiable idiosyncrasies of the King.

"Pardon me, but what a public-spirited woman I always find in you."

He stood beside her chair, looking down at her, and at the lace that filled her bosom.

"And you, my friend?"

"I come to enjoy perpetual rejuvenescence, and to learn to live in the sun rather than in a fog of philosophy that gives us little but cold feet and swollen heads."

She looked up at him and laughed. And Hortense's laugh had a delightful audacity that rallied the world upon its dulness.

"They enjoy themselves, these children; they romp, chatter, make a noise; I never allow them to quarrel. I try to teach them that there is one folly to be condemned, the folly of suffering ourselves to lose our youth."

My lord's eyes were fixed on the young spark, Tom Temple, who was burlesquing a Spanish dance in the middle of the salon.

"We are always in danger of losing the art of make-believe."

"You English are so serious, so grim."

"Say, rather—selfish."

"Is it not often the same thing?"

"Assuredly."

"The world is only a great puppet-show; one of your playwrights has said as much. We can all see the fun, even though we remain in the crowd. But you English, you set your teeth, you push and fight; you must be in the front, or nothing will content you. You make yourselves sullen in struggling for your pleasures, while every one else is laughing, perhaps at you."

My lord bowed.

"I think you wrong the one enlightened spot in the kingdom, madam—Whitehall. We must petition his Majesty to order Sir Christopher to build you an academy, where we can institute you a new Hypatia. But I gather that your philosophy would not end in oyster shells. For the rest—I have a favor to ask."

"I am listening."

"Suffer me to introduce a very dull virgin into your atmosphere. I want to convert her. She has a conscience."

Hortense's eyes met his frankly.

"So have I, my friend."

"I do not question it. But the child I speak of has not learned to laugh."

"Deplorable!"

"She is a tax in sulkiness upon her mother. The poor woman is weary of living with a corpse. In my humanity—I remembered you."

"Bring her to me."

"We shall be your debtors."

"At least—I will tell you whether she will ever laugh. What mischief have we brewing now?"

Tom Temple had bethought himself of some fresh piece of boyish buffonery, in which the girl whom he had drawn to victory in the chariot-race had joined him. It was nothing more complex than a game of double blind-man's buff. The furniture was pushed aside into corners, and the salon prepared for a lively chase.

"Hortense, Hortense, come and play!"

It was little Anne of Sussex, Castlemaine's child, whisking a scarf in one hand, while she held her skirts up with the other.

"Tom Temple and I are to be blind first. I am to catch the men, he—the ladies."

Lord Gore made her a grand obeisance.

"I will stand wilfully in the middle of the room, madam, and be caught."

"Then you will have to give me three pairs of gloves. But you are too large, my lord; we should always be catching you."

"Like a leviathan in a fish-pond, eh?"

"Or an elephant in a parlor. Bind my eyes up, Hortense, and please pin up my skirts."

The Mancini humored her.

"Are you ready, Tom?"

"At your command," said the youth, whom a friend had blindfolded.

"Turn me, Hortense; one, two, three. Now—have at all of you. If I catch you—Tom—cry carrots."

My lord and Hortense stepped back toward the window to watch the fun.

"It is just like the marriage market," said she.

"Catch what you can," he retorted, "and find out what sort of thing it is—afterward."

There was a great deal of scampering and laughing, of creeping into corners and huddling against walls. In the very glory of a stampede, when Tom Temple had sailed straight with his arms spread for a bunch of girls, the salon door opened, and a servant announced:

"My Lord Sussex."

The dramatic humor of the moment was missed by all save Hortense and Lord Gore, so briskly and indiscriminately went the chase. My lord pursed up his lips and whistled with a significant lifting of the eyebrows. Hortense stifled a laugh.

Thomas Lennard, Lord Dacre, Earl of Sussex, was a prim aristocrat with very stately prejudices against fashionable horse-play. Moreover, he had one of those jealous and egotistical temperaments that persuades a man to believe that the woman whom he had honored with marriage should henceforth sit meekly at his feet—and play the mirror to his majesty.

He stood on the threshold, watching the whirligig of youth with the cold wrath of a man who had come with the full expectation of being offended. And to add to the irony of the moment, my Lady Anne came doubling down the room in close pursuit of a couple of men. She made her capture not three yards from her husband's person, and made it gamely—with both arms round the neck of Sir Marmaduke Thibthorp of the thin shanks.

She whipped off the bandage with a breathless laugh.

"Gemini—but it's Duke Thibthorp!"

The gallant, whose back was toward the door, offered a mouth, and caught his captor by the wrists.

"Forfeit, forfeit! A pledge—!"

Sudden silence had fallen on the room, to be followed by indiscriminate and half-smothered giggling. My Lady Dacre's face betrayed blank consternation.

"Let me go—"

"Not for—"

"Let me go, fool."

He of the thin shanks imagined that he was amusing the salon with his waggery till a hand fastened upon his collar. Tom Temple, still blissfully blind, came careering along one wall, and added emphasis to the climax by coming down with a crash over a three-legged stool.

"I shall deem it a curtesy, sir, if you will release Lady Dacre's wrists."

Thomas Lennard's face had the cold fury of a blizzard. Yet he was utterly polite. The gallant whom he had taken by the collar had twisted round, and was staring with ludicrous vacuity into my lord's eyes.

Stephen Gore watched the drama with an expression of angelic satisfaction.

"Hortense, my friend, let me see you stop a quarrel."

She had moved forward from the window with all the atmosphere of the Sun King's court.

"Pardon me, my lord. Your hand should be at my throat—if—you are offended."

The husband still had a firm hold of Marmaduke Thibthorp, and was looking at him as though

undecided whether it would be dignified to drop the fop down the stairs. The aristocratic apathy in him triumphed. He swept the youth aside, and with a curt bow to his wife, offered her his arm.

"Come. Madam, I wish you a boisterous evening."

His young wife had hesitated, with a whimsical grimace in the direction of Hortense.

"Oh, what a sermon!"

The Italian's eyes met those of Lord Dacre. It was as though they challenged each other in their influence over the child.

"If my Lord Dacre will stay with us, I myself will put on the scarf. And perhaps my Lord Gore—here—"

The leviathan bowed.

"I will flounder—most biblically."

The Lady Anne giggled, and then glanced furtively at her husband's face.

"A thousand thanks. My Lord Gore should delight even the psalmist. But my coach is waiting. I wish you no broken furniture. Anne—come."

There was a short, pregnant silence when he had departed with his child-wife on his arm. Stephen Gore shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Hortense.

"Most serious of swains! Oh, sage Solomon, who would grudge him the responsibility of taming even one wife!"

"Alas, another unfortunate who has not learned to laugh."

Sir Marmaduke Thibthorp was standing sheepishly beside the door, striving to look amused.

"Such is fate," he giggled.

"And such is a stool!" quoth Thomas Temple, sticking out a leg with a blotch of blood on his stocking.

My Lord Gore took leave of Hortense after talking with her a moment alone by the window.

"Bring her to me, my friend," she said, as he made his bow.

"If you cannot cure her—"

"Ah, well—we shall see."

He was crossing the park when a servant met him and handed him a note. It was sealed with pink wax and smelled of ambergris. My lord opened it as he strolled under the trees.

"I would see you soon. Jael has been of use to me."

"A. P."

V

A ship's boat came up the river with half a dozen brown fellows tugging at the oars, their dark skins and the patched picturesqueness of their gaudy-colored shirts giving them something of the air of a boat-load of buccaneers with gayly kerchiefed heads, ringed ears, and belts full of pistols. A man in a soiled red coat, with remnants of lace hanging to the cuffs, sat in the stern-sheets, his sword across his knees, and beside him on the gunwale squatted a boy whose cheeky sparrow's face stared out from a tangle of crisp fair hair.

The man in the red coat looked even more brown and picturesque than the seamen at the oars. He wore no wig under his battered beaver, and his own black hair looked as though it had not been barbered for six months. His shoes had lost their buckles, and the stocking of his right leg showed a hole the size of a guinea above the heel.

"Three more strokes—and easy—lads."

"Right, capt'n."

"Let her run now; in with the bow sweeps."

They had passed the Savoy, and drawn close in toward Charing Steps, with a west wind sending the water slapping against the planking. The man in the red coat held the tiller, and let the boat glide in, while the seamen shipped their oars. The boat's nose rubbed against the stone facing of the steps, while a brown hand or two grabbed at the mooring-rings. The boy on the gunwale was the first to leap ashore.

A number of watermen lounging about the steps were staring at the boat and its crew, and exchanging opinions thereon with more candor than curtesy. The sea-captain, standing in the stern-sheets, buckled his sword to a faded baldric, callous to any criticism that might be lavished on him by the river-side sots.

"Good-luck to you, capt'n."

"You won't forget us, sir."

"We'll follow you round Cape Horn again for a fight."

The man in the red coat looked down at the brown faces along the boat that were turned to him with a species of watchful, dog-like alertness.

"I shall have my flag flying in a month," he said; "men sha'n't rot down at Deptford—the devil knows that. We have our tallies to count in the South, eh, and Jasper shall have a long caronado to squint along. Good-luck to you, lads. Here's the end of the stocking. I wish it were deeper."

He tossed a purse to a grizzled old giant who was leaning upon his oar. The man picked it up, looked at it lovingly a moment, and then glanced over his shoulder at the men behind him.

"No dirty dog's tricks here," growled one.

"There's a gold piece or two for ye," said another, slapping his belt.

The giant stretched out a great fist with the purse in it.

"Maybe you'll be selling the little frigate, capt'n; we can knock along—"

The man in the red coat looked him straight in the eyes.

"Damnation, Jasper, I owe you all your pay—yet. Pocket it for beer money."

"Drink your last guinea, capt'n, not me!"

"Why, man, I can get a bagful for the asking—in an hour. And, look you all, stand by down at 'The Eight Bells' to-morrow. I'll pay every man of you before noon."

The watermen above had been listening to this dialogue with ribald cynicism.

"Holy Moses," said one, "here's a boat-load of saints!"

"Throw it up here, mate, we ain't shy of the dross."

The captain had climbed the steps, with the boy beside him. But old Jasper, standing up in the boat with his oar held like a pike, turned his sea-eagle's face toward the gentry on the causeway.

"Squeak, ye land-rats. By God's death, you've never seen the inside of a Barbary prison. If you were men you'd take your hat off to the capt'n. But being land-gaffers, you're all mud-muck and tallow. Shove her off, mates, or I'll be smashing some chicken's stilts with my oar."

The loungers jeered him valiantly as the bow sweeps churned foam, and the boat, gathering weigh, swung out into the river.

"Look at their great mouths," said the sea-wolf, grimly; "when we want our bilge emptying we'll send for 'em to have a drink."

Meanwhile the man in the red coat and the boy had passed up the passage from the river in the direction of Charing Cross, the shabbiness of their raiment flattering the curiosity of the passers-by. The man in the red coat appeared wholly at his ease. As for the boy, he was ready to spread his fingers at the whole town on the very first provocation. Even the fact that he had a rent in his breeches that suffered a certain portion of his underlinen to protrude did not humble his self-satisfaction.

The sea-captain, who had been walking with his chin in the air, glanced down suddenly at the boy beside him.

"How are the 'stores,' Sparkin, my lad?"

"Getting low in the hold, sir."

"We will put in and replenish."

The boy gave a greedy twinkle.

"Hallo! I thought I told Jasper to patch you up with a piece of sail-cloth?"

Sparkin did not betray any self-conscious cowardice.

"He was worse off, captain."

"Poor devil!" And the man in the red coat laughed.

They turned into "The Three Tuns" at Charing Cross, the sea-captain looking more like a Whitefriars' bully than a gentleman adventurer. Two comfortable citizens gathered up the skirts of their coats and edged away sourly when the new-comers sat down next them at a table. The captain remarked their neighborly caution, and smiled.

"Good-day, gentlemen. We embarrass you, perhaps?"

There was a humorous grimness about his mouth that carried conviction.

"Not at all, sir, not at all," said the larger of the twain, poised between propitiation and distrust.

"We are not Scotch, sir, so you will catch nothing."

They dined in silence, the boy's animation divided between his plate and his surroundings, while the man in the red coat watched him with the air of one who has an abundant past to feed his thoughts. His neighbors cast curious momentary glances at him from time to time, but having once spoken he appeared to have forgotten their existence. They had but to look beneath the superficial shabbiness to see that the man was of some standing in the world. He had that gift of remaining statuesquely silent, that poise that suggests power. The brown, resolute face had the comeliness of courage. Of no great stature, his sturdy, hollow-backed figure betrayed strength to those who could distinguish between fat and muscle.

The boy's appetite reached impotence at last. The man in the red coat beckoned to the servant, paid his due with odd small change routed out of every pocket, and with a curt bow to his neighbors walked out into the street.

He made his way toward St. James's, and paused in the street of that same name, before a big house with a pompous portico. A flight of steps led up to the great door.

"Run up—and knock."

The boy obeyed, his breeches bringing a smile to the sea-captain's face as he waited unconcernedly on the sidewalk.

"Don't mind your knuckles, my lad."

And Sparkin hammered as though he were sounding the ship's bell.

A servant in livery opened the door and looked down at the boy with the air of a bully scenting a beggar. The man in the red coat listened to the following dialogue:

"My Lord Gore's house, this?"

"What d'you want at the front door?"

"Lord Gore's house?"

"Oh—is it?"

"Well, is it, stupid?"

"Here, you skip it, you—"

The sea-captain interposed with a laugh curving his mouth. There was so much significance in the fellow's gospel of cloth.

"Wake up, Tom Richards!"

The footman's eyes protruded. He stared down at the seaman with the air of a superior being resenting and distrusting familiarity.

"Well, what d'you want?" And his glance added, "You shabby, cutthroat-looking devil!"

The man in red ascended the steps, while the servant's face receded inch by inch, so that he resembled a discreet dog backing sulkily into his kennel. He was about to clap the door to, when the captain pushed Sparkin bodily into the breach.

"Richards, man, have you forgotten me?"

Sparkin's head had taken the fellow well in the stomach, and the shock may have accounted for the man's vacant and astonished face.

"Is my lord in? Brisk up, man, and don't judge the whole world by its coat."

"The Lord forgive me, sir!"

"Possibly He will, Richards."

"I didn't know you, Mr. John, sir, you're so brown—and—"

"Shabby, Richards; say it, and have done. Is my lord in town?"

"Oh yes, sir. Won't you come in and dine? There is a good joint of roast, Mr. John, sir, and a barrel of oysters. My lord is at Lady Purcell's in Pall Mall."

"Lady Anne Purcell's?"

"Yes, Mr. John."

He turned and walked down the steps, the footman marvelling at his effrontery in wearing such dastardly clothes.

"Take the boy in, Richards."

Richards and Master Sparkin regarded each other suspiciously.

"Give him a wash, and a new pair of breeches, if you can find a pair to fit."

"Yes, Mr. John; and your baggage, sir?"

"Lies somewhere in Barbary, Richards, so you need not trouble your head about that."

The whole episode so piqued the footman that he proceeded to lead the boy in the direction of the kitchen quarters by the ear. Whereat, Sparkin, who had already gauged the gentleman's tonnage, fetched him a valiant kick upon the shin, and broke loose with a grin of whole-hearted scorn.

"You keep your hands to yourself, Tom Richards."

The footman made a grab at the boy, but Sparkin was on the alert.

"Touch me, and I'll dig my dirk into you."

Mr. Richards reverted to that easier and safer weapon—the tongue.

"Didn't Mr. John tell me to wash you, you little bundle of rags?"

Sparkin's hand went to his belt.

"You touch me, and I'll let your blood for you, Tom Richards. The Lord forgive me, sir"—and he imitated the man's voice—"you'd be learning something if you went to sea with Captain Gore."

"Oh, I should, should I!"

"The devil you would."

"And you'd be teaching me, perhaps!" said the man in livery, with a sententious sniff.

"'Twouldn't be my business. They'd send you to the cook's galley to clean pots."

While Sparkin was instilling obfuscated respect and caution into Tom Richards, Captain John Gore made his way to Lady Purcell's house. The stare he met there was no more flattering than that which his father's servant had given him. A three days' beard, no wig, a soiled coat, and a moulting beaver were not calculated to conciliate menials.

"My Lord Gore is here?"

"What may your business be?"

He walked in over the servant's toes.

"Tell my lord that Captain Gore is below."

"Captain Gore, sir?"

The gentleman merely reiterated the order with a straight stare.

"Would you be pleased, sir, to walk into the garden."

John Gore followed the fellow's lead, amused at the caution that did not intend to offer him the chance of pocketing anything of value in the house. He was left pacing the gravel walks, with his red coat showing up against the green of the grass.

John Gore had taken two turns up and down the garden when a girl came out between the pillars of the music-room, and stood gazing at the gentleman's broad back with the impatient air of one who has been cornered by a stranger. She drew back again, as though waiting her opportunity to cross from the portico to the house without being observed. Her chance came and she seized it, only to discover that the garden door of the house was locked.

The man in the red coat turned and came down the path again. He caught sight of the girl standing on the steps, bowed, and lifted his hat to her.

"I am afraid you are locked out," he said.

"Oh—"

"Your man did not like the look of me, I suppose, and wisely turned the key in the lock. There seems nothing to be pocketed in the garden but a few green peaches."

They were looking straight into each other's eyes. Who this sturdy, shabby gentleman could be Barbara could not gather for the moment. Nor was she pleased at being left there—at his mercy.

"You have forgotten me, Mistress Barbara," he said.

She frowned slightly.

"My father, Lord Gore, is here, I believe."

Her eyes flashed suddenly, and she colored.

"Oh—you are—"

"The boy who pulled your ribbons off—that day—at Sheen. You may remember the incident," and he bowed.

Barbara remembered it. There was a short pause.

"You have changed," she said, curtly, glancing over her shoulder at the glass panel in the door.

He passed a hand critically over his chin.

"Seemingly, in the heat of adventure. My father's man took me for a bully. I have been in England about five hours."

They stood regarding each other in silence, the man puzzled by her swarthy, sullen face, the girl

conscious of a rush of embittered memories. It was as though something out of the past had risen up before her, something ignorant and unwelcome that might blunder any moment against her sensitive reserve.

"I trust that Sir Lionel is hearty as ever?"

She seized the handle of the door and shook it.

"I wonder where that fool—Miles—"

"Pardon me, shall I shout?"

Barbara kept one shoulder turned toward him, her face, bleak and white, reflected in the glass panel of the door.

"Oh—at last!"

There was the sound of a key turning in a lock. She pushed past the man as he opened the door, leaving John Gore wondering what manner of mischief three years had made in a girl's temper.

In the parlor, with its panelling, its massive furniture, and great fireplace filled with blue Dutch tiles, Anne Purcell and my Lord Gore had been talking for above an hour. My lord was standing at a window in his favorite attitude of philosophic stateliness. The lady's face had an impatient sharpness of expression that hinted that the man's sympathy had not sounded the deeps of her unrest.

"I tell you, Nan, that these—these possibilities—leave us where we stood before. The girl may be a little touched in the head. Leave her to Hortense; if she cannot tame her, well, there are other ways."

Anne seemed less credulous—and more obstinate than he desired.

"I am not superstitious, but to think of the girl praying to those—I tell you, Stephen, the thought of it makes me afraid. Thank Heaven, she is praying—in the dark."

"Tush—tush," and he smiled down at her, "the girl is not quite human. We understand her, you—and I. Yet you seem to lack that diplomatic foresight, Nan, that sees in an enemy's tricks—the very tools for one's own hand."

She looked up at him blankly.

"No, I foresee nothing save that—betrayal."

"Which, if it occurred, could be turned aside as easily as I snap my fingers. There is but one person to be considered, and we must keep her fat and contented."

"Jael?"

"Yes; the woman is greedy; that simplifies everything. To-morrow, then, you will come with me to the Mancini's?"

"Oh—if it will help."

"At least it can do no harm. Listen!"

They heard the footsteps of the servant climbing the stairs, and in ten seconds my Lord Gore had the first news of his seafaring and unshaven son.

VI

My Lord Gore could not conceal an instinct of fastidious disapproval as he walked homeward with his son along Pall Mall. Sumptuousness came before godliness in his scheme of values, and though poverty and slovenliness were inevitable to the world, my lord found them useful as a respectable background to heighten the effect of an exquisite refinement in dress. But to have a soiled and weather-beaten scamp familiarly at one's elbow offered too crude a contrast, and suggested a sinister interest in Whitefriars.

"What a devil of a mess you are in, Jack, my man!" And there was a slight lifting of my lord's nostrils. "You might have sent one of the men to me instead of making a martyr of yourself."

The reference to martyrdom carried a perfect sincerity, for it would have pained Stephen Gore inexpressibly to have been caught in a seedy coat.

John Gore met his father's critical sidelong glance.

"It is only in plays and poems, sir, that you find your adventurer clean and splendid. We were muzzle to muzzle with those heathen for half a day; the prison they put us in was monstrously dirty; and the vegetation they plant in their gardens and about their fields seems to have been created with a grudge against people who have to run. We ran, sir, like heroes, despite aloes, cacti, and thorns like a regiment of foot with sloped pikes. After such incidents one has a tendency toward torn clothes."

My lord nodded.

"Still, Jack," said he, "when you fall in a ditch and get muddied to the chin, you do not stroll home through the park at three in the afternoon. You should read *Don Quixote*, sir—a great book that."

"I am more of a philosopher than the Spaniard."

His father did not trouble to suppress a sarcastic smile.

"Oh, if you are a philosopher I have nothing more to say, save that you have chosen the wrong school. There is the philosophy of clothes to be considered at this happy period of ours. If you wish to try your Diogenes' humor, go to court in some such scuffle. You would be clapped in the Tower for insulting the King."

John Gore laughed.

"Who himself knows what ragged stockings and flea-ridden beds mean."

"Exactly so, sir, and therefore any tactless allusion to the past would be uncourtierlike in the extreme."

My lord betrayed some impatience in his last retort, very possibly because he beheld a group of acquaintances approaching with all the niceness of fashionable distinction. The young gallants of

the court had all the merciless cynicism of premature middle-age. Genius, to prove itself, scintillated with satire. Even when the youngsters laughed, their laughter symbolized an epigram, a caricature, or a lampoon.

Lord Gore advanced very valiantly under the enemy's fire. The party numbered among its members Tom Chiffinch, the redoubtable royal pimp.

There was an ironical lifting of hats. John Gore's costume had interested the party for the last twenty yards of its approach. My lord would have marched past with flags flying. But from some instinct of devilry the gentlemen appeared overjoyed at the *rencontre*.

"We must take you with us to the Mall, my lord."

"His Majesty has a match there."

"Bring your friend with you, sir. By-the-way, who is he?" And Chiffinch took Stephen Gore familiarly by the button and dropped his voice to a forced whisper.

My lord's dignity did not falter. He had caught a peculiar look in his son's eyes that pricked the pride in him.

"Gentlemen, Captain John Gore, my son."

They bowed, all of them, with sarcastic deference.

"Delighted, sir."

"You have seen hard service, sir."

"No doubt you are a great traveller. May I ask your honor whether it is true that the Spaniards in Peru grow their beards down to their belts?"

The man in the red coat showed no trace of temper.

"I lost my laces and my ribbons on the coast of Africa, gentlemen," he said. "They are a slovenly crew—those Barbary corsairs. It is a pleasure to find myself once more among—men."

My lord stood regarding the upper windows of a house with stately unconcern. He glanced sharply at his son, and then bowed to Chiffinch and his party.

"Come, Jack. Simpson of the Exchange must have been waiting an hour for you. My son is like King John, gentlemen—he has lost bag and baggage to the sea."

They parted with ironical smiles, my lord spreading himself like an Indian in full sail.

"Who the devil may Simpson be?" asked the son, bluntly.

His father frowned.

"My recommendation, sir." And in a lower voice: "The first tailor in the kingdom, you booby; the one reputation that might carry shot into those gentlemen's hulls. Such is the world, sir, that you can be put in countenance by uttering the name of your tailor."

Concerning his adventures, John Gore spoke with the grim reserve of a man who had learned that the least impressive thing in this world is to boast. He had lost his ship and seen the walls of an African prison, an ironical climax to a seventeenth-century Odyssey. More from incidental allusions than from any coherent confession, his father learned that he had touched even Japan and far Cathay, his knight-errantry of the sea carrying him into more than one valiant skirmish. An unhappy whim had lured him, when homeward-bound, into the blue sea of the Phœnicians and the Greeks, there to be pounced upon by a squadron of African rovers. They had carried his decks by boarding after a five hours' fight.

My lord listened with an air of fatherly condescension before reverting to the eternal topic of clothes.

"I must turn you loose in my wardrobe, Jack, my man. You can contrive a makeshift for a week or two. We must have Simpson in for you to-morrow."

His manner was semijocular and genial, as though this man of many oceans were still a boy poling a punt on an ancestral fish-pond. My lord had never travelled, save into France and Holland, and the wild by-ways of the world had no significance for him. As a courtier and an aristocrat he was a complete and perfect figure, and the life of a gentleman about court had given him the grandiose attitude of one who had turned the last page of worldly philosophy. He had said what he pleased for many years to the great majority of people with whom he had come in contact. His "air" itself suggested the majestic finality of experience.

They supped together in the house of St. James's Street, my lord asking questions in a perfunctory fashion, often interrupting the replies by irrelevant digressions and displaying the careless contempt of the egotist for those superfluous subjects of which he condescended to be ignorant. It appeared to the son that the father was preoccupied by other matters. It was only when they came to the discussion of certain questions concerning property that my lord showed some of the acumen of the master of the many tenants.

"How much have you lost by this voyage of yours? As for throwing money into the sea—"

John Gore pretended to no grievance.

"It is only what other men would have spent on petticoats and horses. Call it an eccentric extravagance. I have had a glimpse of the earth to balance the loss. About my Yorkshire property?"

"I have had my hand on it, Jack. Swindale has been a success as steward. More money—for the sea's maw. Is that the cry?"

John Gore maintained a meditative reserve.

"Possibly."

"I have the rent-roll—and a copy of the accounts in my desk. Go down and see Swindale for yourself. There is no need to think of such a means as a mortgage. Money has been accumulating. Besides, my boy, though your mother left her property to you, my own purse is always open."

The son thanked him, and changed to another subject—a subject that had been lurking for an hour or more in the conscious background of my lord's mind.

"How is Lionel Purcell?"

Stephen Gore turned his wineglass round and round by the stem, eying his own white fingers and the exquisite lace of his ruffles.

"Dead," he said, shortly.

The man in the red coat drew his heels up under his chair and leaned his elbows on the table.

"Dead! Why, of all the quiet, careful livers—"

"He had no say in the matter. Some one killed him."

There was a short pause. The elder man's face remained a stately, meditative mask. He raised the wineglass and sipped the wine, pressing his lace cravat back with his left hand.

"It was a sad affair, Jack, and came as a blow to me."

"Who killed him?"

"Ah, that is the question! No one knows. I suspect that no one will ever know."

"Was there a reason?"

My lord looked at his son shrewdly, meaningly.

"A man of the world could infer. These scholars—well—they have blood in them like other mortals. We breathe nothing of it—because of the girl."

"Barbara?"

My lord nodded.

"The whole tragedy broke something in the child. She was bright and sparkling enough, you remember, though always a little fierce. There is the fear—"

He paused expressively, with his eyes on his son's face.

"There is the fear of madness. The thing seems to have worn on her, chafed her mind. Anne Purcell and I have done what we can, for God knows—I was Lionel Purcell's friend. But there is always the chance. She is not like other women."

My lord spoke as a man who feels an old burden chafe his shoulder. As for the son, he was looking beyond his father at the opposite wall. He recalled the girl as he had seen her in the garden. She had baffled him. Here was the explanation.

"It is well that she should never know," he said, gravely; "she has enough to haunt her—without that."

My lord had finished his wine and fruit. He rose from the table, and, catching sight of himself in a Venetian mirror on the wall, turned away with a slight frown.

"You had better amuse yourself choosing some of my clothes," he said. "I have business to-night with Pembroke, and I may be late. Richards will give you the keys. We are much of a size, Jack, though you are shorter in the shanks. Thank the Lord for one mercy, I have not put on too much fat."

By the light of a couple of candles in silver sconces John Gore amused himself in my lord's bedroom, with the boy Sparkin to act as a self-constituted judge of fashions. Mr. Richards, who had accompanied them, indulged in a few polite and irrelevant directions, and then departed, as though he found the boy's company incompatible with his own. Every corner of the bedroom soon had its selection of satins, camlets, and cloths, for Sparkin appeared possessed by an exuberant desire to see and handle everything.

My lord's wardrobe was the wardrobe of a gentleman who had a fancy for every color and for every combination of shades. His stockings were to be numbered by the dozen, and Sparkin, half hidden in a chest, baled the stuffs out as though he were baling water out of a boat.

"Easy, there, you young hound. What manner of tangle do you think you are making?"

The boy turned a hot and happy face to him.

"Take your choice, captain. What would some of the Greenwich girls give for a picking! How does crushed strawberry please you?"

John Gore was standing in front of a mirror trying on a coat.

"That's a sweet thing, captain. Just look at the lace. Here's a chest we haven't opened yet."

"Leave it alone, then. You have tumbled enough shirts to give Tom Richards work for a week."

Sparkin had been fumbling with the keys. He found the right one as John Gore spoke, and lifted the chest's lid as though there was no disobedience in looking.

"What have you got there?"

Supremely tempted, Sparkin had fished out a periwig and clapped it on his head. He pulled it off again just as briskly, merely remarking that "the thing tickled." A second dive of the arm brought up a black cloak edged with gold cord and lined with purple silk.

"Bring that here, boy."

Sparkin obeyed, and John Gore swung it over his shoulders.

"Just your color, captain," said the boy, seriously.

"Thanks for a valuable opinion. Well, put it aside with the shirts and stockings I have chosen. The devil take you, but what a fearsome mess you have made!"

"That's soon mended, captain." And, after depositing the black cloak on the bed, he proceeded to fill his arms with my lord's luxuries, and tumble them casually into chest and cupboard.

"Here, leave the clothes alone."

"But—"

"You had better, out of regard for those new breeches of yours. Richards must come up and restore order."

A spasm of vivacious devilry lit up the boy's face.

"So he had, captain. He is such a particular man! Shall I call down the stairs?"

"Yes, call away."

Sparkin disappeared, and John Gore heard his voice piping through the house.

"Richards—Tom Richards there! I say Richards—Mr. Thomas Richards, the captain's orders are that you are to come aloft and clear up the clothes."

Sparkin's voice reached to the nether regions, for slow and unwilling footsteps were heard below. The boy slipped down the stairs and met the man with a loud whisper.

"The captain has made a most fearsome muddle, Tom. He's turned out every chest and cupboard in the room. Just you come and look. It's like a rag booth at a fair."

Barbara Purcell could not sleep that night, perhaps because she had chosen not to have her curtains drawn, so that the light of the full moon poured into the room. An increasing restlessness brought with it that feverish race of thoughts, where the memories of years flash out and intermingle like fantastic figures at a masked ball.

She sat up at last in bed, shook her dark hair free from her shoulders, and stretched her arms out over her knees. The window stood a brilliant square in the blackness of the wall, each lozenge of glass like crystal set in ebony. Through the open casement she could see the silvery domes of the great trees in the park and the few faint clouds that streaked the summer sky. Her restlessness and the close night air made the moonlight seem like a shower of icy spray. And it was as though some feverish freak inspired her with the whim of bathing her hands and face in it, for she slipped out of bed, her white feet gliding over the polished woodwork of the floor.

A sound like the scuffling of rats behind the wainscoting startled her for a moment, so that she stood listening with her face turned toward the door. The deep silence of the house seemed to listen with her for the recurrence of the sound, but she heard nothing but the sigh of her own breath. Moving to the window, she leaned her hands upon the sill, letting the draught play upon her bosom and in her hair. She felt as though the night laid a cool hand upon her forehead, while the infinite calmness of everything entered into her soul.

Beneath her lay the garden, the lawn like a stretch of dusky silver, the bay-trees casting sharp shadows upon it, the portico of the music-room cut into black panels by its pillars. She stood gazing down upon it all with the air of one whose mind was full of dreams. The moon mirrored itself, twin images, within her eyes, and made her night-gear shine like snow under the torrent of her hair.

Distant clocks began chiming suddenly, to be followed by the deep pealing of the hour. The sound roused the girl from her lethargy, like the challenge of a trumpet waking a sentinel at his post.

The echoes of the chimes still seemed to be sweeping upward into the moonlight when she heard a sound below her in the house. It was like the snap of a turning lock, brief, crisp, and final. The striking of the hour might have had the significance of a signal to some one in the house. She was still listening for other sounds to follow when a shadow moved out between the outlines of the bay-trees on the lawn.

Barbara leaned toward the window, and then drew back with an instinct of caution, still keeping her view of the moonlit garden. The shadow and the figure that cast it moved toward the music-room with the gliding motion attributed to ghosts. The breath of the night air seemed doubly cold upon her face and bosom for the moment. She saw the figure disappear under the portico of the music-room with all the mystery of the night to solemnize its passing.

A slight shiver swept up her limbs toward her heart. Things may seem possible at such an hour that the reason might ridicule at noon. Yet she remembered the snap of the shooting lock, and that mere incident of sound held the supernatural vagueness of her thoughts in thrall.

Still listening, she seemed to hear something that brought a sharp and almost fierce expression to her face. Holding her breath, she leaned against the window-jamb as though to steady herself against the slightest movement that might distract her sense of hearing. A murmur of voices came to her out of the silence of the night, like the rustle of aspen leaves in a light wind.

Her body straightened suddenly, bearing its weight upon one out-stretched arm whose hand rested against the jamb of the window. Her eyes became brighter in the moonlight. Her throat showed white under her raised chin. Then turning as though impelled by some inspired thought, she moved toward the door, opened it, and stepped out into the gallery.

Pausing for an instant, she began to walk slowly down the passageway toward a transomed window that gleamed white in the moonlight. She moved haughtily, with no shrinking haste, her head held high, her hands hanging at her sides. It was the poise of a sleep-walker, stately, wide-eyed, without a flicker of self-consciousness.

Barbara had not gone ten steps before she heard a slight sound behind her like the rustle of a skirt. Startled though she may have been, she betrayed nothing, but moved on with every sense alert. That some one was close behind her she felt assured. Her hand was on the latch of her mother's door before her suspicions began to be confirmed.

She pushed the door open and crossed the threshold; yet though the room was in utter darkness, she felt instinctively that it was empty. Turning slowly so that she faced the door, she saw the outline of a figure framed there against the dim glow of the moonlight that filled the gallery.

Barbara stood motionless awhile, making no sign or sound, and then walked straight toward the door. The figure faltered a moment before gliding aside. Barbara passed it, her eyes fixed as on some dreamy distance, her face blank and expressionless, her step unhurried. As she passed back along the gallery she felt that the figure was following her, and knew that it was a woman, and that woman Mrs. Jael.

Still statuesque as one walking in her sleep she re-entered her room, closed the door, locked it, and moved toward the window. She stood there a moment, motionless, and if she saw anything in the garden beneath her she betrayed no feeling and no conscious life. Before the clocks had chimed the half-hour she was in her bed again, but not to sleep.

By the door leading into the garden two shadowy figures were whispering together.

"She was asleep?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Are you sure?"

"She walked past me as though I was not there. I have seen such a thing before, yet it gave me a fright."

"And she went to my room, Jael?"

"It was as dark as a cupboard, my lady. No one could have told that it was empty—even if they had been awake."

The sky was a brave blue next morning, and the air full of the scent of summer when Barbara came down to the little parlor that looked out on the garden. Her air of lethargy had a touch of gentleness to soften it. Anne Purcell was already at the table. A plate of cherries and a flask of red wine added color to the prosaic usefulness of pie and bacon.

Anne Purcell glanced at her daughter with momentary and questioning distrust. The girl's face betrayed no more self-consciousness than the great white loaf on the trencher near her mother. She sat down, glanced over the table listlessly, and then through the window where the sun was shining.

"You look tired, Barbe?"

An insinuating friendliness approached her in the mother's voice.

"Tired?—I slept all night. How fresh the garden looks! I feel I should like a drive in the park to-day."

"Yes; you want more interest—more bustle in your life."

"Perhaps I should have fewer moods—"

"Take some wine, dear," and she pushed the flask toward her. "Why not trust yourself to me a little more? We are not all so melancholy."

"I might only spoil your pleasure."

"Nonsense. I should enjoy life more if you had a happier face."

VIII

Set a thief to catch a thief, and a woman to unravel the character of a woman. Such was the aphorism my Lord Gore had bestowed in confidence upon Hortense when he had bequeathed Anne Purcell's daughter to the Italian's cleverness. If there were anything beneath that sullen and lethargic surface, Hortense would discover it, and perhaps resurrect the girl's instinct to laugh and live.

Few guests met in the painted salon that summer evening: three girls of Barbara's age, an elderly knight with sharp, humorous eyes, a sentimental widow, and Hortense. The windows were open toward the park, where dull, rain-laden clouds shut out the stars. A few shaded candles in sconces along the walls made a glimmering twilight in the room, and in one corner a little brazen lamp burned perfumed oil, so that the air was richly scented.

A girl stood singing beside the harpsichord when Anne Purcell and her daughter entered the salon. Hortense herself was accompanying the song, while those who listened were like figures in a picture, each with a shadowy individuality of its own. There was an atmosphere of opulence and sensitive refinement about the scene. The breeze of youth had been banished and the salon made sacred to musing maturity.

Hortense excelled in the art of welcoming a friend. Even the flowing lines of her figure could put forth an intoxicating graciousness that fascinated women as well as men. She suggested infinite sympathy, yet infinite shrewdness. Strangers might have mistrusted her if she had shown only the one or the other.

My Lady Anne looked commonplace beside Hortense. Her smile had a crude affectation of goodwill that did not completely conceal latent distrust and jealousy. The Englishwoman was there with a purpose, and a purpose is often one of the most difficult things on earth to smother. It was in the daughter that Hortense discovered a vacant unapproachableness, a callous apathy that piqued her interest. The girl was not gauche, despite her silence. It was as though her individuality refused to mingle with the individuality of others.

Hortense disposed of my lady by setting her to chat with the grim old gentleman in the big periwig, whose interest in life gravitated between the latest piece of learned gossip he might pick up at the meetings of the Royal Society and the lighter, more glittering gossip of Whitehall. My lady could at least satisfy him in the lighter vein. The three girls were given a pack of cards and a table in a corner; the sentimental widow—some new book. Hortense herself drew Barbara aside toward one of the windows, as though she was the one person whom she chose to actively amuse.

The prelude between them resembled a game of chess in which one player made tentative moves to which the other blankly refused to respond. A series of challenges provoked nothing but monosyllabic answers. Hortense had no difficulty, as a rule, in persuading even dull or frightened people to talk. There were the many mundane topics to be invoked when necessary: clothes, music, books, men, amusements—and other women.

"Mère de Dieu!" she confessed to herself, at last, "the child is impenetrable. There is a magic spring in every mortal. I have not touched it—here—as yet."

She studied Barbara with the easy air of the woman of the world who does not betray the glance behind the eyes.

"And who is your great friend—in England, cara mia? We women must always have a confidential mirror, though it does not always tell us the truth. When I was quite young I used to write down all my thoughts and adventures in a book. Some of us make friends with our own souls—in our diaries."

Barbara looked at her as though all the Italian's subtle suggestiveness beat on nothing more intelligent than the blank surface of a wall.

"Do you keep a diary, madam?"

Hortense laughed.

"Oh, life is my diary, and then—I write on the faces of those I meet."

"Do you—how?"

"You must guess my meaning."

"I can never guess anything."

"How dull! Have you travelled much—with your mother?"

"My mother?"

"Yes. Is she not charming? so young—and Junelike! She should promise you a long youth."

"I do not care whether she does or not."

"Then you have not learned to envy her?"

"What have I to envy?"

Hortense paused, with a momentary gleam of impatience in her eyes.

"Has the child any enthusiasm? Let us try her on another surface. Do you remember your father, cara mia?"

Barbara's eyes met the Mancini's with a sudden intense stare.

"My father?"

"He was a great scholar, was he not?"

"Yes."

"Books become such friends to us! Did he teach you—at all?"

"Oh, sometimes. He was very patient. How dark the sky looks!"

Hortense smiled. She had a suspicion that she was no longer fumbling in the dark. She had touched the girl beneath her apathy and her reserve.

"Have you your father's books—still?"

"They are in the library—covered with dust."

"Why do you not keep the dust away by reading them. You could fancy yourself talking with him when you turned the pages he had turned."

"Could I?"

Hortense became silent suddenly, her face turned with an expression of sadness toward the night.

"Of course. It is in our memories that we live again. The past may become a kind of religion to us."

She did not look at the girl, but her brilliant and sensitive consciousness waited for impressions. Barbara remained motionless, with stolid, morose face.

"What clever things you think of!" she said, abruptly. "But the books are nearly all in Latin. I wish I had not eaten so much supper. It always makes me sleepy and stupid."

Hortense turned with a sharpness that contradicted her soft and sympathetic attitude.

"Perhaps you would like some wine?"

"No, I thank you, madam. Mother made me drink half a jugful before we came. She said that it might make me talk."

Hortense gave her one searching stare.

"Either you are very clever or very dull," she said to herself. "I must try other methods, for I want to see you show yourself. Then—we may understand."

It was possible that the Mancini knew that her salon would not maintain its air of Platonic tranquillity throughout the whole evening. She who queened it for the moment above a galaxy of queens could not be left long uncourted by the courtiers of her King. She was the Spirit of Wit and the Pyre of Passion for that year at least; a fire about which the moths might flutter; a Partisan of Princes; a shrewd, roguish, laughter-loving woman. She was never unwilling that a fashionable rout should storm and take possession of her house, for they came to entertain her with their nonsense and to flatter her pride by attending at her court.

A flare of links across the park, and the sound of laughter warned Hortense of a possible invasion. The torches flowed in the direction of her house, with a confusion of voices that betrayed the spirit of the invaders. Barbara, who sat watching the stream of fire, saw the link-boys running on ahead, with the glare of their torches flashing over the grass and upon the trunks of the trees, while behind these fire-flies came a stream of gentlemen in bright-colored cloaks, arguing and laughing, some of them flourishing their swords like sticks.

Hortense appealed to her guests.

"Alas! my friends, here come the court innocents with all manner of nonsense in their noddles. Shall we stand a siege?"

"You will never keep fools out of heaven, madam," said the Fellow of the Royal Society, with a cynical sniff; "have them in, and let us moralize on the wasted energies of youth."

"And you—my vestals?"

The girls at the card-table betrayed no immoderate shyness.

"And my Lady Purcell?"

"Should a woman be afraid of a boy's tongue? We can clip it with our wit."

"They are in the court-yard already, the mad children! Let us see what power music may have over them." And she sat down at the harpsichord and began to play with great unction a dolorous chant that was familiar to serious singers of psalms.

Comus and his crew came in right merrily with a superfluity of ironical obeisances and vivid color-contrasts in their clothes. The party was headed by a figure in a black silk gown, with huge lawn ruffles at the wrists, a white periwig, and a big lace bib. Barbara recognized my Lord Gore among the gentlemen, and in the background she caught a glimpse of the brown and imperturbable face of John Gore, his son.

Hortense still fingered out her psalm as though ignoring the irruption of the world, the flesh, and the devil into her house. The three girls at the card-table sat with eyes cast down and hands folded demurely in prim laps. The grim old gentleman reclined in his chair, and stared at the intruders with the inimitable assurance of a Diogenes. Barbara remained by the window in isolation, while her mother and the widow were smiling and whispering together in a corner.

The gentry of Whitehall appreciated the satirical humor of their welcome. Hortense was laughing

at them with that dolorous canticle of hers.

"Now, Thomas, where is your wit?"

"Prick the bishop's calves, he has gone to sleep."

They laughed and applauded as the figure in the silk gown moved forward into the room. Mr. Thomas Temple could play a variety of parts. His mimicry excelled in burlesquing the episcopate.

"My children, let peace be upon this house." And he gave them a pompous blessing with upraised hands.

Hortense rose from the harpsichord with the assumed fire of a fanatic.

"Children of Belial!"

"Lady, pardon me, they are already qualifying as saints."

"What sayest thou, Antichrist, thou Red Man of Rome? Woe, woe unto this city when its priests wax fat in purple and fine linen!"

The bishop extended reproving hands.

"Woman, blaspheme not! We are here to save all souls with the kiss of peace. My children, come hither. Have you been baptized?"

The three girls tittered. Hortense stood forward, flinging out one arm with a passionate gesture of scorn.

"Behold the book of the beast. Behold the Serpent without a surplice! And you—ye children of iniquity—make way for Thomas with the wine!"

There was a shout of laughter as my lord the bishop, picking up his skirts, cut a delighted caper.

"Alas, she has bewitched me! St. Sack, where art thou—oh, strengthener of my soul?"

A footman bearing a tray with flasks and glasses moved stolidly through the crowd. The mock churchman extended a protecting arm.

"Bless you, my son. Blessed are all vintners and tavern-keepers! And you, madam" (he turned to her with a stately obeisance), "our Lord the King of his nobleness hath sent us to unbind your eyes—and to lead you into the paths of light. We will baptize those innocents yonder into the one true church, even the church of Sack—and Sashes. Let all the heathen rejoice for the souls we shall save this day from the pit of prudery. No woman can be saved unless she be kissed. Amen."

IX

For a girl to maintain her dignity in some such assemblage as that at the house of Hortense, she needed a glib tongue, an easy temper, and no prejudices with regard to the inviolate sanctity of her lips or cheek. The gentlemen of fashion had renounced the central superstition of Chivalry, while retaining some of its outward pageantry and splendor. Cynics and worldlings, they had no real reverence for woman, no belief in her honor, and little consideration for her name. She was merely a thing to be coveted, to be maligned, or to be made, perhaps, the butt of the bitterest and most unmanly ridicule. How mean and utterly contemptible those splendid gentlemen of the court could be, Anne Hyde had learned in the days before she became a duchess. So many noble fellows conspiring to swear away a woman's honor, and fabricating unclean lies about her, in the belief they would please a prince.

Barbara remained isolated by the window, studying the scene with an expression of sulky scorn. It was her first glimpse of the gadflies of the court; their methods of attack and of torture were to her things unknown. Many of the men had prematurely aged features, harsh skins, and unhealthy eyes. Some two or three were palpably the worse for wine. And despite their rich clothes and the beauty of mere surface refinement, they brought an atmosphere of unwholesome insolence into the Italian's salon—an insolence that made such true aristocrats as John Evelyn despair of the courts of kings.

The Mancini had drawn the mock bishop aside, and they were talking together with ironical little smiles and gestures. Barbara met Hortense's eyes across the room. The man in the silk cassock glanced also in the same direction, and Barbara had the sudden sense of being under discussion.

The majority of the men were drinking wine at a side table, talking loudly and without an atom of restraint, as though they were in a tavern and not in the salon of a great lady. My Lord Gore and his son were the centre of a little group; the brown face of the sea-captain contrasting with the whiter skins of the idlers about town. He was glancing about the room, as though tired of being penned up in a corner by a party of fops with whom he had no sympathy. More than once his eyes met those of Barbara Purcell. They appeared to be the only two people in the room who chafed instinctively at their surroundings.

A loud voice at the door of the salon, strident and harsh, overtopped the babbling of the crowd. Heads were turned in the direction; periwigs bowed; slim swords cocked under velvet coat-tails. The commotion hinted at the entry of some great captain in the campaign of pleasure. The knot of many-colored figures fell apart, and a big man in black and silver stalked forward to salute Hortense.

It was Philip of Pembroke, the most outrageous and hot-headed aristocrat in the kingdom, a man whose own friends treated him as they would have treated an open powder-mine, and whose very friendship was often the prelude to a quarrel. Few people had the nerve to sit near him at table, for an argument was his great joy, and his method of debate was so fierce and fanatical that his arguments very frequently took the form of wine bottles and dishes, or any forcible persuader that came to hand. He would quarrel with any one, anywhere, on any topic, and appeared to cherish the conviction that the whole world had conspired to contradict him. Lean, ominous, with a fierce, intent, brown face, his sharp, snapping jowl made him appear more like a mad fanatic than a sane and stately English peer. The marvel was that a man with such a face should waste even his madness on irresponsible brawls and outrages. It was like some fierce Egyptian monk playing

insane tricks in Christian Alexandria.

He saluted Hortense with his usual air of restless-eyed and explosive abruptness. She had assumed her utmost graciousness, her full feminine fascination. My lord stared at her for a moment in his queer, distrustful way, and then turned to the figure in the silk cassock.

"Well, you dull dog, how are we to be amused to-night?"

Tom Temple adopted a tone of the blindest deference.

"We have founded a mission, my lord, for the conversion of un-kissed females."

"Damnation, boy, there are none!"

"My Lord of Pembroke is a great authority."

"Am I? Who told you that? I should like to talk with him a minute. Where are your converts, eh?"

By my soul, I don't see many!"

The bishop made an unctuous gesture with his open hands.

"There are an innocent few, my lord."

"Three pinafores and two aprons! Who's that there—old Purcell's widow? She is as plump as a fat hen! And the one there by the window, who's she?"

Tom Temple appealed to Hortense.

"Anne Purcell's daughter."

"A sour, scratch-your-face looking wench! Zounds, Tom, begin your mission there! Go and kiss her, or I'll knock your head against the wall."

He laughed, as though hugely tickled, while the majority of the men, who had been listening, exchanged glances, and divided their curiosity between the girl by the window, my Lord Pembroke, and Bishop Tom.

Hortense had drawn aside, and was bending over Anne Purcell. There may have been a motive in the move. Possibly she did not wish to countenance the joke, and yet desired to profit by the information she might gain thereby.

The bishop looked embarrassed.

"If you will lend me your countenance, my lord—"

"Go and kiss her."

"On my conscience, sir, but—"

He was drifting perilously near an argument, and the mad peer's eyes began to sparkle. The crowd settled itself to enjoy the drama.

"Why, my lord bishop is a heretic!"

"The recusant, the Fifth Monarchy maniac! Pull his bibs off!"

Tom Temple found himself in the midst of a dilemma. On the one hand was this silent, swarthy-face girl who looked as unapproachable as a Minerva; on the other, my Lord of Pembroke, ready to explode at the slightest opposition.

"I accept your mandate, my lord."

"Forward, then, sainted sir; I am the church militant to support the conversion."

Tom Temple plucked up his impertinence, and approached Barbara with an air of grim solemnity. All eyes were turned in her direction. She found herself the cynosure of this mocking, sneering, mischief-loving crowd.

"My daughter, I am authorized by his Majesty, Pope of Whitehall, and by my Lord Cardinal Pembroke, here, to initiate you into the one true church. Are you, my daughter, in a fit and ready state to be converted?"

Barbara looked the young man straight in the face and said nothing.

"Have you no answer for me, my child?"

My Lord of Pembroke gave him a push from behind.

"To it, Tom, or I'll convert her myself!"

"My Lord Cardinal, I am ready to abdicate in your favor."

"Sophist! Kiss her, and have done."

Tom Temple looked at Barbara and found his expiring impudence unequal to the task. A breeze of cynical laughter swept the room. The three girls had left the card-table, and were standing huddled together, giggling and glancing from Barbara to the gentlemen. Hortense and Anne Purcell had drawn aside toward the harpsichord, while the sentimental widow seemed scared.

"The church militant must intervene!"

My Lord of Pembroke jostled the mock churchman aside and faced Barbara. She had risen and was standing at her full height, an angry color flooding into her face. The peer and the lady looked each other in the eyes.

The man's cynical yet malicious stare humiliated her, despite her wrath and her defiance. Her glance travelled over the faces that seemed to fill the room. Nowhere did she find a glimmer of pity or resentment. She was just a silly, prudish girl to them; a sulky child to be teased; a thing that piqued their cynical curiosity.

My Lord of Pembroke made her a curt bow.

"You will permit me to receive you into the bosom of our church," he said.

She flashed a fierce stare at him, and then drew back close to the window. It was then that her eyes met the eyes of some one in the room, some one who had been standing in the background, and who was watching her with intense earnestness. She recognized John Gore. A rush of appeal and of chivalrous sympathy seemed to leap from face to face.

My Lord of Pembroke advanced a step. There was something satanic about his eyes.

"Come, little simpleton."

He stretched out an arm, and caught her wrist roughly. But she twisted it free.

"Gently, my wild filly; we must break you to harness. Come—now—"

He was shouldered aside abruptly with a vigor that set the whole room gaping at the thunderclap that would follow. A shortish, sturdy man with a brown, imperturbable face had established himself calmly between my lord and Barbara Purcell.

"It seems, my lord, that, since you are all Christians, I am the only heathen in the room."

The retort came instantly with a sweep of the peer's arm. John Gore was ready for it, and put the blow aside. Half a dozen gentlemen rushed in and made a human barrier between the pair.

My Lord of Pembroke struggled like a knot of fire half smothered by damp fuel.

"Hold off, fools! Let go my arm, Howard, or by God, I'll run my sword through you!"

They tried to pacify him, but his violent temper blazed through their words. He looked madman enough as he spat his fury over the shoulders of those who held him back. But for the inevitable steel, the scene might have been ridiculous.

"Will you fight?"

"I am at your service, my lord."

"Come then, draw! Clear the room. Howard, you are my second."

Hortense's voice intervened with imperious feeling.

"Gentlemen, not in my house."

Stephen Gore had pushed through and stood beside his son.

"Take me, Jack; keep cool, boy; the fool's mad."

"In the park, then."

"Lud! but it's raining—torrents," said some one, peering through the window.

"Rain! Who the devil cares for rain? Tell my boys to light their links. Get me my cloak, Howard. Are you ready, sir?"

"Ready, my lord," said John Gore. "We can use the swords we have. That is my privilege, I believe."

X

Barbara Purcell stood alone by the window, her eyes fixed upon the torches that were spitting and flaring in the rain. The salon had been emptied of its wits and gallants, as though the men had been whirled away into the darkness by the very energy of my Lord Pembroke's wrath. The women were left alone with the cynical old aristocrat who dabbled in science, and who had not moved from his chair during the brawl. Hortense, who had dreaded bloodshed in her house and the scandal that might follow, was watching from another window, with the three girls and the widow gathered round her. My Lady Purcell appeared to be the most vexed and troubled of them all. She moved restlessly about the room; sat down in a chair beside the cynic; spoke a few words to him, and seemed repelled by the flippancy of his retort; rose again; walked to and fro for a minute, and then, as though driven thither by some spasm of suspense, joined Hortense and the rest at the window.

The Mancini heard my lady's deep breathing, and, turning to make room for her, was startled by the scared expression of her face. But, being discreet, she ignored her guest's uneasiness.

"These men, they must be forever quarrelling! As for that mad, irresponsible lord, I am always in dread of murder when he enters my house."

Anne Purcell leaned against the window-jamb.

"And they must drag in others, too. I suppose Howard and Stephen Gore will be at each other's throats."

Hortense eyed her curiously.

"I think they have too much wisdom to cross swords over a lunatic. Who is the little brown man with the broad shoulders and the cool face?"

"John Gore, my lord's son."

"Jack Gore; a good name for a gallant swashbuckler. The fellow pleased me; he has a backbone and a keen eye. It was like a scene out of a stage-play. And there is the distressed damsel, your daughter, watching to see her champion do his devoir."

Anne Purcell glanced at Barbara and gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"If the fool had only had some sense!"

"If—yes—if!"

"The stubborn brat! To shut her eyes to a mere piece of play!"

Hortense looked thoughtful.

"Pardon me, but the girl is no fool; that is my belief. It was no sulky, stupid child that dared my Lord Pembroke to bully her."

"No?"

"No. But a woman with pride, and a depth of courage in her that could make her dangerous in a quarrel. My Lady Purcell, I could swear that your daughter is cleverer than you imagine."

Hortense saw the plump woman's face harden.

"Perhaps," she retorted, brusquely; "for myself, I have always thought her a little mad."

As for Barbara, she had no memory for Hortense and the rest. The dim, rain-smirched park, with its pool of stormy light, absorbed all the life in her for the moment. She had seen the torches go tossing out from the gate with a trail of shadowy figures following. The link-boys had headed for a great tree where there would be some shelter from the rain. The torches made a wavering yellow circle about the four chief figures; the rest of the gentlemen gathered in the deeper shadows under the tree. The drifting rain blurred and distorted the details as bad glass distorts the landscape to one at watch behind a window. Yet the four figures with the smoke and flare of the torches seemed vividly distinct to her, two of them stripped of cloaks and coats, so that their white shirts showed up like patches of snow on a distant mountain-side.

Engrossed as she was, she heard one of the watchers at the other window give a sharp cry of relief.

"At last—see—they have begun! My Lord Gore and Howard stand aside."

It was her mother's voice, and the words seemed to set some subtle surmise moving in the

daughter's brain. She remained motionless, her eyes on the circle of torches and the faint flicker of steel that was discernible as the two swords crossed.

She heard a short, dry laugh, and turned to find the Fellow of the Royal Society standing at her elbow. He was watching the scene under the tree with eyes that had lost none of their youthful sharpness.

"There is no need for anxiety," he said, with a friendly glance at Barbara.

They stood side by side in silence for a minute. Then the cynic nodded in the direction of the park.

"That mad jackass stood no chance against Stephen Gore's son. Just as I thought. That—will keep the fool quiet for a time, at least."

There was a sudden swaying of the torches, and the circle of figures swept in upon my Lord Pembroke and John Gore as the sea sweeps in on a sinking ship. Nothing was discernible for the moment but the torch-flare and the knot of eager, crowding men. Then the circle parted abruptly, and they could see two friends throwing his coat and cloak over my Lord Pembroke's shoulders. He was leaning against his second, his sword-arm hanging at his side.

The torches swayed forward and moved in a blot of light from under the tree. John Gore, with his sword set in the grass, was struggling into his coat, his eyes watching the violent fool whom he had wounded in the shoulder. Stephen Gore, distinguishable by his stateliness and his bulk, threw a cloak over his son's shoulders. The torches moved away, the figures scattered, and the whole scene seemed to melt into nothingness behind the falling rain.

The cynic and Miss Barbara still maintained their silent fellowship at the window, as though they approached to each other by showing an uncompromising front toward the world. Her companion seemed to hint that they had a common interest in the proceedings, when he pointed out to her that a couple of torches were moving back toward the house.

"Here come the gentlemen who will assure us. Had I had the guiding of that young man's sword, I should have pricked that wind-bag for good and all."

He continued to talk, as though addressing no one in particular, but only enumerating his own thoughts.

"But then—of course—it would be deucedly inconvenient. It is much wiser to let fashionable fools alone; if you kill them, there will be trouble; if you wing them only, there will still be trouble. It is probable that we shall hear within a month or so that my Lord Gore's son has been bludgeoned some dark night."

Barbara glanced at him with a sharp challenge in her eyes.

"Pardon me, it is a very usual method of procedure among gentlemen of fashion. If you have an enemy who is too strong for you, or a man you are afraid to fight, you hire a couple of bullies to ambuscade him—and crack his skull. Both your honor and your spite are thereby greatly relieved."

The torches were close to the gate of the court-yard, though the watchers at the window could but dimly distinguish the faces of those who were returning.

"I hope to Heaven he is not hurt!"

"Stay there, children! you must not meddle in these men's affairs."

Hortense and my Lady Anne had moved by mutual impulse toward the door. The girls, who had wished to follow them, remained talking in undertones near the harpsichord. But Barbara was bound by no such casual regulations. She left the cynic by the window, and followed her mother and Hortense.

From the salon the staircase of the great house ran with broad shallow steps into the hall. The beautiful balustrade was of carved oak, the corner pillars topped with griffins holding gilded shields. French tapestries covered the walls, and from the central boss of the ceiling a great brass lantern hung by a chain.

Hortense paused at the stair's head, with Anne Purcell at her side. The rain rattled against the windows, with the light of the torches casting wavering shadows over the glass. A servant stood holding the door of the hall open, with the torches making a turmoil of smoke and flame. Barbara, as she came from the salon, was struck by the eager poise of her mother's figure as she leaned forward slightly over the balustrade.

My Lord Gore and his son came in out of the night with their cloaks aglisten, and rain dropping from their beavers. The vision that greeted them was the vision of two women waiting at the stair's head in their rich dresses, the light from the lantern throwing their figures into high relief. Hortense, in autumn gold, tall and opulent, crowned by her crown of splendid hair, seemed a figure divine enough to top that great oak stairway with its sweep of shadows. Anne Purcell, leaning forward with one hand on a carved pillar, symbolized watchfulness and secret suspense. While in the background the Spanish swarthy face added that mystery and solemn strangeness to the picture that life conveys in its moment of pathos or of passion.

My Lord Gore made straight for the stairway, hat in hand.

"Soyez tranquille, mesdames; a mere pin-prick in the shoulder."

Hortense glanced past him with interest at the bronzed and imperturbable face of his son.

"Whose was the wound? Not—?"

"No, no, my Jackanapes had the madman at his mercy. May we men of blood ascend? Assuredly the name of Gore seems suited to the occasion!"

He turned his head and smiled over his shoulder at his son.

"Come up, my Jack the Giant-killer! Where is our little mistress, our inspirer of heroics?"

Anne Purcell bent toward him—as though swayed by her woman's instinct.

"The little fool shall stay at home in future—"

"Psst—beware—!"

My lord gave a forced laugh, and looked upward over my lady's shoulder. He had caught sight of Barbara standing in the doorway of the salon.

"Behold the inflamer of the peaceful citizens of Westminster! Mistress Barbara, my child, see

what an obstinate mouth will do!"

Anne Purcell and Hortense had both turned toward the salon. My Lord Stephen was at the stair's head, his son a little below him, with the light from the lantern falling full upon his face. But the girl standing in the doorway of the salon seemed the significant and compelling figure of the moment. She was staring at John Gore with a bleak intentness that ignored the three who waited for her to make way.

"Barbara!"

Her mother seized her arm and pushed her—almost roughly—into the salon.

"Where are your wits, girl? Don't gape like that! On my honor, I think you are mad."

She suffered her mother's hectoring with an apathy that betrayed neither resentment nor understanding. Her eyes held John Gore's for the moment. Then she turned and walked back to the window as though she had no more interest in the affair.

Yet—she had seen on the cloak that John Gore was wearing three short chains of gold, each with a knot of pearls for a button. They were spaced out irregularly, those three strands of gold, as though one had been lost—perhaps torn off in a struggle and never been replaced.

XI

My lord paused abruptly with the wine-decanter in his hand, his eyes fixed in a vacant stare on his son, who was drawing a high-backed chair forward to the table. The rumble of the wheels of the coach that had brought them home from Hortense Mancini's could be heard dying away along St. James's.

"Wine, Jack? They should have got Pembroke comfortably to bed by now. The man will be about again in a month—ready to quarrel with his best friend. What made you meddle in the game? A little mockery might do Nan Purcell's girl some good."

John Gore was unfastening the curbs of his black cloak. His father watched him, his brows knitted into a sudden frown of uneasiness—the frown of a man surprised by a spasm of pain at the heart.

"You all seemed so ready to make a fool of the child."

"Tut—tut, sir, you ought to have come by more shrewd sense than to make a pother over such a piece of fun. Where the devil, may I ask, did you get that cloak?"

John Gore glanced down at the garment as though my lord's tone of contempt might have made the thing shrivel on his shoulders.

"The cloak? You should know it, since it came out of your own wardrobe!"

"Mine! I deny the imputation."

He laughed with a cynical twist of the mouth, and regarded his son slyly over the rim of his wineglass.

"Well, it came out of your room, sir!"

"Come, come, Jack!"

"My boy Sparkin fished it out of a chest when he was advising me on frills and fashions. The sobriety of the garment suited my inclinations."

Stephen Gore's eyes gleamed for the moment with a flash of fierce impatience.

"The meddlesome ape! You must pardon me being tickled by the irony of facts. Since Captain Jack Gore listens to a cook-boy's opinions on costumes, I am mum."

The son seemed amused and piqued in turn by his father's inquisitive and fanatical prejudices. He swung the cloak from his shoulders and held it up with one hand.

"What have you to quarrel with, sir? The refinements of fashion are too deep for me. I shall be landed in Newgate for wearing the wrong kind of buckle on my shoes before the week is out."

My lord appeared in earnest.

"Pshaw! Quarrel with? Why, the thing is about ten years out of date. Unpardonable! Give it up, Jack; I'll not countenance you in such a pudding-cloth."

John Gore broke into a hearty, seafaring laugh.

"Sancta Maria! is the offence so flagrant?"

"You might as well go to the King's levee with a dirty face, sir. Don't guffaw; I'm in earnest. Richards has orders to get rid of all the husks."

The sea-captain fingered the gold tags.

"Being a prodigal, I will put up with such husks as these. I suppose I may be preferred before Tom Richards?"

My lord took the cloak from him casually, as though he had not noticed the gold chains with their knots of pearls.

"Hallo! these are worth saving, after all. I'll keep them myself, Jack. Give a thing, and take it back again. That is philosophy of a sort, according to Hobbs."

He laughed, pulled out a silver-handled clasp-knife from a pocket, and cut the gold curbs away from the cloth.

"For what we have saved, let us be thankful. It is not always wise to lend other people either your opinions or your wardrobe, much less your purse."

John Gore had picked up the cloak again.

"Three, are there? There must have been four once. Look at the tear, there—in the cloth. Curious; I should not have noticed it before."

My lord took the cloak from him and examined it with a careless air, making use of one corner to hide a yawn.

"The mark of the beast, Jack. Tom Richards' fingers have been at work here, or I know nothing of human nature. Well, the fellow must have his pickings. If one worries about a small man's petty

pilferings one ought not to have the insolence to be a courtier. We are all sooted by the same chimney. Another glass of wine, Jack? No? Well, let's to bed."

They parted with a hand-shake and a light word or two upon the stairs, words that hid in either case the deeper impulses beneath. In my lord's heart there was something of scorn, something of dismay, and the fierce uneasiness of a man who loves to look only upon the more flattering features of his soul. There seemed nothing in the incident to shake his confidence, and yet it had shaken him as a light wind sways a mighty elm that is rotten at the roots. A cloak, so much mere cloth, which he had hidden away and forgotten! Yet the thing had brought back visions of an autumn night, of betrayal and of anger, of passionate reproaches and of swift violence in the dark. What though he solaced himself with the oath that death had judged between the fortunes of two swords? The sin of treachery had been his. The blood-guilt remained, and no sophistry and no well-wishing to himself could wipe the stain away.

For the son, the happenings of the night had a richer aftermath. He was no self-conscious, strutting righter of wrongs; no chivalrous adventure-hunter launching his lance at the world's throat. My Lord Pembroke might have kissed most women with impunity as far as John Gore was concerned; for though they might have protested, he knew, as a man of the world, that not one in twenty would have been worth the interference. Any chivalrous fool who had pushed in to a rescue would have merely flattered a coquette with the offer of blood where the other man had only offered kisses.

But that tall girl with the Spanish face had given the scene a different meaning. The uncompromising sincerity of her pride had turned a piece of fantastic fooling into insolence and dishonor. The call of solitary soul to soul is ever something of a riddle, and yet to the man there must be that one woman whose hair has the darkness of night, whose eyes are mysterious, whose face has an alluring sadness near to pain. Out of one thread of pathos or of passion may be woven that scarlet robe that covers the dim white body of Romance. A trick of the voice, a poise of the head, and the sleeper wakes in the world of color and desire. The streaking of the night sky by a falling star is not more swift and strange than that flash of divine wonder across the consciousness of a woman or a man.

The memory of her standing by the window, tall, defiant, aloof, with those cynical fools mocking her, burned with great vividness in John Gore's brain. He remembered the moment when her eyes had wandered round the room to remain fixed on his. He thrilled still, strong man that he was, at that appeal the girl had given him, as though some instinct had warned her that his manhood was a nobler thing than to suffer her pride to be humbled before them all. Fighting against wild seas and the primeval perils of strange lands had given John Gore the cool and unflurried courage that is steady rather than impetuous. And yet that one glance from the girl's eyes had drawn an instant and impulsive answer from him, as though all that she held sacred had been trusted to his hands.

And then—her history, this morose, brooding grief that my lord had hinted at! The very shadow of sadness that haunted her added a mystery, an alluring strangeness that beckoned the soul. She was not like other women. What more subtle deification! For strong natures are untaken save by strong contrasts and by keen impressions. The song of the nightingale may have no meaning for the falcon. Nor could the chattering lutes of "court beauties" call to a man who had stood where Cortez stood, gazing from Darien on the ocean limitless toward the burning west.

John Gore stood awhile at the open window of his room, as he had often stood at the rail of his quarter-deck on a southern night. The great silence of the sea seemed once more with him, and the far unutterable splendor of the moon. Then, as by contrast, his thoughts were caught by his father's furious convictions as to the importance of the proper droop of a feather or the color of a coat. Who remembered such things when the storm-wind was shrieking, like the ghosts of the sea's dead, through a great ship's tackle? Yet, after all, it was only the fanaticism of another circle, another world. Your scientific zealot will cut a caper over the discovery of some new bug. It was a mere question of environment, and Father Adam may have strutted vaingloriously in some new-fangled smock of leaves.

Not for John Gore alone had it been a night of impressions. They had proved keen, pitiless, and pathetic so far as Barbara Purcell was concerned. She was alone in her room, and at her open window, the human counterpart of John Gore. In her lap lay a little strand of gold, while the moonlight touched the bleak pallor of her face, making the night, like her heart, a contrast of mysterious light and shadow.

With Barbara her impressions were like elemental fire and ice, vivid, distinct, at war with one another. They stood opposed within her mind, hurting her heart by their very enmity. Gratitude and hatred unable to be reconciled; the harsh notes of revenge and the voices of heaven clashing together in the galleries of the brain. She had seen and she had recognized, yet the gross incongruity of it all made her falter for a meaning. The incidents of the night passed and repassed rhythmically before her. The uprising of his manhood in her service; her mother's strained dismay; the scene at the stair's head; the glimpse of the three gold curbs upon the cloak. Where were the beginnings and the endings in this tangled skein for her? Had she not looked for exultation in this moment when at last it should come into her life? And now that the truth seemed close to her very heart, she found the near future blurred by a dimness of doubt, of incredulity, even—of dread.

XII

Summer freshness after rain, a splendor of wet shimmering fields and woods, gardens full of a hundred perfumes, a sky changing from azure to opalescent gold on the horizon. The slow sweep of the river through the dream of a summer day. White swans moving over the water; scattered houses with black beams and plaster-work, or warm red walls, lifting their gables amid sleeping

trees. Now and again the plash of oars and the sound of voices stealing down some quiet "reach."

Two boats with cushions and banners at the stern were moving up-stream while the day was still in its April hours. They were nearing Richmond, stately in memories and in trees, and Sheen also, where the last of the Tudors delivered up her queenship unto God. The two boats had pulled out from Whitehall stairs that morning, carrying a river-party to my Lord Gore's house at Bushy. Discretion and the voice of some "back-stairs friend" had hinted that my lord and his son would discover the country preferable to the town until my Lord of Pembroke's recovery should be assured. The King had lately assumed a prejudice against brawls, and my lord had left this chance indiscretion in the hands of Hortense, who was—for the while—the King.

Stephen Gore had collected a few especial friends to go by river and spend some days with him at Bushy. His deaf sister from Kensington had been appointed state duenna for the week. With my lord were two gentlemen of the same political tendencies as himself; my Lady Purcell, fresh and fragrant as a Provence rose; a certain Sir Peter Marden's wife and daughter, blood relatives of the Gores; and Captain John, his son. Moreover, in the same boat as her mother, with a scarlet cushion under her arm, sat Mistress Barbara, solemn, and dark as some Proserpine to whom the breath of the summer day presaged the shadows of a sadder world.

Her mother would probably have left her at the house in Pall Mall had not the girl displayed a sudden tractable cheerfulness that had surprised Lady Anne into searching for motives. Nor had the fertile and intuitive brain of woman far to seek. My Lady Purcell drew her own amused conclusions, nor was she sorry to suspect the girl of such reasonable yet uncharacteristic softness.

It so happened that Barbara and John Gore were not shipped in the same boat, the son having taken charge of the second and smaller of the two, with a cargo of luggage and servants, to say nothing of Master Sparkin, who had scrambled into the bow, and amused himself alternately by tickling the neck of the nearest waterman with a feather and dabbling his hands in the water over gunwale. John Gore's boat proved the faster of the two, and though she started half a mile behind my lord's, she had drawn up by the time that they had reached Mortlake, much to the satisfaction of Sparkin, who had urged the men on to a race. For a while they pulled stroke and stroke, John Gore laughing and talking to the guests in his father's boat.

Stephen Gore was steering, his sister next him on his left, Lady Purcell on his right. And the moment that the two boats had drawn level, Anne Purcell had touched my lord's knee with hers and glanced meaningly at Barbara, who had been looking back at the flashing oars of John Gore's boat. Her mother had been on the watch for suggestions. And in such matters the most commonplace incidents may appear significant. Yet Barbara had merely been watching Sparkin's drolleries, for one cannot always breathe to the rhythm of tragic verse.

"Jack, my boy, when you put to sea with a boat-load of 'baggage,' you will find yourself faster than stately dowager-laden ships."

My lord's second cousin, my Lady Marden, a fat, happy woman eternally on the verge of laughter, shook the large green fan that ladies used then in the place of a parasol.

"Dowagers, indeed! I am sure we look younger than our daughters."

"That is always the case," said one of my lord's friends.

"I would venture it that Captain John would rather be in our boat," and she glanced at Barbara as though for confirmation.

Anne Purcell's daughter gazed at the far bank over the lady's shoulder.

"Even a boat-load of aunts and cousins may be duller than a Barbary prison," quoth my lord, with a play upon words that no one understood.

"And even a weevily biscuit better than none—when you're empty," said Sparkin, who seemed to consider himself perfectly justified in airing his wit. But seeing that the venture drew a sharp and ominous glance from the great gentleman in the other boat, Sparkin became suddenly oblivious to its presence, and returned to tickling the brown neck of the man who pulled the bow oar—an act that stamped him as the meanest of opportunists, seeing that the man could not express himself in the presence of "quality."

The boats were still moving side by side when Mistress Catharine Gore, the deaf duenna, began asking questions in her shrill, aggressive voice.

"Who's that boy, Stephen?"

My lord assumed an alarmed look and held up a silencing hand.

"My dear Kate," he shouted in her ear, "do not ask embarrassing questions."

His sister's face betrayed a sudden gleam of shocked intelligence that made my lord's fooling appear more piquant. Deafness had developed a habit of irritability in her, and she was accustomed to blurt out her opinions in a voice that she probably intended for a whisper.

"You don't say so, Stephen! I am astonished that your son should have the effrontery. But these sailors—"

The other ladies began to giggle. My lord nudged his sister vigorously with his knee.

"Jack brought the boy home from America with him."

"Why don't you speak louder, Stephen? What did you say her name was?"

But as she discovered that they were trying to hide their laughter behind fans and coat-sleeves, Mistress Catharine Gore gave her brother one stare, and relapsed into a silence that was not altogether amiable.

Nor did John Gore look the complaisant son smiling at his father's waggery. He nodded to his men, who quickened at the oars, making the boat forge ahead of my lord's galley. Barbara's eyes met the sea-captain's as he glanced back for a moment to look at something, perhaps at her. She was glad and yet sorry that they were not together, for the secret that she concealed made his nearness a martyrdom and a season of suspense. How could she keep the consciousness of that grim blood-debt before her soul, with the beat of the ripples against the boat and the flash of the sunlight on the water? She felt too close to humanity to be able to look into her own haunted heart. These laughing, chattering women, these mercurial, pleasure-loving men! She could only sit there

in a silence as in a trance, and let the shores and the tide of life glide by, until she could wake in the tragic loneliness of solitude—and of self.

The garden of my Lord Gore's house at Bushy came down to the river with a sweep of perfect sward. There was a stone boat-house with quaint copper dragons on the recessed gable ends, and a gilded vane shaped like a ship in sail. The steps that led up from the river had statues of fauns and wood-nymphs upon their pillars, and along the bank weeping-willows trailed their boughs in the brown water of the shallows.

The garden itself had all that quaint formalism, that stately simplicity that was part of the lives of some of the Old-World gentry. A great stretch of grass cut into four squares by gravel paths, with closely clipped bays and yews set rhythmically along the walks. On the north, an ancient yew alley, a gallery of green gloom. On the south, a broad flower border, full of roses, pinks, and stocks, and all manner of flowers and herbs. On the west, the stone terrace of the house, with orange-trees in tubs ranged behind the balustrade. In the centre of all, where the four walks met, a fountain playing, throwing a plume of spray from the bosom of a river-god.

John Gore's boat, half a mile ahead of my lord's galley, disembarked first at the steps, so that the servants were able to clear the baggage into the house and help in preparing that most essential of all incidents—dinner. John Gore sent Sparkin off to the kitchen, and passed the time pacing the gravel walks, with the river before him and the air sweet with the perfumes of the herbs. The stateliness of the place, its repose and opulence, had a strong charm for the man after rough years of voyaging and the squalid loneliness of prison. He contrasted it with the weird brilliance and fragmental beauty of the countries of the Crescent. Nothing could seem more rich to him than those splendid lawns, like green samite spread without seam or wrinkle. Even the gilded vane on the boat-house had memories, for he could remember coveting it as a child, and the thing may have suggested the life of those who go down to the sea in ships.

John Gore saw in season the flash of my lord's oars, the bluff bow of the galley pushing the ripples aside, the banner floating over the stern. Going to the water-steps, he stood there and waited, hat in hand, the quiet dignity of such a man seeming in keeping with such a scene. With one foot on the gunwale, he gave a hand in turn to my lord's guests, while the rowers held the boat in place by using their oars as poles.

The character of the different women might have been guessed by the way each accepted the curtesy of the man upon the steps. Anne Purcell smiled in his face with a full-blown and fragrant vanity. Mrs. Catharine Gore gave him a severe stare. My Lady Marden might have melted his dignity with her good-humor; her daughter faltered with assumed shyness, looking at her feet and not into John Gore's eyes. As for Barbara, she ignored his hand unconcernedly, gazing straight before her with a straight mouth and a passionless face.

The gentlemen followed, John Gore leaving them to their own legs. He had turned and climbed the steps close on Barbara's heels, noticing, as a man does, the poise of her head and the proud youth in her figure. A high-born and imperious spirit seemed proper from one who walked between those stiff and stately trees. John Gore would not have wished for a hoyden in such a setting.

The party moved up the central walk toward the house, my Lady Marden verbosely pleased with everything that she saw. "But there were no peacocks! Surely that sweet terrace should have been a proper place for the birds to show their tails! But perhaps my Lord Gore did not like their voices?" My lord replied that he saw so many peacocks at Whitehall that there was nothing singular or distinctive about having such commonplace birds on show. He would send for a barge-load if my Lady Marden would promise to imitate a pea-hen in her dress. Anne Purcell looked tried by the fat woman's excessive and loquacious amiability. She had Mrs. Catharine Gore for a stimulating "cup of bitters," Mrs. Kate, whose wood billet of a figure looked fit only for a great wheel farthingale. My lord's two gentlemen friends were walking one on either side of my Lady Marden's daughter, who pretended to be embarrassed, and was not. She had a black patch at the corner of a very suggestive mouth, and a figure that did not promise prudery. For the rest, John Gore and Barbara Purcell were left pacing side by side like two grave and staid strangers walking up the aisle of a church.

The party dined in the long salon whose windows opened upon the terrace with its row of orange-trees. My Lady Marden careered in her conversation like a fat mare turned out to grass. My lord alone appeared inclined to keep step with her. After dinner there were wines and fruit: wines of Spain and Burgundy; peaches, nectarines, apricots, and grapes. After the fruit and wine, those who desired could steal a siesta, for the river air is fresh after rain, and mature appetites minister at the altar of Morpheus.

The two gentlemen were amusing themselves by making hot love to the younger Marden, and watching the expression of keen curiosity and chagrin on Mrs. Catharine Gore's face. To be able to see so many suggestive things, and to hear nothing! What more tantalizing position for a duenna, and a spinster! John Gore could not keep back a smile as he watched the drama. He rose, and went and stood by Barbara's chair with the quiet simplicity of a man who was not self-conscious.

"Do you remember the old place? I suppose you have been here—often—since I was last here."

"No, not for a long while."

"Would you like to see the garden?"

She glanced up at him and rose.

"Yes."

And that was all they said to each other for fully three minutes.

Probably their interest in glass houses, herb beds, and flowers was a wholly subordinate affair, yet it served the purpose of bringing two people together who desired to be near each other for very different reasons. John Gore may have thought the girl curiously reserved and silent. Yet he did not wish her otherwise, preferring her swarthy, pale-skinned aloofness to red-faced and commonplace good temper. Men who have seen the world have little use of people who let their insignificant souls bolt from their mouths like a mouse out of a hole. Hearts easily won are easily lost. The open field has no lure for the imagination; high walls and a mass of dusky trees pretend to

hide all manner of mystery.

Neither of them referred to the brawl of the other night—Barbara, for reasons known to her own heart; John Gore, from a sense of delicacy and chivalrous understanding. He began to talk to her of the days when they had been mere children, and the subject served to sweep away some of the reserve that chilled the air between them.

They were in the fruit-garden, with its high, red-brick walls, when John Gore recalled to her an incident of their irresponsible youth.

“Do you remember old Jock, the head gardener?”

She looked at him with a slight frown of thought.

“Jock, the Scotchman?”

“The old fellow with the bandy legs, and the head that lolled to and fro when he walked. It was just here I played that trick on him. You were standing there—by the door; I was behind a bush with the squirt. I can see you laughing now, and the flick of your green skirt as you bolted into the yew alley.”

She smiled, but her face grew grave again abruptly, as though reproved by some power within.

“How long ago it seems! We have changed so much! And you have been nearly over the whole world!”

He glanced at her as she spoke, finding by instinct in her a sense of something to be overcome. It might be the natural strength of reserve in her. Yet she appeared to him like a girl brought up in some fanatical home where laughter was a sign of carnal inclinations. Her heart might begin to smile, but some habit of self-repression stifled the impulse before it could mature.

“You will tell me about your voyages?”

“If they are of any interest to you.”

Her eyes met his, and then swerved away with a flash of wayward feeling that puzzled him.

“I should like to hear everything. It has an interest for me. And then—you were in a Moorish prison?”

He looked into the distance with the air of a man ready to speak of his very self.

“Prison. That is an experience that grinds the folly out of the heart. A man is walled up with that strange riddle of a thing—himself. It made me learn to understand those old hermits in the deserts. For the devils who tempted them, and whom they fought and cast out into the night, were the devils a man carried about with him in his own heart. Prison makes a man a wild beast—or a philosopher.”

“More often a beast, Jack,” said my lord, who appeared at the gate leading into the yew walk, fanning himself with a big fan that he had borrowed from Anne Purcell.

XIII

On the evening of the third day at my Lord Gore's house at Bushy, Barbara walked alone in the yew alley on the north of the great garden. It was like some dim cloister built for those who fled from the fever of life to cool their hearts in Gothic mysteries. The dark trunks broke, sheaf by sheaf, into groins that crossed in a thousand arches. Its shadowy atmosphere seemed silent and remote, full of an absorbed sadness that spoke of sanctuary.

On the tennis-court beyond the house Stephen Gore and his friends were playing out a match that had been put up for a wager. The women-folk were looking on, ready to hazard a brooch or a scarf on the fortunes of a racquet. Barbara, whose heart was full of a fierce unrest, had slipped away alone into the garden, and even if her mother had missed her, she had pinned a sentimental meaning to her daughter's mood.

The sun sank low in the west as Barbara walked in the alley of yews, so low that the western arch of the cloister was a panel of ruddy gold. The long shafts of the decline came streaming through and through the criss-cross boughs, splashing the trunks with amber, and weaving a checker of light and shadow upon the path. There was no sound to break the silence save the occasional plash of oars upon the river and the faint voices from the tennis-court beyond the house.

Yet for Barbara the sweet sanctity of the ancient trees had no solace and no shade. She had fled there as to a sanctuary to escape from that most fierce and incomprehensible thing—herself. The desire to be alone had been like the thirst of one in a desert—thirst for quiet waters and the shadow of some great rock.

The girl had come to my Lord Gore's house with the purpose of three years struggling to be matured. Perhaps she was a little mad, even as a mind that has brooded upon one shadowy memory must lose the sane breadth of noonday for the more vivid contrasts of dawn or twilight. The fanatical Spanish blood in her had taken fire and burned those three years in the depths of her sombre eyes. For she had loved the man—her father—as she had loved no other living thing on earth. The manner of his death still woke a slow, ominous fury in her—a phase that placid natures might have been unable to understand. Yet the Jews of old were true and elemental in their vengeance and in the vengeance of their God. They understood that flame of fire in the heart that consumes even its own substance till the sacrificial victim has been found.

Yet here was the bitterness of the thing that she should falter before this very sacrifice. It is so easy to strike when the whole heart is in the blow; so difficult when some trick of lovableness makes the courage waver. If only the man had helped her by being gross, arrogant, or contemptible! Yet he was all that she would not have him be, and all that she, as a woman, would have desired had there been no inevitable tragedy urging her on. His very surface, though she rallied herself with cynical distrust, made her incredulous, even afraid. Often she would fling the very suspicion from her with passionate unbelief. And yet in an hour it would flow back again like dark water into a well.

Walking the yew walk in some such mood of doubt and hesitation, she saw a boy's face looking

down at her from overhead—a brown, impudent, snub-nosed face with an intelligent twinkle in the eyes. It was John Gore's boy, Sparkin, straddling the fork of a yew, the dense vault of foliage overhead casting so deep a shadow that he might have escaped notice like his Majesty in the oak after Worcester fight.

Barbara paused and glanced up at him threateningly, angry at the thought that she had been spied upon.

"What are you doing there?"

"Birds'-nesting," said the boy, promptly.

"You won't find any eggs this month of the year."

"Oh, sha'n't I!"

"No, the birds are fledged."

"Some of them sit twice," quoth Sparkin, determined neither to be corrected nor to be crushed, though he had been caught at such a disadvantage.

There was a stone bench at the western end of the yew alley, and Barbara, leaving Sparkin skied by his own conceit, walked on and sat down on the bench, knowing that the best way to hurt a boy is to ignore him. But Sparkin was out on no vainglorious adventure. He had nearly been tempted to interest himself in his master's affairs, for it was a new experience for the youngster to watch this king of the quarter-deck dipping his flag to a thing in a petticoat.

Therefore, Sparkin came scuffling down the tree as soon as he discovered that his ambuscade had failed, and, pushing his way between the yews and a high brick wall, disappeared in the direction of the house.

Making a bolt for the doorway leading into the tennis-court, he ran full tilt into a gentleman as he rounded the corner, and that gentleman being none other than Captain Gore himself, he took Master Sparkin playfully by the ear, concluding that the boy had been in mischief, and that vengeance in some shape or form followed at his heels.

"Hallo! what are you running for?"

Sparkin had no excuse for the moment. It would have been useless to explain that he preferred the more vigorous form of exercise.

"I met Mistress Barbara in the yew walk, captain."

His innocence was sublime. What earthly interest could John Gore take in such a coincidence?

"I was birds'-nesting, and I thought it would be good manners to run away."

John Gore maintained his hold on Sparkin's ear, and looked down at him with shrewd amusement. Then he gave him a fillip, and a gesture in the direction of the house, a hint that the boy had the wisdom to accept as final.

The stone bench in the yew walk was set forward a little from the trunks of the trees, and John Gore, as he entered the alley, saw the girl's figure outlined against the gold of the western sky. This tunnel of shadows seemed to him to lead toward mystery and desire. The figure at the end thereof remained motionless as a statue in black marble set before the entrance to a shrine.

She did not wake to his presence till he was quite near to her, with the sun shining upon his face, and upon the new coat of scarlet cloth that he wore. There may have been some symbolism in the very color of the cloth. The simple richness of it suited his brown skin and the swarthy strength of his clean-shaven face.

"Oh, is it you!"

"You were tired of watching grown men playing with a ball?"

"Perhaps I had other things to think of."

She moved aside and gathered up her dress so that there was ample room for him upon the bench. Yet, though it was done coldly, imperturbably, without a glimmer of a smile, the man whom she had sworn to kill suspected nothing but habitual melancholy.

"Your boy was here a minute or two ago."

"Sparkin? I caught him on the run, and gave him a tweak of the ear to last for a week."

"The child seems very fond of you."

"Perhaps because I have never spared the rope's-end when necessary, and perhaps because he has never caught me lying."

"How did you come by him?"

"A mere chance. He was no man's child—a kind of wild-cat that haunted the river-side and lived as best it could. It was before I sailed three years ago that I saw the youngster outside a Greenwich tavern. He was standing up in his rags to some big, well-conditioned bully of a school-boy, and thrashing him squarely by sheer pluck."

"That is how you became friends?"

"I took him to sea with me, and grew fond of the youngster in spite of his insolence, which I chastened like a father. And the humor of it was that after pulling him out of a Greenwich gutter, the boy pulled a ship's crew out of a Barbary prison. I have told you that tale before."

Barbara watched his face while he was speaking with an intentness that made him feel the nearness of her eyes.

"A lucky day for the boy."

"And for me. We are more than quits. I am here in England." And he glanced at her as though he had meant more than he had said.

Barbara cherished her reserve.

"It was in the autumn of 1675 that you sailed," she said.

"No, earlier than that."

"I remember the year well."

"It was in June, not in the autumn."

"I remember every month of that year, because it was the year that my father died."

She spoke calmly, yet he was startled by the expression of her face. It shone white in the half-gloom of the evening under the yews, the eyes gleaming out from it with a dull fire.

"The month was June; I am sure of that."

"If you say it was June it must have been so. You should know."

Her wayward strangeness puzzled him. At times he was even tempted to believe that what my Lord Gore had hinted at might some day prove too true. The thought roused in him a shock of rebellion at the heart, and an instinct of strong tenderness that woke a longing to cherish and to protect.

"Are you cold here? There is a mist beginning to rise from the river."

"They will be wondering what has become of us."

"Let them wonder. I will fetch you a cloak."

"No. Let us go in."

She shivered momentarily and rose from the bench, drawing a little away from him as they walked up the yew alley together. The east was full of a faint crimson splendor; the colder tints had not come as yet.

Neither of them appeared to have a word to say. Yet the silence was tinged with a vague mystery that seemed to catch the spirit of the dying day. To John Gore it seemed that any memory of that fatal year chilled the girl like the breath of a raw November night.

Barbara went to her room with a feeling of infinite loneliness weighing upon her heart, the loneliness of a gray twilight over a gray land. An utter dreariness dulled all feeling in her for the hour. Perfunctorily, almost blindly, she changed her dress, putting on something richer for the wax lights and the music in the state salon. A procession of dim thoughts moved slowly through her brain, their significance hurting her despite her obstinate self-will.

It was inevitable that the man should swear that he had sailed from England before the month of her father's death.

Had not the voyage itself been a trick to cover the meaning of the past? Neither he nor that other one whom she suspected had betrayed one glimmer of a tragic intimacy. But that, too, was inevitable—a surface hypocrisy that might betray caution, penitence, even a fading of desire.

And yet—and yet!

She stretched her arms out with a kind of anguish of incredulous helplessness, feeling utterly alone in a world of bitterness and horror. Could he be that man whose sword had left her father dead that autumn night?

XIV

My Lord of Gore's coach carried Anne Purcell and her daughter back to Westminster, for the gathering at the house at Bushy had dispersed prematurely, owing to sundry regrettable differences of opinion that had arisen between the three elder women. My lord himself travelled cityward with the Purcells, as though discountenancing Mrs. Catharine Gore, who had been spirited by Lady Marden and her daughter away in her coach to Kensington. For the quarrel, such as it was, had originated in Mrs. Kate's deafness and her utter lack of reasonable discretion, since her loud and irritable tongue had not only set the two elder ladies by the ears, but had driven even her stately brother to a tempestuous ruffling of his dignity. The repartee had verged on coarseness, for Mrs. Catharine Gore was the most exasperating person to argue with on the face of God's earth. Her deafness, exaggerated for the occasion, made her impregnable both against weight of metal and sharpness of wit. And she could retaliate in the most violent and acrid fashion, pretending all the time that she had mistaken the rival disputant's meaning.

Thus when my lord had persisted with some heat and an impressive dogmatism that his sister painted her prejudices too vividly, Mrs. Kate had seized the chance of flinging an explosive retort into the midst of the party.

"If my Lady Purcell had said that my Lady Marden painted her face, it was no business of her brother's to repeat it, and that only fools made mischief wantonly."

And it may be imagined that a few such sweet misapplications of the truth had ruined the tranquillity of her brother's house.

John Gore and the two gentlemen had ridden over earlier that morning, for the sea-captain had business at Deptford that concerned the men who had lain with him in a Barbary prison. Nor were the three in my lord's coach sympathetically arranged. There were three angles to the diagram, and though two of them may have been in geometrical agreement, the third spoiled the symmetry of the whole human proposition. For Barbara had never seemed more moody or distraught. She sat like a figure of Fate with her great eyes looking into the distance, and her face blank and impassive to any sallies from my lord. An atmosphere of dreariness and of apathy seemed to emanate from her, an atmosphere so sluggish and sincere that it blighted the two elders, who would have been buxom enough if they had been alone.

The lord and the lady exchanged glances from time to time. They were wise in their generation, nor were they ready to be displeased at the little romance that appeared to be developing under their noses. The girl had an eccentric way of accepting homage. Yet they understood her to be a queer piece of morose comeliness; nor had she the habit of simpering like other women.

Stephen Gore smiled, and looked with surreptitious shrewdness at the mother.

"Pauvre petite!"

"La maladie des femmes.—Jean et Jeanette!"

They laughed and glanced, each of them; out of their respective windows, not noticing the dull gleam in the girl's dark eyes.

Meanwhile the Don John of their love prophecies had changed his nag for a fast wherry on the Thames, and had landed at Deptford stairs before my lord's coach had come within sight of the towers of Westminster. Picking his way amid the sea-lumber of the place, he hunted out a tavern

known as "The Eight Bells," a tavern with great tipsy tables, and little windows like blinking eyes, and rough benches along the wall.

Within, a parlor full of tobacco smoke, black beams, and copper-colored faces that seemed to conjure up all the adventuresomeness of the wild life of the sea. It was a corner of the world where men about a winter fire might tell tales of treasure, of sea-fights, and all the coarse, quaint, crudely colored romance of the Spanish seas. The mere words were magical to a roving spirit. Pieces of eight, culverins, great rivers with strange names, treasure-houses full of ingots of gold, the far islands of the buccaneers. There men should tell tales of wine drunk under tropical moons, of mulatto women in bright garments, of Indian girls, of prize-money and the smell of powder, and the salt sweat of the bustling seas. The whole strong perfume of that adventurous life seemed to permeate the shadows of that low-beamed room, with Jasper of the guns turning his hawk's eyes from man to man, and talking of the days when the captain should sail the ship that they had already seen and coveted.

Ha!—and Jasper's face grew fierce and happy—they would sweep down the Channel with sails whiter than Dover cliffs, and all their cannon sparkling like ingots of gold! There would be pikes bristling in the arm-racks around the masts; the hissing of the grindstone as the men sharpened their cutlasses. Full sail past Tangier, and a "lookout" in the foretop for any heathen devil that dared show a nose in the open sea. Even a few piratical jests would not come amiss. Jasper had pictured it all to his mates after they had seen and coveted Old Man Hollis's ship, *The Wolf*, lying at anchor in mid-stream. Just the girl to carry the captain in her lap! They would wipe out the smell of that Barbary prison, and set the brass boys bellowing like bulls of Bashan.

They tumbled up from the benches of "The Eight Bells" when the figure in the red coat showed at the doorway. Jasper, old sea-wolf, with ringed ears and a buckram skin, grinned joyfully, proud with the pride of an old Norse pirate.

There was a chair by the rough table for John Gore. He sat down there, while the men formed a ring round him, while Jasper of the guns said his say.

"We have found you a ship, captain: twenty brass cannon and wings like a sea-gull. All her tackle new as a girl's stockings after Michaelmas."

John Gore looked at them all a little sadly, like a man who must speak bad news. He had picked up Jasper's pipe, and was tracing an imaginary pattern on the table. The sailors would have sworn that it was a love-knot had they been able to see inside the captain's head.

"Don't tempt me, Jasper, my man; when you go to sea again, it won't be under my flag."

Bluntly, yet with a great kindness for them that could not be hid, he blew to the winds all Jasper's visions of judgment. Not for a year at least would he sail on a second voyage. The big man regarded him sorrowfully, as though listening to the news of a Dutch victory. The sailors looked at one another and shifted uneasily from foot to foot. A pipe was tapped softly, even dismally, on the heel of a sea-boot. One worthy could find no other method of expression than that of firing a stream of tobacco juice into a pile of sawdust in a corner.

They were like so many dismasted hulks with the spirit out of them, so many disappointed children. Jasper's enthusiasm broke into a last flare.

"Such a little dancing devil, captain, and her guns all like new pins. She ought to carry you, and no one else."

The man in the red coat still drew patterns on the table.

"Look you, my men, don't count on serving under me; I am high and dry for a year or more. You are too tough to rot here in taverns. My business is to see good men of mine afloat in a good ship."

"That's like you, captain."

"We did not fight the *Sparhawk* for nothing, did we? You served me well; I mean to serve you. Will you go to sea as picked men in a King's ship?"

Jasper looked at his mates, first over one shoulder and then over the other.

"That's the next best," he said, bluntly.

"Well, then, I'll make it my affair."

"I can't keep my fingers off a gun or a rope for long, sir, that's God's truth."

"The smell of the tar sticks, lads? Mr. Pepys and the Duke, if necessary, shall be my men. I would rather see fellows of mine in the best ship that carries the King's flag than rolling in some dirty ketch between Dover and Dunkirk."

John Gore called for a tankard of ale, and they pledged healths together in the tavern of "The Eight Bells." Leaving them a purse of guineas as largesse, he returned to his boat, with Jasper and his mates acting as a kind of state guard to the water-side.

"If God won't have a man, the devil will! That's an old proverb, captain, and the King's a better master than Old Nick."

With some such philosophy Jasper looked lovingly on John Gore as he stood on the water-steps and took his leave. Far down the stream the masts of Old Man Hollis's ship seemed to beckon them unavailingly toward the brightness of Spanish seas.

At the Admiralty offices a plump, buxom, bustling gentleman received John Gore with great good-will. Something of a dandy, with protuberant eyes that appeared to have grown weak with straining at everything that was to be seen, Mr. Pepys bundled himself gladly from the multifarious responsibilities of office, and let loose all his heartiness in the service of a friend. It was impossible to be jovial or to enjoy a gossip where so many detestable quills were scratching and scolding over parchment and paper. The dinner-table was the secretary's inspiration. Mrs. Pepys would be infinitely contented at the thought of an old friend dining off the new silver plate. John Gore and the ubiquitous, but yet lovable, busybody departed dinnerward arm in arm.

At home the fair St. Michel appeared triste and a little out of temper. Her husband's hospitality was often inconsistently impulsive. There are moments, even in the best households, when the joints are scraggy, and the puddings like country cousins, homely and out of fashion. Mr. Pepys kissed his wife with excellent unction, let fall a hint that he had seen a new gown at the New

Exchange, and compelled the domestic sun to shine by the sheer vitality of his good-humor.

Jack Gore praised his sherry, and frankly confessed that he had a favor to ask. Mr. Pepys chuckled. So many people always appeared to be in like case. His sherry was the finest sherry in the three kingdoms on such occasions. Some of these suppliants—well, that was a purely private affair! And he gave a confidential and deliberate wink that suggested that he was popular.

"Most revered Jack," quoth he, "you throw a request in a man's face like a twenty-pound shot into a Dutchman's hull. There is just the polite spark at the touch-hole to give one warning, your urbanity concerning the sherry. None the less, I like it. Candor makes me feel quite fat."

"You will get these fellows of mine well berthed?"

"All captains and lieutenants in three weeks! I would have you come and see some of the scrofulous schemers who wriggle in and smirk at me—most days of the month. They are so polite, so considerate in suggesting how I may be made a fool and a rogue. And sea-captains, sir, seem to be the fated husbands of pretty wives. It makes a Prometheus of me at times, I assure you. And as for Mrs. Pepys there, somehow she always has a sneaking preference for the mild and simple bachelors!"

The secretary's wife stared hard at her husband's embroidered vest. The direction of such a glance is considered disconcerting when applied to gentlemen who are approaching maturity.

"Sam is always a fool where women are concerned," she said, with an autocratic poise of the head.

"There now, sir—and I married her! How can she speak such truths? Some more pie? Nonsense apart, Jack, I will see these men of yours well placed."

What with chattering on his own affairs and questioning John Gore on his voyage, Mr. Pepys appeared to forget that there was such an incubus as his Majesty's business. He suggested a drive in the park. His own coach, so he said, had eclipsed the Mancini's, as Hortense had eclipsed the Breton Rose. Then there was Nell to be seen in a new play at The King's, but he would not wink at her. Mrs. Pepys should see to that. And their best bedroom stood empty! A man who had so much cosmopolitan gossip to impart could not be suffered to call a link-boy that night. They could sit out together on the "leads" after supper, and talk till the stars blinked and they both fell a-yawning.

The end of all this amiable bustle was that John Gore slept between Mr. Pepys's best sheets, and spent a great part of the following day with him, looking at his books and plate, drinking his wine, and hearing his new maid sing one of the secretary's old songs. For Mr. Pepys was such a bubble of mirth, such a book of shrewd sense, such a register of anecdotes, that his loquacity and his infinite good-fellowship made even romance linger in its onrush for an hour.

Late shadows were floating down the river before John Gore escaped from the secretary's weak eyes and stalwart tongue. He had some small affairs of his own to attend to in the City and at the New Exchange in the Strand: some new harness at a saddler's; stockings and shirts at a silk mercer's; a case of long pistols at a gunsmith's in a street near the New Exchange. The pistol-stocks were inlaid with ivory and mother-of-pearl, and he left them with the smith for an hour to have his name scrolled upon the barrels. A coffee-house and a *Gazette* filled up his leisure. And not being a man afraid of carrying a parcel through the public streets, he returned to the gunsmith's shop, and went westward with the pistols under his arm.

He took some of the quieter ways past Charing Cross, where the city and the fields met in scattered gardens and narrow lanes. Apple boughs, already hung with fruit, drooped alluringly over high brick walls. Here and there came the scent of rosemary and sage, of clove-pinks, marjoram, and lavender. And through the bars of some iron gate you might see great sheaves of sweet-peas in bloom, or torch-lilies stiff and quaint, or rose-trees with the flowers falling and turning brown.

In one of these narrow lanes, with a high wall upon the one side and a thorn-hedge upon the other, John Gore met the last soul on earth he expected to meet at such a moment—Barbara Purcell, alone, not even followed by a servant. However dreamily John Gore's thoughts may have lingered amid the stately walks of my lord's house at Bushy, he was surprised to see her before him in the flesh. She was dressed quietly, with a cloak over her shoulders, and the hood turned forward to cover her hair, so that she looked more like a shopkeeper's daughter than a young madam from the atmosphere of St. James's.

There was no turning back for either of them in that narrow lane, even if either had desired to escape a meeting. John Gore saw her flush momentarily, with a glitter of something in the eyes wonderfully like anger. How symbolical that hedged-in pathway seemed to her—a pathway where fate could not be eluded, and where death followed her like a shadow!

"I never thought to see you here!"

She looked at him darkly with her sombre eyes—eyes that made him think of watchfulness and waiting.

"Sometimes I come here and walk in the lanes. They are quiet, and one is not stared at."

"You should not walk here, though, when it is getting dusk."

"Oh, I am not afraid."

The unfeigned earnestness of the man betrayed a depth beyond the shallows of mere words.

"Others—may be afraid for you. These paths that seem so sweet and green are often the night tracks of the vermin of the streets."

Their eyes met and appeared to exchange a challenge.

"I have never been troubled here."

"God save the chance that you ever should. We can walk back together, now that we have met."

She had no excuse with which to parry his grave frankness. Had life promised another meaning she might have suffered herself to be touched by the message that his manhood seemed to utter. And to John Gore, walking at her side, the rose-trees that had bloomed in the quaint gardens were budding again into crimson flame. The high hedgerows were full of golden light, caught and held in the mysterious shadow-net of the dusk.

Under his arm were the pistols that he had bought at the gunsmith's shop in the street near the

New Exchange. He little thought that Barbara Purcell had been bound for that very place, where steel barrels glistened row by row in the oak racks against the wall. Chance, and their meeting, had prevented her that day, and her first impulse had been one of anger and impatience. It was not easy to slip away alone and unobserved from the house in Pall Mall. John Gore had marred the first endeavor. She could but pretend tolerance, and hold to that patience that counts upon the morrow.

Yet, when he was leaving her as the dusk fell, she felt like one nearing the grim and incredible climax of a dream. It hurt and oppressed her to be near him, and yet there was an indefinable mystery in his nearness that made her heart cry out against the inevitable doom of all desire.

"Good-night."

"Good-night."

She felt that he stood and watched her with those grave eyes of his after she had turned from him along the footway. And the shadow of the coming night seemed more apparent to her soul.

XV

There are few episodes in a man's life that plunge him into that dim forest world of romance where the woodways are full of whisperings and elfin music, and the gleam of moonlight upon the smooth trunks of mighty trees. In youth romance is a habit; in maturity, a mere digression. The boy is naturally an imaginative creature; he dreams dreams of beauty and strangeness, and of women whose lips suck the blood from the heart. The marriage service sobers him. He ceases his excursions into hypothetical raptures, and becomes the steady, workaday busybody, proud of his house, his table, or his garden, paternally patient with poetical youth. Affection takes the place of that inconvenient thing called passion. To romance he is inert, fuddled—unless one illegitimate fire plays havoc with his respectable tranquillity.

And yet those moments of passion when the heart was all flame, incense, and music, and the world a young world gorgeous with dawns and sunsets, those moments of wistful youth come back dearly with a rush of regret that makes gray reality transiently bright with a faint afterglow. What though it be a cheat and an illusion, it is the finest dream that will ever steal through the gates of day. The man may remember it when he figures at his ledger, and may yearn secretly for that rich, sensuous youth which the cumulative common-sense of years has crushed into a faded, foolish fancy.

There are few lives without one red gleam from the west, one moment of desire when the wind comes with the cry of a lover through midnight forest ways. To feel again that strange stir of mystery many a man has leaped into what the world calls "sin." It is but Nature's living voice: the potion of sweet herbs that she presses upon her children, that they may drink and see the sky waving with red banners, and smell the far fragrance of pine woods or wild thyme. For life must beget life, and Nature weaves her mystery about the hearts of mortal men, only snatching the magic veil aside when her witchery has worked its will.

Now my Lord Gore had passed through many such phases, and was as wise as most men who have studied others and themselves. To remain interested in life the man of the world must be piqued continually by some new plot. A dish that can be had for the asking has less spice in it than one that boasts delicacies from strange lands. And my lord was amused by his son's possible lunacy, even as a man who has been under the table many a night is amused by watching some grave person make a first experiment in the art of self-intoxication.

My Lord Gore and his dear Goddess enjoyed the little drama together, being in such sympathy with each other that they could discuss its subtleties and smile over its innocent blindness. There was some singularity in the case in question. The woman was not what the world would call wooable. As for the man, he was no courtier, and not given to fine phrases. They imagined that much bellows-work would be needed to make such green wood flare up into flame.

My lord and Lady Anne were standing at a window in the main gallery of the house—a window that looked out upon the garden and the music-room. My lord was hiding, almost playfully, behind a curtain, and peering at the mother with inimitable slyness. Anne Purcell stood back a little, so that she could hear without being seen.

"They are not very talkative," said my lord.

"No."

"A couple of sphinxes making love to each other without speaking a word! I have no doubt but that Jack will prove a veritable Petruchio. It will be boot and saddle for him to-morrow, and a canter along the road to York to see how his property doth in those parts. A man must be given opportunities of saying good-bye. It is discreet and amiable of us to stand here chuckling in a draughty gallery."

Anne Purcell held up a hand, a sharp gesture for silence.

"Hark! some one is playing the harpsichord!"

"Not Jack."

"No one has touched the thing for months."

"That accounts for the discords. Mistress Barbara is picking up the old fascinations that girls learn at school. Phew! Jack must be a gallant liar if he can swear that he enjoys it!"

"For Heaven's sake, be quiet, Stephen. I want to listen."

She bent toward the window, holding her hollowed hand to her ear. My Lord Gore pulled down his ruffles and leaned gracefully against the wainscoting. He winced hypersensitively as the harpsichord notes jangled out of tune.

"Well, madam, if you can make anything out of it—"

"Be still."

"For five minutes I will have no tongue."

There was an expression of bleak intentness upon Anne Purcell's face. More than once her lips moved. My lord watched her with an air of cynical tolerance.

Suddenly she straightened at the hips and swung the lattice to with a clash of impatience.

"Tut—tut!" quoth the gentleman, soothingly.

"Did you hear what the girl is thumbing out?"

"No, on my honor."

"That song of Sutcliffe's which the Westminster choir-master set to music! Such things must run in the girl's brain."

A frown gathered upon my lord's debonair and buxom face.

"You are always looking for the snake under the stone, Nan. Why should we worry over such a flick of the memory?"

"Why? Why, indeed! Except that some shadow seems always to strike across my face. You—you should understand."

He drew a deep breath, and expelled it slowly with a hissing sound between his closed teeth.

"If you believe in omens, Nan, we must transfer the sinister side of it to Captain Jack. Pah! what do either of the young fools know? They will help each other to forget every one and everything on earth save their two sweet selves. That is one of the advantages of the disease. What are parents when a lover appears? He has already roused the girl to some show of spirits, and for that, Nan, you should be thankful."

There was, however, something false and forced in the energy of his cynicism, and in the flippant way he tossed the past aside. Yet even when they returned to the salon on the other side of the house, the faint, husky voice of the harpsichord followed them like a voice from another world.

XVI

In the music-room a sudden silence had fallen, like the pause between the two stanzas of a song. Barbara, seated on an oak settle with a cushion of crimson velvet, let her hands rest idly on the key-board of the harpsichord. Her eyes were raised as though her thoughts had been carried beyond the four walls of the room by the music her fingers had drawn from the keys. Yet it was not the pose of one who was dreaming, for she was looking into a mirror that hung on the wall above the harpsichord.

In that mirror—she had hung it there with her own hands—she could see the greater part of the room reflected with all the minute brilliance of a Dutch "interior": the polished floor, the oak table, John Gore's red coat, the brown wainscoting; even the vivid grass beyond the window, and the massed colors of a bed of summer flowers. John Gore was sitting in the window-seat, and she could watch his face in the mirror on the wall.

He was bending forward and looking at her with an intentness that betrayed his ignorance that she had him at a disadvantage, in that he saw only the curve of a cheek, while Barbara had everything before her. His elbows were on his knees, his hands knitted together between them, his sword lying on the window-seat, the scarf a knot of brilliant color like a great red rose. He was a man in whom even a child would have found great strength, and a kind of quiet sternness that mellowed when he smiled.

John Gore had come to her to say good-bye, and she knew the meaning of his coming, the meaning that had come kindling in those eyes of his since the duel that wet night in June. It was a mere man's trick to be near her, and to turn a month's absence to the service of the heart. And they were alone together in that room where she had found her father dead—the room that might prove an altar of sacrifice.

Barbara's white face seemed near to tragedy as she gazed steadily into the mirror on the wall. Every fibre of her heart had been strung to a tenseness that made each heart-beat hard and perceptible. She had put pity from her with the dry cold eyes of a fatalist and the fierce apathy of one driven onward by force of fate. She had faltered too long, clung too treacherously to an incredulous caution. Life had become a dull misery for her, full of infinite doubt and sudden passionate impulses that carried her to the edge of the unknown. Only to grasp the truth, to tear aside the veil of sentiment, to end the uncertainty of it, even if it should be forever! Her heart was emptying of the power to hate. She had begun to distrust herself. She had to scourge herself with memories, as a fanatic uses a knotted whip upon the flesh.

"Is that the end?"

The silence had seemed a silence of hours instead of moments, and she started at the sound of his voice, pressing a hand over her bosom with an involuntary spasm of swift consciousness. She was wearing a loose gown with a mass of lace over the breasts. There was something more tangible hidden there than a memory.

"I have no voice to sing; I shall only remind you of a missel-thrush."

"But the harpsichord?"

"The notes are all harsh and the wires rusty."

She glanced at the mirror and saw the same intentness in his eyes.

"Then you do not play often?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"My mother is no music-lover. And my fingers have grown stiff."

"Why should that have been?"

"I have hardly touched the key-board since—my father died."

She watched him in the mirror, but he did not change his posture or betray anything upon his face. It seemed stern, and a little sad, the face of a man with depths beneath a surface of reserve.

"I can understand that—in measure."

His voice struck a chord in her, as a voice that sings may set a wire vibrating.

"It was here—in this room."

"Here?"

"Yes. It was I who found him. His hands had touched these notes the day before. He had sung the song that I have played to you."

Upon the panel of the upturned lid was a picture painted in an oval scroll of flowers, a sensuous scene from a *fête galante* with men and women dancing and looking love. The colors and the gestures of each minute figure seemed to burn in upon the girl's brain, as small things will when life hangs upon a look or upon a word.

Barbara rose slowly, pushing the settle back, and gazing into the mirror at the man's dark and thoughtful face.

"It was some unknown sword that killed him."

She had turned, and his eyes met hers.

"Nothing was ever discovered."

"Nothing?"

"That was what seemed so strange."

She stood a moment gazing through the window at the flowers in the border, yet trying to penetrate by sheer instinct beyond the man's quiet dignity. John Gore remembered his father's innuendos. It had been a pitiable affair for an innocent girl. It would have been even more pitiable had she been confronted with what my lord had hinted to be the truth.

"Does the thrust of a sword hurt? I have often wondered."

Her eyes were fixed upon him, as though she had discovered the slightest flicker of uneasiness, a length of silence that suggested premeditation.

"Why think of such things?"

"One cannot always help one's thoughts; they come like the wind through the window."

John Gore leaned his head upon his hand, his fingers tugging at his hair, much like a school-boy baffled by a pile of figures. Man of action, and of the world that he was, his ways were often quaintly boyish.

"There may be one pang, perhaps."

"The thought of steel in one's body makes one shiver."

She seemed to persist in her morbid melancholy like one whose thoughts move in a circle.

"Is that the sword with which you fought Lord Pembroke?"

"That? Yes."

"Let me look at it. Strange that such bodkin can be so deadly."

He took it for a whim of hers, and humored her, hiding the pity in his eyes.

"Why, it is not much heavier than a gentleman's cane!"

She held it in her two hands, balancing it, and looking at the silver work upon the sheath. John Gore watched her, grave-eyed and compassionate.

"It is said that the sword suits itself to the age."

"Oh!" And she drew back innocently, step by step.

"Broad and trenchant; slim and subtle."

"Then you would call this a sword for a treacherous hand?"

"No, rather a tool for the man with a brain. Any fool can fight with a club."

She drew the blade sharply from the scabbard, still moving backward step by step till the table was between her and John Gore.

"It was some such sword as this that killed my father."

"Perhaps."

He shirked the subject, as though afraid of paining her or abetting her in her distemper.

"If I could only know the truth! The mystery of it haunts me."

She laid the sword upon the table, quite close to her hand, so that she could snatch at it if things came to such a pass.

"Some parts of life are better forgotten."

"If we can forget."

A great impulse stirred in him, bidding him go to her and take her hands.

"The bitter things remain, and with them—for contrast—the silliest trifles."

He looked up at her with a brightening of the eyes.

"Yes; why, Heaven alone knows! I can remember kissing my mother when she lay dead. And with the same vividness I can remember a wooden horse I had as a boy, a gray horse with a brown saddle painted on his back, and his nostrils a gay scarlet. Whenever I see a horse I think of that wooden horse's nose."

Barbara gave a queer, short laugh, her face firing with sudden animation.

"That is just what life is. And sometimes we see the same thing again—afterward. I can call to mind looking into the window of a goldsmith's shop, and seeing upon a little green board a short gold chain with a knot of pearls for a button. Why I should have noticed and remembered that one thing I can't tell. But I saw its brother chain one night this summer."

His eyes met hers, calm, steady, and unperturbed.

"Where?"

"On the cloak you wore that night."

"A cloak?"

"Yes, at Hortense Mancini's, when you came in wet with the rain. And I thought that one of the gold chains seemed missing."

She watched his face, her hand going instinctively toward her bosom.

"Strange! That chain probably belonged once to the cloak I wore."

"Ah!"

"There was a chain missing and a small scar in the cloth, as though it had been torn away. The loss might easily be answered for."

She steadied herself against the table, feeling every muscle in her rigid, yet ready to tremble when the end had come.

"You had worn that cloak before?"

"I?"

He glanced up at her curiously, struck by her white, set face and the harsh straining of her voice.

"Yes."

"No. The cloak was borrowed, if the truth concerns you."

"Borrowed?"

"I came home from sea with one shirt, one coat, and the other part of me in like proportion. My father's wardrobe came to the rescue."

"Then the cloak was my Lord Gore's?"

"Yes; and his man probably stole the chain and sold it."

He laughed; but on looking up at her again a silent, questioning wonder swept the lighter lines aside. She was standing motionless behind the table, her hands fixed upon the edge thereof, her eyes staring at nothing like the eyes of one in a trance. Yet even as he looked at her a great spasm of emotion seemed to sweep across her face. She turned without a word to him and fled out of the room.

John Gore found himself looking at the table behind which she had stood and at the sword that lay unsheathed thereon. The inexplicable swiftness of her mood went utterly beyond him, save that the words my lord had spoken flashed up like letters of fire upon the wall.

He rose and went to the door of the music-room, moving slowly as one weighted with thoughts that bear heavily upon the heart. The garden was empty, save for its closely clipped bays. Like some wayward cloud-shadow she had passed it and was gone.

But Barbara had fled to her room with a tumult of deep feeling within her heart. It was as though something had broken within her brain, letting forth infinite tenderness that welled up into poignant tears.

She went in and fell on her knees beside her bed. And if her heart found utterance it was in the one short cry: "Thank God!"

XVII

John Gore rode for Yorkshire the next day, mounted on a good gray nag, with pistols in his holsters, and a servant with a blunderbuss, and a valise strapped on the saddle of a stout brown cob. Travellers had to take their chance of meeting rough gentry on the road, and many a nervous countryman, weighing sixteen stone, made out his will before he did so desperate a thing as travel forty miles. The sea-captain was not a man with jumpy nerves, and his thoughts went to and fro between rentals and harvestings and the ways of women as though he sat smoking at home in a padded chair. Put a man in the saddle on a summer morning, when the dawn is coming up, and all the hedgerows are dashed with dew, and he will be moved to sing, and to think well of the world, for the fresh kisses of the dawn leave no stain upon the mouth.

John Gore was thinking of Barbara Purcell; and the mistake a man so often makes is to accuse a woman of whims when he does not understand her, it being easier to call a thing by a name than to investigate its properties. Man is the creature of a superstition in this respect, and if a cow kicks the milk-pail over he calls her "a cussed beast," and as such she is branded. For man, taking himself so solemnly, cannot stay in his stride to find out why a woman has her silks or her worsteds in a tangle. If she weeps, his great solatium is a sweep of the arm and a kiss. If she seems sulky, it is just her perversity, and it is no more use for him to trouble his wise head about her vapors than to ask a February morning cloud why it shows such a sour face. It is nature's business, and man, unless he happens to be a psychologist, leaves it as such and thinks about his dinner.

John Gore, jogging along at a good pace, with the fields and woods all silver under the rising sun, looked back at the hours of yesterday with more thoroughness than the majority of lovers. An ordinary egotist might have drawn some flattering inference from the strange melting of the girl's reserve and her eagerness to escape him. He would have reminded his own conceit that a woman cries, "Shame, sir!" and thinks what she will wear for the wedding. But John Gore was not so ordinary a fool. His thoughts went deeper into the soil than the thoughts of frailer men. And he had more true manhood in him than to insinuate even to his own heart that because a woman played the will-o'-the-wisp, she was luring him on with the lure of mystery.

It was all so simple, had he but known, as all great secrets seem when they are once discovered. Your astrologist goes weaving grotesque obscurities about man's destiny and the stars, till one calm brain sets the whole grand and reasonable scheme in order. Men wrote with prodigious pomposity about a pump. "Nature abhors a vacuum," quoth they. And Nature, like a misunderstood woman, laughed in her sleeve, knowing that the larger a wise man's words are, the less he knows.

That Lionel Purcell's death had left a great void in the girl's life, and that she still brooded over the violent mystery of it, of these things John Gore felt assured. He could put no clear meaning to the mood of yesterday, save that much grieving had left, as it were, an open wound upon the brain, and that memory, touching it, would not suffer it to heal. She had never given him one glimpse of the real purpose that she cherished. Yet probably John Gore's nag would have leaped forward under a sudden slash of his rider's spurs had the man been told what Barbara had kept hidden from him in her bosom. As it was, her past life appeared to him suffused with a wistful glow of infinite sadness, infinite regret. Her face rose before him dim with a mist of autumn melancholy. Her crown was a crown of scarlet berries woven and interwoven amid the dark peril of her hair.

As for Barbara, she had fallen into a strange mood that day when John Gore rode northward out of her life. She rose early, and walked alone in the garden, showing an untroubled face to her mother when my lady descended after taking breakfast in bed. Barbara, to appear occupied, had a basket on her arm, and a pair of scissors with which she was cutting off the dead flowers along the border.

Anne Purcell was a lady who had never bent her back over such a hobby. "Such things were for maiden ladies with round shoulders and no bosoms." And the mother was a little inquisitive that morning, for John Gore's face had told her nothing the night before. Her wishes were all for an understanding between the two, and she was not squeamish. The grip of a man's arm would hug the mopes out of the girl. Barbara needed hot blood to teach her to live and to enjoy. My lady was wise in all these matters.

"It is a new thing for you to touch the harpsichord, Barbe," she said, with that kindness that comes easily when people seemed inclined to shape themselves to one's wishes. "I will send Rogers to the City and have a man out to tune the wires."

Barbara reached for a dead flower, showing off her figure finely as she leaned over the border—but there was no man there to see.

"You can have a singing-master again, if you wish for it, so that you can sing to some one when he comes riding back from the North."

She laughed and looked at her daughter with motherly archness. It was good, at least, to see the girl busying herself even over such things as dead flowers.

"My voice is not worth training."

"What! When some one is ready to sit in the dusk and hear you sing?"

Barbara looked at her mother innocently enough. She was all meek guile that morning.

"My Lord Gore is a good judge."

"Why, to be sure, he shall give you a lesson or two. We must get you some new songs pricked. The old ones are too chirrupy and out of date."

Thus my lady imagined that she had discovered much of the truth, and perhaps she had discovered some small portion of it beneath that placid surface. Dead flowers! Anne Purcell had no prophetic instinct in such matters. And Barbara was glad when she was gone, and the garden empty of all thought save the thought of expiation. She was neither happy nor sad, but possessed by a strange tranquillity, like the first sense of coming sleep to one who has been in pain. She might have been surprised at her own calmness had she been in a mood to be surprised at anything. It was as though bitterness and doubt had been swept out of her path, leaving the way easy toward the inevitable end.

Barbara went into the music-room, and, lifting the lid of the harpsichord, let her fingers go idly to and fro over the notes. So few hours had passed, and yet the passionate voice of yesterday had died down to a distant whisper. She was glad, quietly glad now, that he had gone out of her life innocent and unharmed. There was still the blood-debt between them, and in the consummation of her purpose she would leave him a memory that could retain but little tenderness.

It was a strange yet very natural mood, the mood of one going calmly to the scaffold with all the fears and yearnings of yesterday drugged into stoical sleep. Her one wonder was that she had been so blind, and that she should have overlooked the grim simplicity of the riddle of three years. Now, everything seemed as apparent and real to her as the reflection of her own face in the mirror upon the wall. Her whole insight had seized upon the discovery and accepted it with swift conviction, even as a man in doubt and trouble seizes on the text that answers his appeal. She could have laughed at her own blindness, had laughter been possible over such a hazard.

My Lord Gore was to sup with them at six o'clock that evening. Barbara looked calmly toward the hour, as though her heart had emptied itself of all emotion. There was no anger in her, no haste, no clash of horror and regret. "I shall kill him to-night," she said to herself, quite quietly, as though there could be no other ending to that three years' vigil. Judged by the ordinary sentiment of life, men would have called her utterly callous, execrably vindictive, a thing without any heart in her to feel or fear. Yet fireside judgments are shallow things. No man knows what a hanging is like till he happens to drive in the tumbrel to Tyburn, and the imagination looks for lurid lights where everything may be as calm and cold as snow. It is easy for a man to sit as judge with the stem of a pipe between his teeth and a good dinner inside him. He has no more knowledge of what love and desire and vengeance and death may be than a plum-pudding can know the thoughts inside the head of the woman who stirred it in the making.

At noon Barbara dined with her mother, and in a Venetian vase upon the table there were some late roses sent from my Lord Gore's garden at Bushy. The subtle scent of the flowers remained with the memory of that day like the perfume from censers before a sacrifice. After dinner she dressed herself, and, taking the girl who waited on her as maid, walked in the park and down past Whitehall toward the river. The girl with her noticed nothing strange, save that she was very silent, and seemed not to see the people who went by.

Leaning over the parapet of the river-walk, Barbara saw a barge moored near in, and a couple of brown children sitting at the top of the cabin steps and blowing bubbles from broken clay pipes. The soapy water in the porringer between them would not have been wasted had it been used upon their faces. But they were so brown and healthy and happy watching the bubbles sail and burst that Barbara turned away from the water-side with the first pang of the heart that she had felt that day.

Coming back past Whitehall a troop of the King's guard came by with drums beating and trumpets blowing, and all the pomp of the Palace in their red coats and burnished steel. The girl with Barbara stopped to stare; but Barbara walked on under Hans Holbein's gate, letting a crowd of boys rush past her to see the redcoats and hear the trumpets.

She would liked to have wandered into the fields beyond Charing village, but time was passing, and there were things to be remembered. She went straight to her room on reaching home, and, locking the door, opened an oak coffer of which she kept the key. Lying there on a green silk scarf

were two pretty little flintlocks, their barrels damascened and the stocks set with silver. She took them out and, sitting on her bed, held them in her lap while she ran the ramrod down the barrels to see that the charges were safely there. The scattering of powder in the pan from the ivory powder-flask should be left till the last moment.

Barbara was putting the pistols back in the coffer when she heard voices at the far end of the gallery. It was her mother and Mrs. Jael talking together. Their footsteps came down the gallery, and a hand knocked at the door.

"Yes. Who is it?"

Mrs. Jael's voice answered, bland and sweet:

"Mistress Barbara, my dear, my lady wishes to see you in her room."

Barbara closed the lid of the coffer, put the keys in her bosom, and went to the door. Mrs. Jael curtsied, never forgetting her good manners.

"Will you please go to my lady's room?"

"What does mother want with me?"

"Go and see, my dear mistress," quoth the woman, with an air of motherliness and mystery.

Barbara passed up the gallery without locking the door after her, since Mrs. Jael made a pretence of going down the stairs. Yet the woman was back again, with a briskness that did her years credit, so soon as she had heard the closing of my lady's door. Mrs. Jael appeared wise as to what to do in Barbara's room, probably because of that peep-hole in the wainscoting of the wall. She went straight to the table where the oak coffer stood, pulled out a bunch of keys from her pocket, and, choosing one marked with a tag of red ribbon, unlocked the coffer and lifted the lid.

Mrs. Jael showed no surprise at seeing the pistols lying therein half concealed by the green scarf. She ran a knitting-needle, which she drew from her stocking, down each barrel in turn, holding the pistol close to her ear and listening as she probed it. Then she examined the powder-pans, smiled to herself sweetly, and, putting the pistols back just as she had found them, relocked the coffer and sidled out of the room.

XVIII

My Lord Gore came to the supper-table in the best of tempers, welding fatherliness, gallantry, and wit into one and the same humor. After a glance at his debonair and handsome face the veriest nighthawk out of Newgate might have declared him a great gentleman, a pillar of the state, and upholder of all chivalry. No man could be more gracious when the wine had no sour edge to it. He could dance a child to the ceiling, laugh like a boy, and make the majority of young maids fall in love with him with a tremor of romance.

In the world it is too often self that is served, and the gallant courtier may be a bear at home. My Lord Gore was a man charmed with his own charm. It pleased him to shine upon people, to radiate warmth, to be looked upon as generous and splendid by men of duller manners. Yet he could act generously, and not always with an eye to personal effect. The plague came when his own comfort or his self-love were menaced. Then the great gentleman, the classic courtier, showed the crust of Cain beneath silks and velvets and coats of arms. Cross him, and Stephen Gore's stateliness became a power to crush instead of to propitiate. He could be brutal with a courtly, sneering facility that was more dangerous than the blundering anger of a rough and clumsy nature. For though every man with the normal passions in him may be a potential Cain, it is chiefly in the two extremes of brutishness and luxurious refinement that one meets with that savage intolerance of the rights of others. And it must be confessed that in the matter of sheer selfishness the poet has often eclipsed the boor.

At the supper-table Anne Purcell spoke of Barbara's singing. Who was considered the best master, and did my lord prefer the Italian manner?

"For a man, yes," he answered, quickly, "if he has a bull's chest on him. But give me a Frenchman to teach a woman to sing love-songs. That is the fashion for Proserpine, eh, when Master Pluto has gone a-farming?"

He winked at Barbara over his wine, looking very bland and fatherly, with his lips rounded as though he were saying "Oporto" to his own comfort.

"You might try the girl's voice after supper, Stephen."

My lord was very ready. He had a bass of rich compass, like the voice of a popish priest chanting in some glorious choir.

"Herrick should be the man for Barbara. Soft, delicate lyrics, with an amorous droop of the eyelids. Poor Lionel was too fond of the old Cavalier ditties."

Barbara looked at him with sombre, widely opened eyes. It was not often of late that she had heard him speak her father's name. And that night it woke a flare of exultant anger in her, because of the touch of patronage, as though the dead could always be safely pitied.

"Well, then, let us go to the music-room," said her mother. "I will ring to have candles lit."

My lord wiped his mouth daintily and laughed.

"Next month there will be no lights needed, but chaste Diana peeping through the casements and wishing she was not cursed with so prudish a reputation."

They wandered out into the garden, where a great slant of golden light came over the trees and made the grass vivid, even to violet in the shadows. Barbara walked a little apart, like one whose thoughts went silently to meet the night. Now and again she glanced at my lord, when his eyes were off her, with an earnestness that might have puzzled him had he noticed it.

It was Mrs. Jael who came out with a tinder-box and lit the candles in the music-room. Barbara watched her through the window, noticing, almost unconsciously, the woman's double chin, and loose, lying, voluble mouth. She was watching Mrs. Jael when my lord took her by the elbow

playfully and turned her toward the portico.

"Come, Mistress Jet and Ivory, we must see how you fancy Parson Herrick."

Anne Purcell went in after them, Mrs. Jael standing back as my lady entered.

"You can send the people to bed early, Jael."

"Yes, my lady," and the confidential creature passed out.

Yet what she did was to fly up to Mistress Barbara's room so that her breath came in short wheezes, unlock the coffer, grope therein tentatively, relock it, and hurry down again with a complacent smirk on her fat face. For Mrs. Jael had a sense of the dramatic where self was concerned, and could keep a shut mouth, despite her loquacity, till the occasion should come when she could most magnify herself by opening it. She went out again into the garden, where it was already growing dusk, and, crossing the grass softly, stood at one corner of the music-room where she could wait to hear whether her prophecies were likely to be realized.

My lord had established himself on the settle with the scarlet cushion, and was playing an aria, the rings on his fingers glancing in the candle-light. The mirror had been taken from the wall above the harpsichord. In the window-seat Anne Purcell showed a full-lipped, round-chinned profile ready to be outlined by the rising moon, while on a high-backed chair beside the door sat Barbara, quiet and devout as any novice.

"Sing us that song of Mr. Pepys's, Stephen."

"'Beauty Advance,' eh? A wicked wag, that Admiralty fellow. I have watched him in church trying to discover which girl in the congregation would make the prettiest beatitude. A dull song, very, for so lively a gossip."

My lord had a habit of turning his head and looking over his shoulder, as though he never for one moment forgot his audience.

"Well, has Proserpine a word to say?"

Barbara gave him her sombre eyes at noon.

"There are my father's songs."

My lord struck a false note on the harpsichord.

"Some old Cavalier ditty, fusty as a buff coat! No, my dear, we have forgotten how to carry a bandolier."

"Let the girl try something. Teach her one of the playhouse songs."

Barbara sat with one hand in her bosom.

"There is an old song I remember," she said, with the far-away look of one calling something to mind.

My lord paused and glanced at her.

"What do you call it?"

She met his eyes.

"'The Chain of Gold.'"

"The name has slipped my memory. How does it run?"

Barbara leaned against the high back of her chair. She looked steadily at Stephen Gore, every fibre in her tense as the fibres of a yew bow bent by an English arm.

"'My love has left me a chain of gold.' That is the first line."

My lord furrowed his forehead thoughtfully.

"Hum! go on. I catch nothing of it yet."

"My love has left me a chain of gold,
With a knot of pearls, for a token.
It came from his hand when that hand was cold,
And the heart within him broken."

There was a short silence in the music-room, the flames of the candles swaying this way and that as though some one moving had sent a draught upon them.

My lord turned with a laugh that had no mirth in it.

"A dreary ditty. Where did you come by the song?"

She answered him with three words.

"In this room."

My lady's silks rustled in the window-seat like the sound of trees shivering in autumn.

"What moods the girl has!"

My lord kept his eyes on Barbara.

"Is there any more of that song?"

"There was only one verse to it till I found another."

"So!"

"For to match that chain—there were three other chains. And they were sewn upon a black cloak with a lining of purple silk, the cloak Captain John wore the night he fought Lord Pembroke."

My lord pushed back the settle very slowly. His face was in the shadow, but for all that it was not pleasant to behold.

"Has the child these mad fits often?" he asked, with a jerk of the chin. "She will be wishing Jack at Newgate next."

Barbara would not take her eyes from him to glance in the direction of her mother. Had she looked at Anne Purcell she would have seen a plump, comely woman grown old suddenly, and trying to make anger shine through fear.

"The cloak did not belong to John Gore, my lord. Nor did he know that I have the chain from it that I found in my father's hand."

She rose suddenly, and, swinging the chair before her, knelt with one knee on it and steadied her elbow on the back.

"Father lay over there—near the table. There is a stain on the floor still—though Mrs. Jael was

set to scrub. It was I who found him. You may remember that."

They both looked at her askance, cowed and caught at a disadvantage for the moment by this knowledge that she had and by her hardiness in accusing.

"My dear young madam, you had better go to bed."

Her bleak imperturbability turned my lord's sneer aside like granite.

"Here is the chain from your cloak. I give it back to you now that it has served its purpose."

She flung out her hand, and the chain fell close to my Lord Gore's feet. He did not even trouble to look at it, as though he had no wish to appear seriously concerned.

"We appear to be judge, jury, and witness all in one," he said. "Come down off that chair, my dear, and don't be foolish."

He spoke with an air of amused impatience, but there was something in his eyes that made her know the truth of what she had said.

"You have always thought me a little mad, my lord."

"No, assuredly not. Only a little strange in your appreciation of a joke. Nan, stay quiet."

Barbara had put her hands into her bosom, given one glance behind her, and then levelled a pistol at my lord's breast. The high-backed chair and the settle were scarcely four paces apart.

"I made a promise to myself that I would find out the man who killed my father. When I discovered it I bought these pistols."

My lady had risen from the window-seat and was standing with her arms spread, her open mouth a black oval, as though she were trying to speak and could not.

"Mother, do not move. I will beseech my Lord of Gore to tell me the truth before I pull the trigger."

The great gentleman looked at her like a man dumfounded, hardly able to grasp the meaning of that steel barrel and that little circle of shadow that held death in the compass of a thumb's nail.

"Assuredly I will tell you the truth," he said, at last.

"Then let me hear it."

He grappled himself together, gave a glance at my lady, who had sunk again into the window-seat, and then met Barbara eye to eye.

"Since you seek the truth at the pistol's point, my child, I will tell it you, though no man on earth should have dragged it from me at the sword's point. Good God!" And he put his hand to his forehead and looked from mother to daughter as though unwilling to speak, even under such compulsion.

Barbara watched him, believing he was gaining leisure to elaborate some lie.

"You are determined to hear everything?"

She nodded.

"Have it then, girl, to your eternal shame! Why should the unclean, disloyal dead make the living suffer? Much good may the truth do all of us, for none are without our sins."

He spoke out in a few harsh, solemn words—words that were meant to carry the sorrow and the travail and the anger of a great heart. It was the same tale that he had told John Gore, yet emphasized more grimly to suit the moment. And when he had ended it he put his head between his hands and groaned, and then looked up at Barbara as though trying to pity her for the shock of his confession.

"Is that everything?"

She was white and implacable. My lord's lower lip drooped a little.

"Is it not enough?"

"Of lies—yes."

He looked in her eyes, and then gave a deep, fierce cry, like the cry of a wild beast taken in the toils. It was done within a flash, before he could cross the space that parted them. He stumbled against the chain that she had thrown down toward him. And as the echoes sped, and the smoke and the draught made the candles flicker, Barbara fell back against the wall, her hand dropping the pistol and going to her bosom for the consummation of it all.

"Mercy of me, my dear, mercy of me, what have you done?"

She found Mrs. Jael clinging to her and holding her arms with all her strength. Barbara tried to shake the woman off, but could not for the moment. Then, quite suddenly, as the smoke cleared, she ceased her striving and leaned against the wall, her eyes staring incredulously over Mrs. Jael's head as the little woman clung to her and pinioned her with her arms.

For though my Lord Gore had fallen back against the table with a great black blur on his blue coat and the lace thereof smouldering, he stood unhurt, with my lady holding to one arm and looking up with terror into his face.

"Safe, Nan," he said, very quietly, being a man of nerve and courage; "where the bullet went, God only knows!"

A gray fog came up before Barbara's eyes. She stood like one dazed, yet feeling the warmth of Mrs. Jael's bosom as the woman still clung to her. Then her muscles relaxed and her face fell forward on Mrs. Jael's shoulder.

Stephen Gore put the mother aside, and, striding forward, thrust his hand into Barbara's bosom. He drew out the second pistol, looked at it with a grim, inquiring smile, and then laid it upon the table.

"The child must be clean mad," he said, with admirable self-control and a glance full of meaning at my lady and Mrs. Jael.

"Oh, the poor dear! oh, the poor dear! To raise her hand against such a gentleman without cause or quarrel! Her wits must have gone. I've feared it many weeks."

Stephen Gore pondered a moment, looking at Barbara's bowed head with a look that boded nothing good for her.

"Get her to her room, Nan. Keep the servants out of the way. We don't want any pother over the child's madness. Understand me there; for her sake we can hold our tongues."

Mrs. Jael looked at him as though he were a saint.

"Poor dear, to think of it!"

My lady and the woman took Barbara by either arm. She lifted her head and looked for a moment at my lord, and then went with them meekly, as though dazed and without heart. Whispering together behind her back, they led her across the garden and up the staircase to her own room. When they had locked the door on her, Anne Purcell laid a hand on Mrs. Jael's arm, and they went together into my lady's chamber.

XIX

When Anne Purcell returned to the music-room she found my lord waiting for her there, walking to and fro with his hands behind his back and his handsome face lined and shadowed with thought. He looked up quickly when she entered, a look full of infinite meaning, as though he had felt a chill of loneliness and was glad that this woman shared with him what the future might convey.

He closed the door and casements carefully, after walking round the garden to see that no one was lurking there. Anne Purcell's face still looked white and scared. The horror of a betrayal haunted her as she went to the window-seat, where the moonlight was already glimmering upon the glass.

"Speak softly. I had better draw the curtains."

He did so, leaning over my Lady Anne, and stooping to kiss her before he drew away. Restlessness seemed in his blood, for he kept walking to and fro as they talked, pausing sometimes as though to think.

"Does the woman Jael know anything of this?"

"She knows everything. It was she who saved your life by tampering with the charges."

"She knew the girl had pistols?"

"Yes—by watching through the hole in the wainscoting. She saw where Barbara kept them, and found a key to fit the coffer. Jael seemed to have foreseen something, for to-night she found that the pistols were no longer there."

My lord turned to the table where the steel barrels glistened in the candle-light. He picked them up and looked at them closely, a deep pucker of thought upon his forehead.

"Who would have thought that the girl had so much devil in her! I tell you, Nan, she must have been playing with us all these years, watching and waiting, and pretending to be asleep. And it was a narrow thing, by God! But for that woman of yours, I should be lying there, where—"

He did not complete the sentence, but broke off abruptly, for the conscious shock seemed to strike him more heavily now the intensity of the moment had passed. He looked white about the mouth, and his eyes had a hard, scared wrath in them that made them ugly.

Anne Purcell turned on the window-seat to look at him, and then covered her face with her hand.

"She said that the stain is still there. And it is—"

"Fiddle-faddle! What of that, Nan?" And the evil spirit in him flashed out fiercely. "The girl has cornered us. It is no time for whimpering."

He recovered his serene and cynical poise almost instantly, and, putting two fingers in the pocket of his embroidered vest, drew out the curb of gold with its knot of pearls.

"This little thing came very near ending everything. I shall give it no second chance. Like the easy fool I am I put that cloak away and forgot it, never suspecting that it had left such a clew behind. Jack turned it out of an old chest when he came home shirtless from sea, and wore it that night at Hortense's. It was only when we got home that I noticed the thing, and talked him into surrendering it. She must have cross-questioned him. And, by the prophets of Israel, Jack was near having a bullet in his heart! She said she told him nothing. God grant that's true. Jack's a man with a tight mouth and a kind of grimness that sails straight in the face of a storm."

He paused, staring hard at the flame of one of the candles, and tossing the chain up and down in his palm.

"What are you going to do, Stephen?"

"Do?" And his face darkened, although so close to the light. "Keep the Spanish fury out of danger. What can you desire—"

She stretched out an arm to him, her face rigid with dread.

"No, not again, Stephen. I cannot bear it—I will not—"

"There, there," and he laughed, "how you women leap at conclusions! There is no such serious need. But I value my neck too much, and yours, my dear, to let her run at large."

"Then how?"

He looked down at her steadily.

"The girl is mad."

"Barbara!"

"Yes, mad, poor thing, as a March hare. Mad! Drink the word in, and live on it. Mad—mad! This wild scarecrow of a suspicion is nothing but a shadow on the brain, a shadow of distortion and madness brought on by poor Lionel's death. There are some of us to swear to that, and our words carry more weight and volume than the ravings of a girl. Mrs. Jael must be worth her money. The whole affair will be very simple. Thank Heaven, son Jack is in the country! I can bleed him and doctor him when he returns."

Anne Purcell watched him with a trace of wonder in her eyes. The man was so many-sided, such an actor, such a cynic.

"Then—"

"She must be treated as one gone mad, yet discreetly and gently, as though the family niceness

were to be considered. No idle talking, no news about town. Yet being dangerous, even, perhaps, against herself—mark that, Nan!—she must be put under soft restraint in some quiet corner where she can do no harm.”

He spoke so shrewdly, and with such a meaning between the words that Anne Purcell again looked scared.

“No whips, Stephen, and all those things. I have heard—”

“Tush, my love, am I a fool?”

“But—”

He opened his arms to her, with an impulse of tenderness and strong appeal.

“Now, sweetheart, trust me. We have been too much to each other, you and I. Look at me, Nan; what I am I am because you are what you are. We are on the edge of a cliff. Don’t tell me that I must drag you over.”

He played to the woman in her, yet not without real feeling. She rose to him, and for a moment he had her in his arms.

“There. You understand, Nan, why I want to live. It is for your sake as well as mine, though I shall not see fifty again. We cannot help ourselves. And I tell you the girl is mad. I have said so to others before it came to this.”

My lord put her gently out of his arms, and led her with some majesty back to the window-seat.

“You must know, Nan, that this will be *de prerogativa regis*—that is to say, it will be the chancellor’s affair, and he is an easy man to manage. As to a private inquiry, we can probably slip by it—with Christian discretion. The point is—that the unfortunate subject is confined in custody under the care of her nearest friends or kinsfolk.”

Anne Purcell began to understand.

“But there may still be danger in it.”

“No; trust me; very little. It can be done quietly. There is your place of Thorn.”

“Thorn! Why, it is half in ruins, and no one ever goes there.”

“Nan, my sweet, are you a fool?”

“No, Stephen; but—”

“The country air and food, and contact with some simple couple—what more could the poor wench wish for? An old house in the deeps of Sussex, seven miles from a town. Why, it is made for such a case.”

She looked at him helplessly, for her selfish worldliness had received a shock that night.

“There is no other way?”

“None, unless you wish to feel a silk rope round your neck, my dear.”

They said little more that night, my lord putting on a cloak to hide his powder-blackened coat, and kissing her very kindly before he went. He gave her a few words of warning, commended Mrs. Jael to her, and spoke of the money that should be forthcoming. Barbara was to see no one but Mrs. Jael and her mother. They were to keep her locked in her room till my lord should bring a physician whom he could trust to inquire into the state of the girl’s mind.

Yet there was one thought that haunted Stephen Gore as he walked home alone by the light of the moon without a single torch to keep him company and scare away footpads: it was possible that the girl might turn against herself. And though he tried not to hanker after the chance, he knew how it would simplify the tangle. Barbara’s window stood some height from the ground, and there were no bars to it. My lord remembered these details before he went to bed. He was careful to show the man Rogers his blackened coat, and to tell him that he had been fired at by some villain, but that the ball had missed him by some mercy of God.

Mrs. Jael came down from her attic next day soon after dawn, her eyes red and suffused, her bosom full of sentimental sighings. She went about the house, blubbering ostentatiously in odd corners, dabbing with her handkerchief, and setting all the servants spying on her.

Yet all she would say was:

“Poor dear, poor sweet! The brain is turned over in her. And so young, too! I always was afraid of it, she took it so to heart. Oh, dear Lord, what a sad world it is, surely! The poor child’s made me ten years older.”

And then she would shuffle away, jerking her fat shoulders and trying to smother sobs, so that every servant in the house knew that something strange had happened, and were ready to hear of anything—and to accept it as an interesting fact.

XX

John Gore, riding over the yellow stubbles with some burly farmer at his side, seemed very far from the stately littlenesses of Whitehall. For, next to the open sea, John Gore had always loved the open country, either moor, field, or forest, so long as the eye could take in some sweeping distance. He loved, also, the smell of the soil, the byres, and the old farm-houses with the scent of the hay and the fragrant breath of cattle at milking-time. Much of his boyhood clung to the memories of it all, where the play of lights and shadows upon the moors made the purples and greens and gold as glorious as the colors of sky and sea at sunset.

John Gore had inherited these Yorkshire lands from his mother, who had been able to will them to him by right of title. Her marriage with Lord Gore had not been a happy one, for he had been too desirous of pleasing all women, while she was a lady of sweet earnestness who would have given her heart’s blood for a man—had he been worthy. Her character appeared to have mastered my lord’s, for her nature ousted his from the soul of their only child—a boy, John Gore. She had died in her Junetide while the lad was schooling at the great school of Winchester, leaving her property in trust for him till he should come of age.

Shirleys, for such was the name of the manor-house and the park, had been leased to a city merchant, a man who had trudged to London as a Yorkshire lad, and driven out of it as Sir Peter in a coach-and-six. The farms and holdings were under the eye of a steward, Mr. Isaac Swindale, a lawyer at Tadcaster. The whole estate was worth a good sum yearly to John Gore, and it was with the money, therefore, that he had bought and fitted out the *Sparhawk*, and sailed in her as gentleman adventurer into strange seas.

John Gore passed some days at Shirleys as Sir Peter Hanson's guest, for his mother had died in the old house, and he had wished to see the place after the passing of three years. Perhaps his heart went out the more to the memory of that dead mother because she had taught him to reverence women, and given him that most precious thing that a man can have: the power to love deeply and with all the tenderness that makes love stronger even than death. The gardens and the walks were just as in his mother's day, for John Gore had stipulated that nothing should be meddled with, and the flowering shrubs and the herb borders were there as she had left them.

The spirit of the place seemed full of sympathy for him that September. Its memories had a restfulness that touched him even more than of old. For the thought of his mother bending her pale, serious face over the rose-bushes and the green ferns where the roach pool lay seemed more dear and vivid to him because of that other thing that had taken birth within his heart. He felt that he would have given much to have walked with his mother through those little coppices and the green aisles of the orchard where the Lent-lilies dashed the April winds with gold, and to have talked to her as a son can sometimes talk to a mother, even though he be a grown man with the tan of the wide world upon his face. So near did her spiritual presence seem to him that he would not go to kneel before the stately tomb in the chantry at the church, feeling that she lived in the place that she had loved, and not under that mass of alabaster and of marble that covered the mere dust.

For John Gore had found the one woman in the world who could make the heart grow great with awe in him—as with the awe of unsailed seas. It was sweet even to be so far away from her that he might feel the dream-lure drawing him amid those Yorkshire moors. The memory of his mother shared in the tenderness thereof, as though she had breathed into him at birth that soul of hers that could love even in sadness and regret.

John Gore spent two weeks upon his land, walking in the gardens and the park of Shirleys, and talking to Sir Peter of the great ships and the trade routes, and the doings of the Dutch in the East Indies. Sir Peter and his wife were a grave and homely couple without children, whose simple dignity hurt none of his recollections. Or he would ride over the various farms, finding old friends among the farmers and the men, inquiring into his tenants' affairs, and ready to sit down and take his dinner in the great kitchens with the country folk and their children. For John Gore was more at home in an ingle-nook, with some little Yorkshire maid on his knee, than idling in his father's painted salon with a score of somebodies trying to seem more splendid and more witty than either their estates or their brains could justify.

Now John Gore dreamed a quaint dream the last night that he lay at Shirleys in the very room where his mother had died. He dreamed that he was at sea again, and sitting in the stern-sheets of a boat that was being rowed in toward an unknown shore. It was all vivid and real to him—the heave of each billow under the boat, the dash through the surf, the men leaping out and dragging the boat up on the sand. He crossed the beach alone, drawing toward a little grove of palms whose green plumes were clear and breathless against a tropical sky. And as he neared the grove a woman came out from among the straight boles of the palm-trees, and that woman was his mother.

There is no astonishment in dreams, and John Gore went toward her as though she had not known death, and as though there was nothing strange in finding her there where palm-trees grew in lieu of elms and birches.

But she held up her hands to him, and cried:
"Go back—go back!"

Then there was the sound like the ringing shot of a carbine, and he woke in the room at Shirleys, wondering whether there were thieves in the house, and whether the old merchant knight had used a musket or a pistol upon the marauders.

Yet though believers in dreams might have sworn that his brain had caught an echo of some tragedy that concerned him deeply, how little John Gore thought of the dream may be judged by the fact that he went back to bed, after sallying forth with a candle and a horse-pistol to reconnoitre, and slept till the servant drew back the curtains to let in the sun. For the episode of Barbara Purcell's expiation had become a thing of the past by the time John Gore reached Shirleys.

The day following the affair in the music-room, Stephen Gore drove a jaundice-faced old gentleman in his coach to the house in Pall Mall. They talked gravely together on the road, the rattle of the wheels on the cobbles compelling them to mouth their words almost in each other's ears. The old gentleman wore a white periwig, and a kind of gown or cassock of black silk, beneath which protruded a very thin pair of legs ending in clumsy square-toed shoes. The top of his long cane was made to carry snuff, and the whole front of his silk gown appeared blotched with the powder. His long nose prying out from his shrewd face gave one the impression that the habit of snuff-taking had lengthened it abnormally. The skin over either cheek-bone was mottled with small blue veins, and his mouth, long and curved like a half-moon, made one wonder whether he was smiling or sneering.

My lord had explained the nature of the case to Dr. Hemstruther, adopting a tone of paternal and chivalrous concern that he contradicted on several occasions by a majestic wink. The physician was a quaint character, for he combined in himself two vices that might have been considered mutually opposed. Yet the resulting energy that arose from the friction between these two passions, the love of precious stones and the love of the eternal feminine, inspired Dr. Hemstruther with a lust to grab every gold Carolus he could lay his fingers to. He was a man of great repute, and had made money out of "back-stairs secrets," though the apothecaries and the midwives hated him, swearing that he knew more than a mere physician should.

Now this shrewd, snuffy, peaky-faced little man was ushered about twelve o'clock into Barbara Purcell's room, with my lady and Mrs. Jael to act as guards. The curtains were drawn, and Barbara, dressed in simple black, with her hair upon her shoulders, was lying, in the dim light, on her bed. She sat up and looked at them with her large eyes as they entered—heavy, languid eyes, that seemed to have been empty of sleep.

Dr. Hemstruther made a little bow to her, handed his hat and cane to Mrs. Jael, tossed back one of the curtains, and drew a chair up toward the bed. He sat down, keeping his eyes fixed on Barbara's face, and sniffing from time to time as though he missed his snuff.

"So you are not feeling in good health, my dear young lady."

He had a soft, silky voice, easy to swallow as good wine. Barbara, seated on the bed, stared at him and said nothing. It was easy to see that the girl had suffered greatly, either in mind or body, for the youth seemed to have left her face, leaving it blanched, lined, and very weary. Her eyes looked doubly big because of the shadows under them, and her lips were no longer firmly pressed together. The strain of her sacrifice had broken the heart in her, and she had fallen into a stupor like one whose brain has been numbed by frost.

Dr. Hemstruther considered her with his clever eyes.

"Can you sleep, my dear?" he asked her, at last.

"No."

She was only dimly conscious that her mother and Mrs. Jael were in the room, and who the little man was she hardly had the will to wonder.

"What is it that keeps you from sleep at night?"

"Oh, thoughts—and other things."

"Perhaps you hear voices?"

She looked at him vaguely.

"Yes, voices."

"And they talk to you?"

"Sometimes. There are often voices with one, are there not?"

Dr. Hemstruther rubbed his hands together, forgetting to sniff for a minute or more, a lapse that the sentimental Jael mended.

"Are they the voices of people whom you know?"

"Sometimes."

"And perhaps you hear bells ringing, and other such sounds? Do you ever see the people who talk to you at night?"

She maintained an indolent yet questioning silence. Dr. Hemstruther repeated the question.

"Yes, I have fancied it," she answered; "one can fancy so many things in the dark."

Dr. Hemstruther gave a jerk of the chin as though to emphasize this as a fact worth noting. He drew his chair nearer, and, taking her hand, looked at it attentively, rubbing the skin with his thumb-nail. Then he asked her a few more questions, keeping his eyes on hers, and watching her with the alertness of a hawk.

My lady and Mrs. Jael saw the girl's eyelids begin to quiver. When Dr. Hemstruther spoke to her she did not answer him, but sat rigid, like a cataleptic, her face betraying no feeling and no intelligence. She remained in some such posture till the old man rose and pushed back his chair. Then a deep breath seemed to come from her with a great sigh, and the lashes closed over her eyes so that she appeared asleep.

Dr. Hemstruther watched her for a while, and then turned to Anne Purcell with an expression of sympathetic gravity upon his face.

"She is best left alone, madam, at present."

And he marched out at my lady's heels, Mrs. Jael following and carrying his hat and cane.

Dr. Hemstruther had satisfied a pliant conscience with regard to the nature of the case. He sat—much at his ease—in one of the leather-seated chairs in the room that had been Lionel Purcell's library, and declared his conviction that the girl was of unsound mind.

"I can understand, madam," he said, with a courtly little bob of the wig to my lady, "how much exercised you are in mind over your daughter's sanity. At present it is the calm after the storm, the cool dew after the fire of noon. The pulse is depressed, the brain almost torpid, and she did not even hear some of the things I said. Then you heard her confess to hearing voices; that is a very common and significant symptom. My experience goes to prove that some of these cases are the most dangerous and distressing."

He nodded his head, took snuff with emotion, and looked under half-lowered eyelids at my lord.

"The young gentlewoman must be most carefully watched. It would be expedient to have non compos mentis proven. That gives her guardians the very necessary power to have her cared for and restrained in some safe place."

He was merely advising what he knew Stephen Gore desired in the matter of advice. There was sufficient on which to swear that the girl's mental state was not healthy. Young gentlewomen who fired pistols and made wild accusations against old and honorable friends could scarcely be regarded as either sane or safe.

"Then you advise us to apply for powers of custody and restraint."

"Assuredly, my lord, for the patient's sake. She cannot be trusted not to turn against herself. I would suggest that you send her into the country and put her in charge of some capable relative—some sensible maiden aunt, let us say." And his mouth curved with huge self-satisfaction.

"You prefer the country?"

"Far away from all distractions and all cares. Perfect rest, and a convent life. Then I may hope that God's grace will heal her." And he rose with a bow to my lady.

Stephen Gore touched him on the shoulder.

"Supposing that one of those violent fits should occur? A dose of soothing physic, eh?"

"Certainly, my lord, certainly. I will have it compounded and despatched to you without delay."

That same afternoon Stephen Gore drove out in his two-horse coach, and called on no less a person than Sir Heneage Finch, the Keeper of the Great Seal. My lord and the chancellor happened to be well disposed toward each other for the moment, and Stephen Gore approached him as a friend with an air of grief and of concern. He spoke most movingly about "the child." It was a sad affair, and might have been far sadder but for the mercy of God. Dr. Hemstruther had seen Mistress Barbara Purcell that morning, and given it as his opinion that she was of unsound mind. He had advised immediate seclusion and restraint, warning them that unless she was watched and guarded she might do some damage to herself.

My lord's sympathies were importunate and appealing. It would be less humiliating for both the mother and the daughter if the thing could be done quietly, and without noise or scandal. The chancellor, being an amiable man, and not proof against sentiment on occasions, declared himself ready to agree. Yet since it was a question of the King's prerogative, his Majesty would have the matter laid before him quietly; that was the only formality that would be needed, and no very serious one, for the King was grateful to people who took business off his hands, provided they did not relieve him also of the prerequisites.

In three days the whole affair was settled, thanks to my lord's briskness and influence—and his ability to pay. On the third evening he was carried in a sedan to the house in Pall Mall, and spent more than an hour with my lady in her salon. He had made his plans, and all that the mother had to do was to agree with him and to commend him for his ingenuity.

"We had better travel at once," he said, when they had talked over every detail; "we can take her in a closed coach. And the nurse and her man can come with us; they are both trustworthy people. You say that there are only a gardener and his wife at Thorn? They must be pensioned and discharged."

"Yes, no one else."

"We must have the girl mewed up before Jack comes back. I shall be able to deal with him. He must not know where we have hidden her."

"No; but should he—"

"Prove obstinate! We must find a substitute, or pack him off to sea again. The man has a roving disposition. But listen—in your ear, Nan: I have discovered some one who has taken a sudden liking to Captain John."

"Who?"

"Guess."

"Not poor Barbara—she does not count."

"No, no; but Hortense."

My lady looked at him with open eyes.

"Hortense! Why, she has only seen him perhaps twice in her life. And then—?"

"His Majesty? Oh, Mr. Charles is—well, her banker. It would be like Hortense; it is the blood, and the southern fire in her."

"But how do you know this?"

He flipped her playfully on the chin.

"How long have I lived in the world, Nan, and how much do I know about women?"

XXI

A blustering, cheerless wind beat up over the hills as John Gore rode the last five miles of a three days' journey, and saw the vague glimmer of the distant city clinging to the loops of the river Thames. Scudding clouds made the sky cold and full of a gray hurrying unrest, though it was splashed toward the west with stormy goutts of gold.

John Gore rode over the heathlands, with the furze-bushes shivering as the wind swished through them; and the sandy road was dry and adrift with dust, although the sky looked so wet and sullen. The servant behind him on the cob kept a sharp eye cocked on the hollows of the heath and the knolls of furze, and nursed his blunderbuss for comfort, though his face looked as red and as round as the sunny side of an apple. Here and there clumps of stunted hollies jostled each other, their whisperings making the evening seem doubly gray and dreary. An unhallowed dusk was creeping over the landscape—an unhallowed dusk that made travellers imagine footpads lurking behind the thorn-bushes or the furze.

As they trotted downhill a solitary horseman came creeping up a side track, with his cloak blowing about him and his beaver over his nose. John Gore had a hand ready for a pistol, and the man Tom began to nudge the butt of his blunderbuss against his knee. Yet the stranger appeared more scared of them than they of him, for he went skimming like a swallow into the dusk, itching for his own chimney glow and the warm side of a safely barred door.

John Gore had come by an instinctive distrust of the man Tom's forefinger. He pulled up, and sent him ahead.

"I shall be safer at your back, Tom, with that tool of yours ready to roar like a boy at the sight of the birch."

Tom obeyed him with rather a shamefaced grin, for thirty miles south of Shirleys his blunderbuss had exploded at two in the afternoon, the road running through a wood with a stray cow pushing through the hazel-bushes. A scattering of slugs and buckshot had pattered into the grass beside John Gore's horse; for Tom's forefinger had a habit of crooking itself for comfort round the trigger when the road wound into shady bottoms. And if an owl screeched at dusk along a hedge-row, Thomas would give such a start in the saddle that it was a mere turn of the coin whether the flint would come sparking on the powder in the pan.

It was growing very gray in the west when they came by Edgeware toward Hyde Park, and soon

saw the spires of Westminster like faint streaks against a fainter sky. The lights that were looking up in the gathering twilight had a heartening, warming twinkle. Tom slung his blunderbuss by a strap over his shoulder, and began to look buxom and bold enough—as though he already sniffed a hot supper and felt the ale-mug tickling his beard. They came without event toward St. James's, Charing Village, and Whitehall, and all that sweet savor of courtliness where great gentlemen and roguish "maids of honor" drank wine and let the warmth thereof mount into their eyes.

To John Gore the whole purlieu of the palaces had a mystic glow—a glow that the romance of the heart throws out like a June sun over an Old-World garden. His thoughts were very different from those of red-faced Tom, who may have associated the ogle of a pair of merry eyes with the glint of a pewter pot; for John Gore forgot a twenty-mile hunger at a glimpse of the dim trees of St. James's and the imagined gleam of Rosamond's Pool. And hunger in a strong man is an earnest pleader. Therefore, romance had the greater glory, and even so the queen thereof—a girl in a black dress, with white bosom and white arms, and eyes so sombre that the sorrow of the world might have sunk therein.

The lower windows of my Lord Gore's house were aglow as John Gore and his man rode up St. James's Street with a homeward clatter over the stones. The iron gates leading into the court-yard at the side of the house stood open, and in the yard itself several coaches were standing without their horses, and a couple of sedan-chairs in one corner with the poles piled against the wall. Yet though there was as much talking going on as in the parlor of a river-side tavern, there was not such a thing as a servant to be seen.

As John Gore rolled out of the saddle, being a little stiff after three days' riding, a couple of red faces were poked out of the near window of one of the coaches. The postilions and footmen had taken their master's places, issued invitations to the chairmen and the grooms, and were all much at their ease with the beer-mugs passing round, and one of my lord's cook-boys playing "powder-monkey," and running round from coach to coach with a great can and an apron full of bread and cheese. In one of the carriages that was upholstered in orange and blue a fat chairman had stuck a farthing candle on the prong of a dung-fork, and so arranged the primitive candle-stand by leaning it against the door that the company within had a light to drink by, though the upholsterings might suffer from the droppings of the tallow. Even my lord's grooms were making familiar with plush and scarlet cloth and stamped leather, with their heavy stable-boots planted where a satin slipper or a silver-buckled shoe alone had the right of repose.

The impudent roguery of it so tickled John Gore that he gave the two men at the near window a gruff "Goodevening," coarsening his voice so that they should think him one of themselves.

"Hallo! Be that you, Sam Gibbs?"

"Samuel it is, old codger. Liquor going?"

"A hogshead full. Come inside; there's room for a porker."

John Gore laughed. It was dark in the yard, and the men could not recognize him.

"Whose coach?" he asked.

"This 'ere? Old Porteus Panter's. And pant he would, the liquoring old scoundrel, if he knew what honest fellows were warming his cushions. Come along in, lad. Skin o' my eyes, where's that damned boy with the beer?"

"I'll go and clap the horses in, and come and clink mugs."

He walked toward the stables, leading his horse by the bridle. Catching the man Tom while he was still staring at the dim but vociferous vehicles in the yard, he slapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"Keep mum, Tom, my lad. There is some fun here. Put the horses in, and swing your heels on the manger for half an hour."

John Gore managed to slip into the house by the garden entry, and making his way along a passage, reached the door of the dining-room without meeting any of my lord's servants. Supper was over, and the gentlemen were at their wine, and talking so hard that a company of carol-singers might have struck up in the court-yard without being noticed. John Gore turned the handle and walked in—top-boots, riding-cloak, and all, dusty, and a little hot. His father sat with his back to him at the head of the long table, with some dozen guests talking and drinking on either side hereof.

Seated on Stephen Gore's right hand was one of the gentlemen who had been at Bushy those few days in the summer. He was the first to recognize the intruder, and welcomed him with a laugh and an upraised glass of wine.

"All hail, John Gore! Here are we, all on the right side of the table—as yet!"

John Gore's eyes were fixed upon his father. He saw him turn sharply with the look of a man who sees in a mirror the face of an enemy behind his chair. He was on his feet almost instantly, his buxom face pleasant as a glass goblet full of Spanish wine.

"Jack, my lad, this is well timed! We are all friends here, or should be. Gentlemen, my son, Captain John Gore, just out of the saddle from Yorkshire. Never mind your boots, boy. You have a hungry look, and a dry look. Pull the bell-rope, Launce, and I'll thank you. Supper is the song that a man wants to hear after a hard day's ride."

A boy in a pink velvet coat, and with the grand airs of a lord chamberlain, rose and offered John Gore his chair. The sea-captain bowed to the youngster in turn, though the child's attitude of condescension was vastly quaint to a man who had dared more adventures in one year than the young fop would meet in a lifetime.

"You seem to have left a great many of your friends outside in the cold, gentlemen," he said, still standing, and looking down the long table; "my father has enough chairs, and more than enough liquor."

His coming had brought a momentary lull with it, and not a few of the gentry at the table were staring with some curiosity at a man who had seen the inside of a Barbary prison.

My lord caught his son's words.

"What's that you are saying, Jack?"

"These gentlemen have left some of their friends outside in their coaches. Sir Porteus, sir," and he bowed to an apoplectic old fellow with a fringe of white hair and a tonsure like a monk's, "there are people in your carriage. I trust you have not been too modest."

The baronet stared boozily across the table.

"People in my coach, sir?"

"Certainly. And drinking small-beer when they should be drinking sherry."

John Gore had such a stern and serious way with him at times that casual acquaintances might have set him down as a Puritan, with none of the sly, jesting spirit behind his swarthy and imperturbable face.

"I assure you, sir, there were gentlemen seated inside your coach. My father's house is not so niggardly—"

Stephen Gore caught his son's eye and twinkled. A servant came in at the same opportune moment, having taken fully three minutes to answer the bell.

"Here, Jeremy, sirrah, Sir Porteus has left some gentlemen to wait in his coach. Desire them to join us; my table is big enough."

The man stared, and then appeared in a great hurry to go about his master's business. But my lord hindered him.

"Jeremy, you rascal, come here. Pardon me, Porteus"—and my lord assumed his most impressive manner—"perhaps you had better call these friends of yours in to us."

"I should recommend the other gentlemen to do likewise," said John Gore, gravely; "Sir Porteus is not the only culprit. The more the merrier."

The curiosity of the whole room appeared piqued. Several of my lord's guests pushed their chairs back and made toward the door. But what Sir Porteus and the rest of them said when they poked their heads into the windows of their respective coaches no one but a hostler could possibly confess. The tallow dip on the pitchfork was knocked over by a judicious fist, but not before it had gutted all down the cushions of the door. There was a sudden exodus of stable boots and small clothes into the dark, and from the whistling and hissing in the stable any innocent man might have imagined that horses had never been so carefully rubbed down after a two-mile drive. The boy with the beer-can was the only thing captured, and most unjustly cuffed because his ears happened to be at the right level for the easy exercise of a gentleman's hand.

It was well after midnight before Stephen Gore and his son were left alone in the great dining-room, with the air thick with the fumes of tobacco and of wine. John Gore opened the windows that faced the street. His father was standing by the Jacobean fireplace, with one elbow on the ledge of the carved oak over-mantel and the stump of a little brown cigarro between his fingers. He was frowning to himself, and looking at the dying fire upon the irons, for a log fire had been burning, though it was still September.

John Gore pulled out a short clay pipe and a tortoise-shell box from a pocket. He filled the pipe leisurely, and lit it with a splinter of burning wood that he picked up with the tongs.

"Well, Johnny, how is Yorkshire?"

My lord, like a father, showed no discretion or sense of proportion either in the diminutives or in the vernacular renderings of his son's name. Moreover, the Yorkshire moors were very far away, and a more vivid vista blotted them into the distance.

"Shirleys has changed very little. They have a new pump in the village. All the farms are in good fettle. Swindale seems as honest as such men ever are."

My lord appeared distraught and preoccupied.

"How are old Peter Hanson and his woman? Does she still wear a farthingale?"

"Well—as ever, like the solid north country folk they are. I have no news, save that the new pump's leaden snout was cut off the first week it was put up, and that a couple of deer were shot at Shirleys three days afterward. How have things passed here—in the world?"

My lord put his cigarro to his lips, drew a deep breath, and expelled the smoke slowly, watching it curve under the hood of the chimney.

"Oh, somewhat sadly. I have a thing to tell you, Jack."

John Gore's face darkened perceptibly.

"News?"

"Yes. After all, it may not concern you much—at least—I trust not. We all have our little impulses, our chance inclinations. Do you remember, Jack, something I said to you in this very room the night you fought Phil Pembroke?"

John Gore remembered that something very keenly. His eyes betrayed as much.

"Does it concern Barbara Purcell?"

My lord gave him one look, and then threw the stump of his cigarro into the fire.

"It does, poor child. She has gone stark mad. There's the blunt truth, Jack. If I have hit you hard, take it in the face like a man—and forget."

XXII

John Gore asked few questions that night, but went to his room with a silent and impenetrable air that refused to betray any inward bleeding of the heart. His reserve challenged my lord to decide whether the son was really unconcerned, or whether he hid what he might feel beneath a casual surface. For Stephen Gore had spoken with great pathos of this "maid's tragedy," and had tempted his son with a display of sympathy to make some sentimental confession of faith.

But John Gore had knocked his pipe out against the hood of the fireplace, pulled off his heavy boots, and pretended that he was sleepy after a forty-mile ride and a good supper. He had taken

one of the candles from the table and gone to his room, leaving his father no wiser as to what the son felt or what he knew.

John Gore did not sleep that night, despite the September wind over the open country and the dust that had been blown into his eyes. He had left my lord that he might be alone, and escape that parental curiosity and concern that grated upon the raw surface of his consciousness. For, strong man that he was, he had felt sick at heart over the news of the girl's madness; it had come as a shock at the end of a day of dreams; sudden as a musket-ball lodged beneath the ribs, making him faint with the pain of it and with an inward flow of blood. In those few seconds, when his father had spoken to him, he had realized how deeply he had pledged himself to that mystery of mysteries. It had laid bare the truth to him as a knife lays bare the bleeding heart of a pomegranate.

John Gore left the candle burning and sat at the open window, his arms crossed upon the window-ledge. It was the attitude of one whose eyes gazed out into the night with sadness and great awe, while the soul went down into the deeps to drink bitterness bravely to the dregs and gain new strength thereby. He was still there, fully dressed, when the candle guttered in the candlestick, throwing up spasmodic gleams of light before dying into the dark. The dawn came up and found him there, like one who has kept watch all night on the deck of a great ship before a battle.

With men who live the life of action the coming of each new day brings a fresh impulse and fresh inspiration. John Gore seemed to throw off the stupor of the night as the grayness of the dawn deepened into bands of blue and gold across the east. He shook himself, dashed cold water over his head and face, and, putting on fresh linen and new clothes, went down into the house before a servant so much as stirred. Opening the street door, he met the dewy breath of the morning and all the silent and gradual glamour of the dawn. He was not the man to mope and write sonnets in a corner, or to surrender a strenuous will to feeble speculation. Wandering down to the river, he hired a waterman who happened to be industriously early with a pot of paint down by Charing Stairs, and, making the man row him into mid-stream, he stripped and plunged, and swam a good half-mile with the tide, feeling the fitter for it in body and heart.

Returning, he breakfasted alone, and, inquiring from the man Rogers, learned that my lord had rung for his morning cup of chocolate, which he always drank in bed. He heard also the account of how Sparkin had been sent to school some days ago, for John Gore had entered the youngster as a boarder at St. Paul's. He had been packed off, as Mr. Rogers described it, like a pressed man to a king's ship, swearing that he would desert at the first chance, and cut the servant's throat who had had the insolence to drag him schoolward by the collar. But Rogers, who had been sent by my lord to inquire after the child, confessed that he had found Sparkin more resigned to his fate. He had fought three fights in as many days, and been royally licked in the last encounter. Defeat seemed to have decided Mr. Sparkin to remain, in order to be avenged as honor and the prestige of the past demanded.

My lord was luxuriously at his ease, leaning against a pile of pillows in the four-post bed, when his son paid him a morning call. He lost a little of his dignity in a silk nightcap and a black velvet bed-gown as elaborately belaced as some priestly vestment. But Stephen Gore was still the great gentleman, the man of affairs, the dispenser of favors, as the litter on the quilt testified—letters, pamphlets, a needy poet's new book of poems, bills, petitions, and what not. The man Rogers was laying out shirts, stockings, and silk underwear—preparing for that most solemn ceremonial, the sacrament of the toilet.

"You can leave us, Rogers, for half an hour. If any of my people call, keep them waiting till I ring."

John Gore had opened the window, and stood looking down into the little garden at the back of the house.

"My dear Johann, I am not seasoned, like you, to sea breezes. Please pity my gray hairs, my son. I allow no draughts till I have gotten me my periwig. Hum—ha, what's this! Will your honor put such and such a matter before the Duke of York? Yes, of course, dirty work, as usual. Let it bide. I hope you have got rid of the saddle-ache, Jack, my fellow. My business hour—this; look at all this infernal paper; it is an amazing pity that so many people should learn to write."

He was picking up letters and papers, and tossing them aside, stopping now and again to scribble notes upon his tablets.

"I had a secretary, Jack, for a year, but I distrust the tribe. I find that they are always selling one's secrets behind one's back. Is this a filial visit, or am I to include it among my business?"

John Gore was watching his father with those dark, intent eyes of his.

"I want to speak to you about Barbara Purcell."

My lord threw his tablets upon the bed, and looked at his son with questioning keenness. It was still of vital interest to him to discover whether this sea-rover had lost his heart or no.

"Tell me one thing first, Jack. Had you any strong fancy for the girl?"

"It is four months since I smelled the sea, sir."

"Then she had some flavor for you—beyond the mere scent of a petticoat?"

"Yes, a good deal more than that."

His father regarded him with sympathetic solemnity. Yet my lord's attitude betrayed the fact that even a clever man of the world may prove shallowly pompous in dealing with a son.

"I gave you all the information I have, Jack, last night. If you care to see the pistol-mark the poor child made on me, the coat is hanging in that cupboard."

John Gore kept his place.

"You said, sir, that she believed that you knew the name of her father's murderer."

"Some such madness, Jack. But I can assure you that it was a most unholy, startling incident. I can see her now standing like a young figure of Fate, with a pistol in her hand and her eyes like two live coals. I told her to go to bed, and then she fired at me. Southern blood—Southern blood! Not that I bear any malice against the poor thing, John, though she was so near sending me to my

account with all my sins upon my head. What more do you want to know?"

"Where she is."

My lord pushed some of the papers aside with a trace of impatience.

"Safe, and well cared for, Jack. Dr. Hemstruther's commands. We applied to the Chancery—"

"Where, sir, did you say?"

"The child has everything that can make life easy."

"You have not told me yet, sir, where she is."

My lord swung to one side of the bed, and, putting an arm round the carved corner-post, looked straight into his son's face.

"You want to know the one thing, Jack, that I have not the least intention of telling you."

"And why not, sir?"

"Why not!" And Stephen Gore threw himself back again upon the pillows with some of the dramatic action that he could make appear so natural. "Look you, most obstinate of bulkheads, do you care one brass culverin for the girl? Answer me that."

There was no need for the answer; my lord galloped on.

"Do you want her to come by her reason and her right mind again? You will protest that you do. Of course. Once more, John, my son, would you like to see your love making mouths at you, gnawing her bib, and perhaps shouting like a fish-wife? You will protest, perhaps, that you do not."

John Gore stood very still about two paces from his father's bed. His eyes had a gleam of fierceness in them, for even the possible truth filled him with an impulse to strike the man who uttered it. My lord, who was watching him as a swordsman watches his enemy's eye, changed his tactics abruptly, and held out an appealing hand like an orator pleading for a reasonable understanding.

"Don't glare at me, Jack, my boy, as though I had called some one a bona roba. If I have struck hard, it is for your good. Understand that I am not an old fool, and that I have some sense. You are one of those men who love a woman with the same headlong fierceness with which you would board an enemy's ship. Look at the matter through my eyes. You would only harm the girl by seeing her, for, by God's providence, she may recover if we rest her as we rest inflamed eyes in the dark. It would only hurt your heart, Jack, if you were to see her as she is now. That is why I am minded to keep temptation out of your way."

He threw himself back again upon the pillows, for he had been leaning forward like a preacher over a pulpit rail.

"You must trust me, my son. Some day you may thank me for this. I may be pardoned for wishing the best in life for you, for though you may think me a wild old worldling, even a courtier, Jack, may have a heart."

He spoke with such a burst of manliness and emotion that John Gore bent over his father's hand.

"You are in the right, sir, and I thank you."

And he went out from my lord's room touched to the heart, and awed a little by the sudden fervor of this great gentleman of the court whose flippant splendor had so much of the simpler, braver manhood.

Yet so strange and mercurial a thing is temperament that Stephen Gore lay back upon his pillows when his son had gone with the drawn look of a man caught by some spasm of a faltering heart. He forgot for the moment to ring for Rogers, but sat staring straight before him, his hands moving amid the papers on the quilt. For my Lord Gore, like many a man embarked on crooked courses, was very human, as such men often are. He could not forever be callous in hypocrisy, and a touch of tenderness lurks like a faint red glow amid the cold embers of every heart.

Stephen Gore felt a sudden pity for his son that morning. Something drew him toward that silent, brown-faced man, so strong and yet so simple—so wise, and yet so ready to believe. Yet what was the use of soliloquizing over broken pitchers and squandered wine? He had entered an alley in which there was no turning, and those who hindered him must be brushed aside. To hesitate would only plunge all those concerned into bitterer complexities, and perhaps into deeper guilt. And yet he could not forget that look in his son's eyes, for the man trusted him, and the man was his own son.

"Crooked corners are best left crooked," he said to himself, at last, as he reached out a hand toward the bell-rope. "After all, he need not make an Arabella Stewart of the girl; there are handsomer and better-tempered women by the score.—Come along, Rogers; I am late as it is. Put my plum-colored suit out. And have you stropped those razors properly? They were beginning to bite like files."

Rogers bustled forward with hot water, scented napkins, and a phial of perfumes.

"Yes, sir, they are as sharp as your own wit, sir."

"Give me the glass, Rogers. I feel yellow this morning. Do I look it?"

"A little tired, sir, perhaps. Nothing more."

XXIII

They will tell you in those parts how Waller, the parliamentarian, battered with his cannon the Purcells' house of Thorn, leaving it half ruinous, as a warning to all royalists who felt tempted to trust in the breadth of their moats or the stoutness of their walls. Be the woodland legend what it may, the Purcells were poor after the long war, and Thorn had been for thirty years a haunt of owls and jackdaws—a strange, dim place set in the midst of stagnant water, far from a high-road, and hidden by wastes and woods. From broken gable ends and tottering battlements a red-brick tower and a few twisted chimneys rose against the blue. Even in those short years ivy had climbed up over the walls, pouring over the stone sills of the windows, and growing knotty and stout of stem even up

to the leaden water-spouts of the tower. When the wind blew from the southwest the whole house seemed to shake and glimmer with the movements of those myriad leaves. And through the windows of roofless rooms you could see the sky redden or grow gold at dawn or sunset.

As for the moat, it was a checker of black and green, with moor-hens swimming on it and water-rats making rippling tracks from wall to wall, while here and there great rambling roses, that had not felt the knife for many a year, poured over the brick parapet, and hung in summer-like banners of green flowered with crimson and gold. The crown of the bridge had been broken, and several tree-trunks, ranged side to side and banked with earth and brushwood, filled up the gap. The court-yard gate, a new one since Waller's day, seemed the only unruined thing about the place; but the court-yard itself was knee-deep with grass and weeds at hay-time. In the garden there were stretches of turf that had once been lawns, paths that were no longer visible, roses and shrubs growing as they listed, for a corner of the vegetable-garden alone had been kept in cultivation. The out-houses and stables in the kitchen court were crumbling and falling in—a quaint medley of ragged thatch and gaunt roof timber, falling plaster, and lichened brick.

Yet the old thorns that grew in the grass-land beyond the moat, thorn-trees that had given the house a name and were outliving it, stretched out their flat tops like so many pleading and appealing hands. They were white each spring above the green rushes, the brown mole-heaps, and the dew-wet grass. And in the winter the birds flocked to them and fed upon the red berries, welcome, indeed, when the turf was frost-bound or when the snow lay deep. So the old thorns lived on as they had lived for generations, while "Thorn" crumbled brick by brick, and the ivy, as though yearning to hide its nakedness, made it dim with glimmering green.

Thorn had its ghost, and no Sussex churl would come within half a mile of it when dusk began to fall. An old Scotch gardener and his wife had lived there some ten years, warm and snug in the rain-proof kitchen, daring the devil and all spirits and insects with a handful of good sulphur. MacAlister and his dame had been given their quittance that autumn, and had been packed off into some distant county, no man knew why or where, and no man cared. The owls might fledge their broods, the jackdaws build in the chimneys, and the place be given up to all manner of mystery and ghostliness. None had troubled in those parts about Thorn, save one farmer who had needed a new barn, and had driven a wagon over to thief bricks, and come away with such a scaring that every one believed him when he swore the place was cursed.

There were ghosts at Thorn that autumn—but solid, hungry, and most gluttonous ghosts, who seemed to have abundance of good beer and food stowed away in the huge cupboards of the kitchen. The kitchen and the two rooms over it had been made habitable for the MacAlisters, and were now used by the new spirits who haunted Thorn—a big, stocky man, with a back like a flagstone; a comely, broad-hipped woman, with black eyes and a tight, hard face. They had come there suddenly, when the moon was full, walking by the woodland track from a great black coach that had set them down upon the high-road.

One evening in October, as the dusk was falling, the figure of a man, a burly blotch of darkness in the half light of the yard, came across from an out-building that was used as a wood-shed with an apron full of oak blocks for the fire. Farmer Knapp, he who had come to steal bricks, had told how he had come to the gate of Thorn and had seen through the grill, not a foot from his own eyes, a great white face as big as the moon when full. Farmer Knapp had not taken a second look, and, although it was only three in the afternoon, he had jumped into his wagon and driven off with his cart-horses lumbering at a canter. Now the man who crossed the court-yard, carrying his billets of wood, had a piece of white cloth covering his face, tied under the chin and about the forehead, with two holes for the eyes and a slit where the mouth should be.

The huge calves of the man's legs rubbed together as he walked, and under the brim of his beaver his pate was as bald as the ivory knob of a gentleman's cane. He went down into the kitchen by three steps and a short passageway, and tumbled his wood into a corner of the open hearth.

At the table the woman was stirring something in a basin. A big black pot hung on a rack and chain over the fire, and on the bricks before the hearth lay a dog of the mastiff breed, who lifted his head and blinked when the man entered.

"Supper ready?"

"Throw some more wood on, Sim, will ye?"

The man tossed two or three blocks into the red heart of the fire, pulled a rough settle forward with one foot, and sat down and stared at the pot. The firelight glittered on the eyes behind the white cloth, showing up the red lids unshaded by the trace of an eyelash.

"Lord, what a dull hole this is, or I'm saved!"

The woman had her sleeves turned up, and her big forearms were brown and comely.

"Dull," said the man, "when there's plenty to eat?"

"And drink, Sim?"

"Better than Tyburn or Newgate, anyway. Only there ain't nothing to lay one's fist to; not so much as a dog for old Blizzard to take by the throat."

"Turn smuggler, my dear, if you want to let blood."

The man sniffed at the pot.

"Smuggler? No, thank ye; we don't want none of those gentry inside Thorn. Stodging about the country for a keg of liquor when we can have it for going to the cupboard! This deuced viz of mine smarts like hot Hollands to-night."

He untied the strings and turned the mask up, but the woman did not look at him, it being near supper-time and food upon the table. They were not Sussex folk, nor even country people, by their speech, but gentry whose childhood had been passed within hail of Southwark or the Savoy.

"Who's going to carry the girl's food up to-night?"

The man took an oil flask and a piece of linen from the long shelf above the open fireplace. Over the shelf hung a long gun and a couple of heavy pistols, also a seaman's cutlass and a pair of iron wristlets. He dropped some of the oil on the rag, and began to dab his face with it, blinking his red

lids like an owl.

"Take it up yourself, Nance; I'm tired."

She looked at him with a shrewish lift of the chin.

"Tired, you great hulk! Dang those rickety stairs, they make my knees ache; a bat put the candle out last night. Mother of God! I wouldn't be here another week but for the doubloons! Think of the smell of the sausage shops and the snug little taverns Southwark way! I would give a gold Jacobus to sniff the river mud at low water. They might take us for papists from St. Omer; as for the girl—Black Babs, she's no more mad than I am."

The woman had a certain air of culture—the culture, perhaps, of a bold and clever orange girl who had caught some of the courtliness of the playhouses and the gardens.

"So we are papists," quoth the man, still dabbing his face, "and to say whether a wench is mad or not is none of our business."

"It's my business, Sim, to see no one drops a noose over my neck."

"Noose be damned! When a great gentleman opens his purse, you slut, wise folk ask no questions."

"P'r'aps not. Lift the pot off. My Lord Pomposity wishes the girl mad, I gather, and mad she will be in six months, with the winter coming—or, maybe, stiff as a frozen bird. Then it will be old Drury and Whitefriars again."

"As likely as not. Captain Grylls will be black-guarding it this way with orders before long. They must get us fresh supplies sent in before December."

"That's the real business of life, Sim, to be sure. There's the girl's bread and dripping. Run up with it like a good lad, or I shall spoil the pudding. You had better take the lantern; the old tower is full of bats and draughts."

The man put the oil flask on the shelf, and, dropping the white cloth over his face, took down a horn lantern from a beam and lit the candle in it with a burning brand from the fire. He trod on the dog's paw in the doing of it, and gave the beast his boot in the ribs because he presumed to snarl at him.

"Anything to wash it down?"

"I filled the jug this morning."

Simon Pinniger picked up the pewter plate and marched off swinging the lantern. From the kitchen a passage led to what had been the hall, now rafterless, with the stars blinking between ivied walls. A flight of steps led to a door that opened into the lower story of the tower. Simon put the lantern down, pulled out a key, and, unlocking the door, picked up the lantern again and began to climb the interminable stair. Thud, thud, thud, up into the darkness, with the light from the lantern swinging this way and that, and the raw cold of the autumn night breathing in at the open squints, and through the shot-holes that could be seen here and there in the walls. Simon Pinniger climbed sixty steps or so, passing two narrow landings before he came to a door with a bar across it. He put down the lantern, unlocked the door, lifted the bar that worked upon a pin, and, opening the door about a foot, pushed the plate in with the toe of his boot.

"Supper," was all he said.

Then, after the turning of the lock and the creaking of the bar, the thud, thud died down again into the darkness of the stair.

Only one thing moved for the moment in the tower-room, and that a mouse, who came out boldly to nibble at the bread on the pewter plate. A single window, high up in the wall and closed with stanchions, let in the brown gloom of the dusk and the glitter of a star. There was no fire, no furniture to speak of, and nothing that could be broken and used as an edge to cut and wound.

In one corner stood a truckle-bed, and sitting thereon a still, shadowy figure whose face showed a gray oval in the darkness. The place seemed far above all sound, though the wind might moan there and shake the ivy on the wall.

The figure rose from the bed and moved toward the door. It went on its knees there, and with cold hands began to crumble some of the rough bread. A tiny shadow crept up toward the white fingers and took crumbs. It was so little a thing, too small to be caressed, yet it had grown tame in one short month, and, above all, it was alive.

Barbara, kneeling there, fed the mouse with crumbs, and ate some mouthfuls of the bread herself. For there was nothing for her to do at Thorn but to watch for this friend at dusk, or for the white pigeons that sometimes flew up to her window during the day. She could see nothing of the world, not even the waving woods, but only the clouds moving and a few stars at night. One book they had given her, and that an old Bible bound in faded red leather. She had read it twice from cover to cover, sometimes with listlessness, sometimes with fierce hunger, sometimes with tears. And for an hour or more she would sit on the bed and think, her white face thin and questioning, but with no madness in her eyes.

XXIV

There was a shadow of unrest over England that year, as though each man distrusted his neighbor, and was ready to accuse his own friend of treason and papish practices, of taking the French King's money, or of complicity in some wild and improbable plot. There had been no rush of the mob as yet, no Protestant fury, but the discontent and the fear and the distrust were there, spread on either side by vague whisperings and all manner of monstrous rumors. Men were seen to sit cheek by jowl in the taverns, and talk of an armed landing, of a second Massacre of St. Bartholomew, when all good Protestants were to be murdered in their beds. There were tales of Jesuits swarming over the country-side like silent, night-flying moths. The Catholic lords had long been arming, so it was said, and were ready even to murder his Majesty the King, and set up the

Duke of York, that morose-faced inquisitor, in his stead.

John Gore, who had suspected his father of being trammelled up in some secret undertaking, had called on my Lady Purcell one gray afternoon, and was walking home alone across the park, taking a circuit so as to pass by Rosamond's Pool. He had been often of late to the house in Pall Mall, drawn thither by instincts that he could not smother. He went to hear news, and more than once he had spoken to Anne Purcell of her daughter; but my lady had set her mouth very firmly, and made him believe that the affair was too poignant for her. He had even questioned Mrs. Jael quietly, and the woman had drawn two gold pieces from him with her emotional loquacity and the trickle of tears down her plump cheeks.

My lord had advised patience, and John Gore had done his best to abide by the advice, suspecting no treachery in it, and hoping for all that God might give. Yet often he rebelled against his blindness, yearning but to know the place where they had hidden her away. The truth might have been had by bribery, but John Gore had no reason as yet to persuade him to bribe his father's servants, nor would he have stooped to such a thing without great need. Yet the girl had vanished out of the world, and there was no horizon toward which he might turn his eyes and know that she was there, like a light beyond the hills. In his heart he kept her image bright, even as she had appeared to him those summer days, swarthy and sorrowful, with silent lips and watchful eyes.

Dusk was falling as John Gore crossed the park, and there were few people strolling along the paths. He had come close to Rosamond's Pool when he saw two figures leaning over the rail, with the collars of their cloaks turned up and their hats down over their eyes. They turned from the water as John Gore came by, and even in the dusk he recognized the taller of the two as Stephen Gore, his father.

The son stopped, and saw his father give a tug to the shorter man's cloak.

"Well met, Jack; you are the man I want. This, Captain Grylls, is that son of mine who has sailed a ship farther than any of your sea-going braves."

My lord's companion bowed and lifted his hat. He was pock-marked and somewhat overdressed, with a hook nose and a sharp, dry mouth. One of his shoulders appeared higher than the other, and his head set a little askew upon his neck.

"The great navigator! Proud to approach you, sir; we are mere duck-pond gentry, some of us, though we may have fought the Dutch."

His nose wrinkled queerly when he smiled, and he displayed a row of teeth discolored by tobacco. John Gore judged the man to be a rogue, and a hanger-on to the skirts of patrons about the court. His eyes had a knack of seeming to look both ways, and no doubt he would have been pleased if he had been able to see behind him like a hare.

"Attend to this little affair of mine, Grylls. I shall expect you some day this week."

"Yes, my lord; you know me to be as steady as a clock."

"Yet clocks need winding, Grylls."

The man laughed politely as though he saw the gilt edge of the jest, and, lifting his hat, moved away with the discretion of an underling who has learned to tell instantly when he is no longer wanted.

My lord opened his cloak and set his hat at a happier angle.

"Come along, Jack; I have business for you to-night."

Now John Gore carried one matter uppermost in his mind that evening. My lord seemed to read the nature of his son's thoughts, and dashed any illusion with the candor of a friend.

"No, nothing of that kind, Jack; I had news this morning. She is well in body, but she has not changed greatly yet in soul. Put it behind you, and wait for the best. After all, there are stirring things to be done in the world, and a maid should not make a man's blood turn to milk."

John Gore walked on in silence, his father humming a tune that sounded very much like a chant. For my Lord Stephen was a papist, though the conversion had not come till his maturer years, and whether it had been a question of conscience or of statecraft none but a Jesuit could have explained.

"Who was the man you were talking with by the Pool?"

"Grylls? A poor, willing kind of rogue who has learned to make himself of use. Small fry, Jack, to float in shallow streams. I have deeper waters for you, sir, with all your guns and tackle."

There was a gleam of grimness in his eyes as he spoke.

"The Bible sayeth, Jack, 'Put not your trust in princes.' A wise saying, truly; yet I have a wiser, and that, sir, is, 'Put not your faith in the mob.' Trust the sheep-dog, and watch the wag of his tail, rather than bump and scurry and run with the flock. Yonder lies our anchorage."

A house rose before them amid the trees, its windows dark save for one in the first story, and that dim with the shadow of drawn curtains. John Gore recognized it as the house of Hortense. They were crossing the ground where he had fought my Lord Pembroke that wet night in summer.

"Is your call there, sir?"

Stephen Gore glanced this way and that, and then laid a hand on his son's shoulder.

"Yes. Join with me, Jack; there are nobler prizes to be won here than you will ever take at sea."

They entered the Mazarin's house through the little garden door, behind which some one seemed to have been waiting, for it was opened directly my lord had given five sharp knocks. The door closed behind them, and in the dim light John Gore saw the janitor was a woman. My lord walked straight ahead toward a back stairway as though he knew the intimate secrets of the house. John Gore was following him, when he felt the woman touch his arm.

"Of your curtesy, sir, the lock has caught; will you turn it for me?"

She spoke with a slightly foreign accent, drawing out every syllable with quaint directness.

"Have you the key?"

"Here it is, sir. Fie, now, I have dropped it; how very clumsy!"

She began to draw her skirts this way and that in the narrow passage, peering for the thing in the dark, and even sweeping the floor with her hands. John Gore bent down to help her. And in the

quest the woman's hair brushed up against his cheek.

She gave a sudden, thrilling little laugh, and took John Gore softly by the ear.

"So you have come to join us, Signor Giovanni? That is very sweet of you. We need brave men."

To be held by the ear by a waiting-woman surprised the sea-captain for the moment. He took a firm but meaning hold upon the lady's wrist. But with the other hand she put back the hood of the cloak she wore.

"Ah, how good! I have played a trick upon you both. Have you never been held by the ear, Sir John, by some pretty little waiting-maid? Now do not pretend, Sir John; I shall be able to tell a different tale."

She seemed to grow taller suddenly, and to radiate splendor even in the dusk. Her voice changed also from a mincing treble to a full contralto that seemed made for song.

John Gore knew that it was Hortense.

"Madam," he said, "I beg your pardon."

She laughed with mischievous charm, and drew her hand away slowly so that it brushed his cheek.

"How simple of you, Sir John. And yet you can handle a sword so well. Shall we follow my lord?"

"And the key?" he asked, with a glance at the floor.

"Is in the lock. And the lock is turned. So you see!"

She dropped the cloak that she was wearing, and as they ascended into the light he could see the splendor of her dress gleam up gradually, the color of her hair, and the compelling beauty of her face. Her eyes seemed full of sparkles of light; her lips red, soft, and mobile, as though on the brink of a smile.

She paused at the head of the stairway, and stretched out an arm across the passage that led toward a room whence light and the sound of voices came. John Gore paused also, and she stood and looked into his eyes with an earnestness that made him color.

"I am serious now, Sir John. We are risking our necks here; it may be no mere supper-party and a trifling loss at cards. You are young—and, then, you have been in other lands. And yet, after all, I am speaking to you as though you were a boy."

For the moment he could only look at her, for she was so very lovely and so womanly that it was not in a man's nature not to look.

"I am in the dark," he said, at last.

"Are you afraid of the dark?"

"I have dared it before—for the sake of adventure."

She still stood regarding him with her great eyes, so liquid, so mysterious, and perhaps a little sad. John Gore saw her press something to her bosom, and when she took her hand away he saw that it was a little silver crucifix hung by a chain about her neck. Her lips moved as though she were repeating some Latin prayer.

"Fides sanctissima, Maria beatissima, Pater-noster in cœlo."

And then she swept forward toward the room, and John Gore followed her lest she should think him afraid.

The room was quite small, panelled with dark oak, and with a fire burning upon the open hearth at one end. A long table stood in the centre. About it were seated some half a score men, and at the head thereof, in a great leather-backed chair, Coleman the Jesuit, chaplain to the Duchess of York.

My Lord Gore exchanged glances with Hortense.

"It was you, then, most magical Dian, playing porter at the door. I wondered what had become of our friend here. Had I known—" And he laid a hand over his heart.

Hortense turned her head for an instant with an audacious flash of the eyes at John Gore.

"I will not betray him, but he wished to help a woman find a key that she had not dropped, gallant Sir John!" And the look she gave him would have made the greatest epicure push his plate aside and talk.

Father Coleman, infamous or sainted Coleman, as men were soon to call him, sat at the head of a table that was covered, not with papers and epistles, but with dishes of fruit, wineglasses, bottles, comfits, and spiced cakes. The gentlemen about it appeared to have easy consciences and pleasant thoughts. They were debonair, familiar, talkative, very much in the grace of pleasure. The panelling of the room was fanatical and austere, yet the Duchess's chaplain had cheerful cheeks and vivacious eyes, and bore himself with that easy-flowing worldliness that carries a clever priest into the intimate life of palaces.

It might have been nothing more than a gathering of lords and gentlemen who gossiped over their wine, comparing their views, and exchanging the ordinary news of the day. There appeared to be no elaboration of secrecy, no self-conscious sense of urgent peril. They ladled out punch, or filled their wineglasses, smiling across the table at one another, and listening to little pieces of scandal with the ingenuous cheerfulness of country ladies over their dishes of tea.

All of those present appeared very interested in the breeding of race-horses, and the technicalities of the sport were bandied to and fro, even Father Coleman appearing to be possessed of very pronounced views upon so unpriestly a subject. They talked much of a famed French horse named "Soleil d'Or," and also of a Dutch stallion whose breed none of the gentry seemed to fancy. There were a great number of noted beasts in the shires whose names and points were familiar to the whole table. "Norfolk Joe," "Northern Star," "Jenny of Cheshire," "Hertford Prince"—such were some of the many titles that John Gore heard passing from mouth to mouth. Being a seaman, he felt himself out of touch with the "horse gossip" of the day. That some gentleman contemplated introducing a stud of French mares into the country was news whose significance was largely lost to him. He knew very little of Italian roans and Spanish jennets, nor why "Oak Apple" should be spoken of as a sire who had not been properly watched.

There was no coarseness in their gossiping, and John Gore, who sat at one corner of the table close to Father Coleman and Hortense, saw no need for either the priest or the lady to look

embarrassed. The gentlemen were still intent upon the topic when the Mazarin leaned over the side rail of her chair and drew a plate of grapes toward her.

She cut a small bunch, and began to eat the grapes one by one, doing it so daintily that it was good to watch her white hands and her full red mouth. She glanced now and again at the man beside her with a charming suggestion of coy interest in him that contrasted with the mischievous mood of an hour ago.

"You know more of ships than of horses, Sir John?"

She gave him the title as though it provided her with an excuse for mouthing two very pretty syllables where one might have sounded blunt and clumsy.

John Gore looked at her with his grave eyes and smiled.

"At the Nore you would have heard ships talked of in much the same fashion."

"Yes. A sea-captain must love his ship as an Arab loves his horse."

"If she can spread her wings well and swing her shot home into an enemy."

"Truly, Sir John, even I should love to go to sea, and sail away for leagues and leagues—away to those dim islands where everything is new and strange. I feel like a little ignorant girl when I think of what you men of the sea have seen."

She looked at him so delightfully, with her eyes full of wonder and interest, that a far stronger man than Ulysses might have lingered to tell her of the splendors of unsailed seas. John Gore discovered himself in Calypso land, with white hands pushing dishes of fruit toward him and proffering Spanish wine.

He was telling her of the grim passage of Cape Horn, and of the savages who lived in those wild parts, when a sudden gleam from his inner consciousness swept across his mind. He remembered how he had told the same tales to that silent, sad-eyed girl whose life had had no glamour of homage in it, and whose tragic face looked out at him from a mist of madness.

He grew silent quite suddenly, bringing his voyages to a clumsy and confused end, and not noticing the questioning look in Hortense's eyes. He felt instinctively that she was nearer to him than he wished. Her beauty became a sudden glare, clashing with something more spiritual, more mysterious, and more strangely sad. He was glad when some of the gentlemen rose and began to kiss Father Coleman's hand.

They went down by the same stairway, Hortense herself lighting them with a little Italian lamp. She was very close to John Gore in the passageway. Her dress brushed against him, while the lamp she carried made her beauty seem softly brilliant amid the shadows.

"Good-night, my lord; good-night, Sir John; I hope we have not frightened you very greatly?"

She searched him with her great eyes, so full of intentness for the moment that he felt their power and could not look away.

"You must tell me more of those wild seas, the great rivers, and the Indians, the gold and the pearls."

He bowed to her a little gauchely, but did not touch her hand, and he had a last glimpse of her standing there with the glow from the lamp upon her face as he went out into the night.

My lord appeared in excellent spirits as they walked home together in the dark. His son had a silent mood upon him, and Stephen Gore found nothing in his silence to be reproved.

"Pearls and gold and strange lands. That is Hortense," he said, suddenly, as they entered the broad street; "a splendid creature, too—in heart as well as in body."

John Gore walked on with no sound save the crisp beat of his feet upon the stones.

"What was the meaning of it all, sir?" he asked, at last.

"Meaning, Jack?"

"Yes."

"Why, just what you please, my lad. We choice spirits and good Catholics love to have our gossip, and you can find in it just as much as you wish to know. You must come with me again, and tell the lady more about the pearls and the gold and the strange lands. I tell you, John Gore, there is something for you to discover more mysterious and alluring than anything Cortés and all the Spaniards discovered in the New World over the sea."

XXV

In the salon of the Purcells' house in Pall Mall there hung a portrait of the Spanish lady whom the Purcell of Queen Bess's days had won with the romantic daring of an adventurer's sword. It was the portrait of a young woman in a quaint stiff dress of black and gold, her dark hair curled loosely about her head, and her black eyes looking down out of a proud and rather peevish face.

The portrait was touched by a ray of sunlight that October morning when John Gore stood beneath it, finding a strange and wistful familiarity in the Spaniard's face. He was waiting in the salon for my Lady Purcell, being the bearer of a letter from his father, who had ridden suddenly into the eastern counties, giving no other reason than that of business with a friend. These Purcell pictures had been familiar to John Gore from his boyhood, yet they were full of a deeper significance for him now as he searched face after face, but especially that of the lady in black and gold. There was a stretch of landscape in one corner of the picture, the one sunlit space upon the canvas, a scene of meadows and of woodlands, with a mansion of red brick rising from the narrow waters of a moat. John Gore guessed it to be the Purcells' house of Thorn, now ruinous in a Sussex waste, but once the home of the fair Spaniard with the peevish mouth.

He was looking at this picture with some intentness when Anne Purcell came in to him, with cross lines about her mouth, and the strained air of a woman whose temper is not at its best when inconsiderate persons make morning calls. She was wearing a faded puce-colored gown, and lace and ribbons that were none too clean, and she looked sallow in the morning sunlight, and restless

yet heavy about the eyes.

"Good-morning, Jack."

She treated him with blunt ceremony, having seen his ears boxed as a boy. John Gore turned and bowed to her, with his head full of other things.

"I was looking at Donna Gloria's picture," he said, making the most obvious remark, as a man commonly does on such occasions; "there is a strange likeness there."

"Ah, yes, Gloria had a temper."

"Is that Thorn—in the corner of the canvas, where the patch of sunlight lies?"

My lady glanced at him as though she had found him infinitely tiresome on previous visits.

"Thorn? I suppose it is."

"It lies some miles from the Rye road, does it not—not far from a place called Battle?"

Anne Purcell looked at him with sudden suspiciousness, and, turning aside, sat down on a low couch with her back toward the light. John Gore had always angered her of late with the grim and quiet persistency of a forlorn and ridiculous faith. And possibly this impatience of hers came from the inevitable pain she suffered when gleams of the finer spirit in her broke through the shades of self.

John Gore, feeling in his pocket for his father's letter, could not help being struck by the haggard expression of my lady's face. So ripe and healthy by nature, the change in her was the more obvious and the more marked. The woman looked ill, with an indefinable grayness about the mouth and a heaviness about the eyes. Wrinkles had appeared in the skin that she had not touched that morning with rouge and powder, making her look thin, yellow, and even old.

"I have a letter for you from my father."

"For me?"

Her face lighted up instantly, yet John Gore was struck by a shallow gleam like fear in her eyes.

"He has gone into the country for a few days."

"The country! Where?—what part?"

"Suffolk, I believe."

He handed her the letter, and turned to the window as though to give her leisure to break the seal and read it. Yet for nearly half a minute she suffered the letter to lie unopened upon her lap as though she were afraid to dip into its contents. Her eyes had fixed themselves with a look of prophetic dread upon the Spaniard's picture where the sunlight shone.

John Gore, standing at the window, heard the stiff crackle of the paper in her hands as she spread it upon her knee. Stephen Gore and my Lady Purcell had been friends for so many years that the son almost thought of them as brother and sister. His father had been Lionel Purcell's friend and Barbara's godfather, and the sympathies of the two families had seemed to flow in one common channel.

"John"—her voice startled him, for his thoughts had flown elsewhere, as a lover's thoughts will; he turned and saw her sitting with the letter on her lap, her face dead white, and the muscles twitching about her mouth—"will you ring for Jael?"

He looked at her keenly, with some concern.

"Have you had bad news—"

"No—"

"—about Barbara?"

"No, no, I am only faint. I have not been well these last few days." And she crumpled the letter in her hands.

As he crossed the room he heard her give a curious, shivering cry, and when he turned again she was sitting with her face hidden in her hands, swaying slightly from side to side, her whole body shaken by some convulsive storm of tears. John Gore looked at her helplessly. Experience had not taught him to deal with an hysterical woman of forty.

Seizing the most discreet impulse, he moved toward the door and nearly pushed against Mrs. Jael as he opened it. He stood aside, and nodded her into the room, feeling that only a woman could deal with a woman in such a case. What the woe was he could only conjecture; perhaps some woman's affair that made her emotions passionate and uncertain.

The spirit of unrest that seemed in the blood of every man that year might well have entered into John Gore's mood as he wandered without purpose in the park after leaving my Lady Anne to Mrs. Jael's ministrations. To a man who had led an active and adventurous life the court world seemed a trivial world, unless he were a libertine, a gambler, or a dabbler in ambitious schemes. John Gore felt himself out of touch with all these people, for after a three years' voyage a man may be more ignorant of the political passions of the moment than a ploughboy who can catch the village gossip in a tavern. There were causes and interests to be served, and numberless back-stair intrigues to enthrall those who loved crooked pleasures and the mystery of some plot. John Gore realized that his father had plunged both hands into some secret undertaking, yet even the glamour of the Mazarin's private salon did not lure him to mingle an amour with intrigues. The times seemed sinister, and full of violent yet treacherous motives. The life about him appeared vague, elusive, and unsatisfying. Even my Lady Purcell, so plump and buxom of yore, seemed to have fallen under the spell of some secret panic, to judge by her sickly look, and the strange emotion she had betrayed that morning. He found himself wondering what she had read in my lord's letter, for the suddenness of her distress could hardly be explained by a fit of the vapors. For Anne Purcell had always appeared to him to be a thoughtless and selfishly cheerful woman, affectionate toward those who pleased her, but not one who would suffer greatly for the sake of others. The thought haunted him that the news had concerned Barbara, and that she had concealed the truth from him with a spasm of motherly pity.

His mood was of restlessness and discontent that morning—the restlessness of a man who lacks a purpose for the moment, and who longs for something to grapple with and overcome. My Lord Gore had counted on this adventurous spirit in the son, believing that it would lure him into the

angry intrigues of the hour, and that he would forget that which my lord wished heartily to be forgotten. The fascinations of Hortense might have won many a man's sword, and her splendor have dimmed the feeble and romantic glimmer of a distant face. To forego such plunder for a sulky girl whose mouth did not seem to be made for kisses! My lord's worldliness scoffed at the chance. Hortense would disenchant him for any such sickly whim, and with a pout of her red lips or a touch of the hand, turn him aside from stupid melancholy. Yet Stephen Gore misunderstood the nature of the man, for though the vicissitudes of life make most folk fickle, there are some fanatics who grow more obstinate when threatened by fate.

John Gore passed by the Duke of Albemarle's rooms, and entered the street by Holbein's Gate. He walked under the windows of the Banqueting Hall, over the place where a king's head had fallen, and turned in at the Palace Gate. He was strolling across the first court with the air of a man who wishes the whole world with the devil, when at the entry of the passage that ran past the Great Hall and the Chapel to Whitehall Stairs, he cannoned against an equally preoccupied person who came out by a side alley with a couple of books under his arm.

"Pardon, sir; but may I remind you that God gave us eyes!"

"Tu quoque, my friend; you have some weight behind those books, to judge by the dig in the ribs you gave me."

They stared at each other irritably for the moment, and then fell a-laughing like a couple of boys.

"Bless my eyes, Jack Gore, but they are always playing me these scurvy tricks. I shall be kissing all my neighbors' wives soon in mistake for my own."

"And no doubt the excuse will be useful, unless the husbands are fools."

"Ah, you dog! Remember my dignity, and in the public and august place. Where are you bound?"

"Anywhere—and nowhere."

"The most devilish, dangerous course, John Gore, that a man can ever sail; it ends too often with places beginning with T and B. It also betokens a precarious state of mind, sir—a readiness to be made a fool of by a satin slipper or the turn of an ankle. I have had experience. Don't laugh, you buccaneer. I am minded to take you under cover of my guns, and sail you into the country, where you can run into nothing more dangerous than a milkmaid with scarlet stockings."

Mr. Pepys insinuated a hand round John Gore's arm, and turned him back in the direction of the Palace Gate.

"Lest you find your way to the Stone Gallery, John, or to the bowers of the maids of honor, I will conduct you under escort as one who may prove an incorrigible vagrant. But to be most serious. Are you so incontinently idle and unoccupied?"

"I am."

"Then you should be the very man for a fat and purblind friend who is driven to making pilgrimages on other people's business. It is an error, sir, to be considered honest and good-tempered. How would a week's saddle-shaking help your hunger. You have the took of a man too full of bile."

John Gore looked into Mr. Pepys's florid, short-sighted, and shrewdly amiable face.

"Are you going into the country?"

"Yes, like a Jew to Babylon. For of all the things I abominate, John Gore, commend me to country inns and the sloughs that bumpkins call roads. Being plump, Jack, I am piteously popular with certain officious insects, and when I consider it, I am moved by the reflection that these insects might split their affections out of curtesy to a strapping sailor."

Mr. Pepys turned abruptly in his bustling way, dragging John Gore round by the elbow.

"We will go back by boat and dine, and after dinner a friend can refuse nothing. Take count of my afflictions, John Gore: Item one, to visit a female cousin and inquire into some business where she has been robbed and skinned by some rogue of a steward; and the woman is monstrously ugly, Jack, with not so much as a simper to make a man feel gallant. Item two, to go in person and render some private matter to Lord Montague who is resting—resting in one of his accursed country houses; it is no real business of mine, John Gore, but the kind of sottish business that a man allows himself to be saddled with because he is what people call trustworthy. Item three, to ride on to Portsmouth and poke my nose into certain unsavory messes there. This is what it means, sir, to be a man of affairs, and the most popular purse-carrier in an accursedly large family."

John Gore laughed at Mr. Pepys's declamatic energy, knowing him to be a man who would read a beggar a sharp lecture and then give him sixpence to drink with on the road.

"When do you start?" he asked.

"To-morrow."

"And by what road?"

"The Rye road, John—and a wry road it is, I wagerdown to some miserable town called Lamberhurst, in Kent. They work iron there, and I suppose the beds are full of smuts that bite and smuts that don't. Thence to the town of Battle to find my Lord Montague, if he chances to be there and not at Cowdray. Thence on to Portsmouth, and so home. The one cup of spiced wine is that we ride by Tunbridge; I shall visit The Wells, buy apples from the country girls, drink ink, and perhaps see some fine women. And if you will take the road with me, I shall be more easy in my mind as to footpads and fleas."

Now there had flashed into John Gore's mind the vision of Donna Gloria's picture, with the glimpse of Thorn amid its woods and meadows. And sometimes a man is swayed by the veriest whim toward destinies that are far beyond the moment's vision. So it proved with John Gore as he followed Mr. Pepys into the boat at Whitehall Stairs, for he promised to share with him the mellow comfort of St. Luke's summer, and to serve as partner in the matter of rustic beds.

Mr. Pepys was a gentleman whose spirits were never dashed save when he was testy for want of food or plunged into some periodical ague fit of shivering religiosity. He was an excellent companion for the road, with his vivacity and his bustling determination to get the best that life could give. John Gore and the Secretary had agreed to take no servants with them, for, as Mr. Pepys declared, "the rogues only drank their masters' purses dry, and ran away at the first click of a pistol"—though it is highly probable that Mr. Samuel preferred to ride alone upon his travels simply because he was minded to enjoy himself without some prying rascal of a groom carrying home all manner of scandalous lies as to what Mr. Samuel said and did and drank in his hours of ease and absence.

They slept the first night at The Checkers Inn at Tunbridge, a fine timber and plaster house whose great gables overhung the street. The next day they rode on to The Wells, where many fashionable folk still lingered, enjoying the autumn sunshine and the country air. Mr. Pepys contrived to hire one of the little wooden cottages upon The Common for the night, a step that saved them riding off to Speldhurst. The Secretary appeared chiefly delighted with the fair held near The Pantiles, where pretty country girls sold fruit and flowers and garden stuff, and robbed their customers coquettishly, being not so simple as they seemed. Mr. Pepys proved such a zealous marketeer that he came away with a boy carrying a big basket, in which were three cabbages, a gallon of apples, two pounds of butter, a chicken and a duck, some home-made cakes, several bunches of ribbons, and a bottle of gooseberry wine. "What the deuce to do with the stuff?" That was a problem that made him laugh most heartily. And being an ingenious wag he went down in the evening with the basket to a little pavilion where some of the quality were playing cards by candle-light, and, soon finding friends there, he sat down and played ombre till he had lost three guineas. Then came the jest of protesting that he must pay his debts "in kind," and the duck and the cabbages and the butter were hauled forth out of the basket. The bottle of gooseberry cordial was the only thing they took back with them to the cottage on The Common, and they shared it between them, finding it far stronger and more fiery than they had expected.

Mr. Pepys had a religious fit next morning when they rode on toward Lamberhurst to condole with the ugly cousin over her losses. It proved to be a smoky village in a valley, with a little stream running through it and a good inn near the bridge. Mr. Pepys established himself at the inn, swearing that he would cause Cousin Jane no extra expense; for her cooking would have caused a second revolt in heaven—at least, so he told John Gore. He appeared in need of a comfortable cup of mulled wine when he returned from calling upon the relative, who lived in a dull little house up the hill. Mr. Pepys confessed that she had talked five gold pieces out of him, and he went to bed so surlily that the officious insects, if there were any in the place, remained at a discreet and respectful distance.

On the fourth day from crossing London Bridge they rode for the town of Battle, leaving the Rye road at Flimwell, and entering upon a track that made Mr. Pepys sore in spirit as well as in the saddle. The roughness and the quagmires of the so-called highway reduced him to one of those sad and pensive moods when a man beholds rottenness in every institution, and despairs of an age that can suffer so much mud. When Mr. Pepys felt gloomy he took to talking politics, and to inveighing against the venality of the times, and the dangers that threatened every man, however shrewd and honest he might be.

"Keep away from it, John," he said, solemnly; "for I assure you there will be heads falling before you and I are a year older. We are passing through a pest of plots—ouch!—hold up, you beast, that is the fifth time you have bumped me on the same place! I trust, John, that you have not meddled with any of these intrigues."

"I am just as wise as a child, Sam."

"Be careful that you are not too simple. Now, in your ear, John, I have many fears for that fine gentleman, your father. He is dabbling his hands in dangerous dishes. God knows what will come of all this ferment. The Protestant pot is on the bubble, John; it will boil over and scald a good many people, or I know nothing."

"How much of it is froth?"

"Perhaps on the top, sir; but there is a deuced lot of hot liquor underneath. I know more of these things than most men, John; I am in and out, here, there, and everywhere; I keep my ears open, my clacker quiet, and my opinions to myself. There are some people who must be forever meddling, and banking up secret bonfires under their own houses. The papists are just such folk, John. There will be a flare soon, I tell you, and a bigger flare, perhaps, than the Great Fire ever made. Keep your fingers to yourself, John, and let fools play with hot coals."

John Gore listened to Mr. Pepys's prophecies, and watched the autumn woods flow by, russet and green, and bronze and gold. They were riding now over the Sussex hills, with a gorgeous landscape flowing toward the sea. Blue distances, far, faint horizons, dim, winding valleys ablaze with the splendor of decay. Leaves falling with a flicker of amber in the autumn sunlight. Berries red upon the bryony and the brier. Bracken bronzing the woodlands and the hill-sides, vague mists ready to rise so soon as the sun had set.

It was late in the afternoon, and the west a sweep of cold clear gold, when they came to the town of Battle, riding over the hill where the windmills stood, the hill called Mountjoy in those parts, for there the knights of William the Norman had tossed their spears in triumph as the sun went down. Coming by Mill Street into King Street they saw the great gray gate of the Abbey facing the town green where the fairs were held and where they baited bulls. Looking about them for a good inn, they chose "The Half Moon," on the eastern side of the green. Over the way stood the great beamed house where wayfarers had been lodged before the days of the Abbey's death.

The first piece of news Mr. Pepys had from the hostler as he dismounted was that my Lord Montague was not at the Abbey, but was expected from Cowdray some day that week. Mr. Pepys swore by way of protest, being stiff and hungry, and inclined to be choleric and testy over trifles. He

was walking to and fro in the yard to stretch his legs, and throwing caustic brevities toward John Gore, when a neat and comely woman of forty came stepping over the stones, and desired to know how she could make the gentlemen welcome.

Mr. Pepys looked at her bland, brown face, with plaits of dark hair drawn over the forehead, and recovered some of his urbanity.

"Your best bedroom, ma'am, the best supper you can serve, and the best bottle of wine you have. You may not know Mr. Pepys of the Admiralty in these parts."

The landlady spread her apron and curtesied very prettily, her brown eyes and the red handkerchief over her bosom making Mr. Pepys approve of her manners.

"The great Mr. Samuel Pepys, sir?"

"Some people would question the adjective, ma'am."

"I have a boy in one of the King's ships, sir, and Mr. Pepys, sir, is mighty popular in the navy. I am proud to serve you, sir." And she dropped him another curtesy that made the great man think her a mighty fine woman. "Tom, carry up the gentlemen's valises to the big front room. I can give you a little parlor to yourselves, sirs. And what may it please you to take for supper?"

They became quite coy and coquettish over pasties and spitted woodcock, duck and apple sauce, and Mr. Pepys's favorite pudding. The Secretary appeared to forget the stiffness in his legs. He walked in with the genial air of a man who feels that his dignity is sure of its deserts, whispering to John Gore, with a wink, that it is useful at times to be somebody in this world, even for the sake of a clean bed.

The hostess of "The Half Moon" reconciled Mr. Pepys so thoroughly to his quarters by the polish of her pewter, the warmth of the wood fire, and by the supper she sent him by the hands of her daughter, that he lost his spite against my Lord Montague for being on the other side of Sussex. Lolling in a chair before the fire, his shoes off and his stockinged feet enjoying the blaze, he made as comfortable a picture as a philosopher could wish to praise.

"I could stomach a day or two here, John, with great contentment," he said; "for the thought of those Sussex roads at night make me bless God for the burning logs, although it is October. My Lord Montague can come to me while we enjoy ourselves. Let us consider what there is to be seen in this part of Sussex. Ha, so—let us call up mine hostess's daughter and hear what she has to say."

There was no bell in the parlor, but Mr. Pepys improvised a gong with the bottom of a big brass candlestick and the poker. But since this most martial clashing did not bring the damsel, he went to the stairs-head and called over the balusters:

"Betty—Betty, my dear."

Petticoats bustled up the stairs, and the daughter of the house appeared with a tray held like a buckler across her bosom. Mr. Pepys made her a polite little bow.

"We shall be beholden to you, my dear, if you will tell us how we may be amused to-morrow. Are there any gentlemen's houses worth a ride in the neighborhood?"

Mr. Pepys retreated backward into the room as though desirous of drawing the girl after him.

"There is the Abbey, sir."

"The Abbey!" And Mr. Pepys tossed the suggestion aside as superfluous. "I shall see enough of it, Betty, when my Lord Montague reaches us. Are there any houses hereabouts where murder has been committed, or a plot hatched, or a king been entertained. We like to see the shows."

The girl leaned against the door-post with the tray lodged jauntily upon one hip, and her green stays with their red laces showing off a very embraceable figure.

"There is Bodjam Castle, sir."

"Bodjam—Bodjam. What a name, my dear, for a cobbler! It likes me little." And he admired the red petticoat and the green stays.

"Hastings Town—and Castle, sir."

"Fish and old stones! No, John, eh; no Betty. Try me again."

"Perhaps Rye Town would please you, sir."

"A wry road, no doubt, which is more than your figure is, my dear; not wry, I mean, but trim as—well—just what you please."

The girl laughed, perked up her chin, and glanced at John Gore as though he looked a sturdy fellow, and as though she expected him to wink.

"There is Pevensey, sir, where the King landed, and Thorn House, and Hurstmonceux."

"Ah, Hurstmonceux, and Thorn, did you say? Thorn belongs to the Purcells, John, surely?"

"Yes, Mr. Pepys—"

"Pat off the tongue—Patrick Pepys shall be patted!"

"No one ever goes to Thorn, sir; there is nothing to see but ravens."

"Hurstmonceux is a pretty word, my dear. Say it again; I like to see your lips pout out. What! giggling? Now, dear soul, what is there to laugh at? I am an old bachelor, as this gentleman will tell you. And, Betty, don't forget the warming-pan, will you, my dear?"

John Gore and Mr. Pepys shared the same room that night, and the Secretary's bed-going was as lengthy as his tongue. He had a habit of undressing by degrees, and of sitting down and roasting his toes at the fire between each act. He would even draw off his small-clothes from one leg and sit with the other still breeched, while he chatted and fondled his chin. Even when he had undressed, the toilet for the night was nearly as thorough as the toilet for the day. Mr. Pepys aired the contents of his travelling valise before the fire, and donned in succession a pair of lamb's-wool bed-boots, a thick undervest, a blue cloth sleeping-coat, and a great nightcap, which he drew down over his ears. Then he shut the lattice tight, pushed a table against the door, put his money under his pillow, warmed his feet for the last time at the fire, and then clambered into bed.

"Lord Montague can stay at Jericho," he said, as he wallowed down into a feathered mattress. "The weather should be steady, Jack—my corns are quiet. What do you say to Hurstmonceux for to-morrow. I wager that we can get inside."

"The girl spoke of Thorn."

"That was an allegory, John; ask her if her name is Rose. Now I dare you to keep me awake with your talking, sir; I know you sailors, all yarn to the rope's-end. Good wench, she has warmed the bed well just where my feet go, God bless her! Did you applaud the color of those stays, John? Red and green are rare colors on a dark woman. Ah—ho!—if I tie not my clacker up, you will never let me sleep till midnight."

John Gore still remembered Mr. Pepys's snoring when they ordered their horses out next morning for a jaunt over the Sussex hills. Mistress Green Stays brought Mr. Pepys a mug of sack into the court-yard as he sat in the saddle, for which favor he thanked her gallantly, and told her she had pretty dimples at the elbow. They took a track that ran out of the western end of the town past the old Watch Oak, and soon toward Ashburnham and Penhurst.

Now, to put the matter frankly, these two gentlemen got wickedly lost that day, largely through a fit of friskiness on Mr. Pepys's part in chasing a stray donkey down a side road. He had been lusting for a gallop, so he said, and the moke gave it him, to land him quizzically in a stout thorn-hedge. John Gore extricated the Secretary, condoled with him over the scratches, and prevailed upon him to return toward the road. But Mr. Pepys boasted a great belief in his own bump of locality, and, taking to a bridle-path, lost himself with complete success. And then he swore roundly at the Sussex roads, as though it was their duty to fly up in his face and not go crawling and sneaking like a lot of thieves behind a wood.

John Gore laughed, for it was Mr. Pepys's outing and not his, and he suffered his friend to follow his own nose, being amused to know what would be the end of it. They were following a grass track that curled hither and thither through thickets and over scrubby meadows, not a house to be seen anywhere, with the sun at noon, and no dinner threatening.

The track proved kind to them, however, for the woods gave back suddenly, and they saw a red farm-house shelving its thatch under the shelter of a few beech-trees against the clear blue of an October sky. The beeches themselves were a-glitter with ruddy gold. And from the low brick chimney blew a wisp of smoke, as though flying a signal to Mr. Pepys's inner man.

The Secretary bumped his heels into his horse and went forward at a canter. John Gore saw him rein in clumsily as he skirted a hedge that closed the orchard and yard, rolling forward in the saddle as though he was in danger of going over his horse's head. He waved an arm over the hedge toward a great pond that lay on the farther side thereof, between the farm-yard and the orchard.

It seemed that the farmer's child of seven had something of the Columbus in him, for while the men were in the fields and his mother in the kitchen he had rolled a big tub down from the yard, floated the craft, and embarked boldly, with a couple of thatching-pegs for oars. Whether the child paddled his way too daringly or no, the tub overturned in the middle of the pond, and, righting itself, lay there water-logged, while a flaxen head and a pair of frightened hands went bobbing and clawing and gulping amid ripples of scared water. And on the far bank, with the drake at their head, a company of white ducks were quacking in chorus, shaking their tails, and making a mighty pother.

John Gore saw that the boy was likely to drown, and, vaulting out of the saddle, he broke through the hedge and reached the pond. The pool looked too dark and deep for wading, and probably had two feet of mud at the bottom; so, pulling off his horseman's coat and his heavy riding-boots, he went in, made a breast plunge for it, and struck out for the child. The white head was going under again when John Gore snatched at the curls. He held the boy at arm's-length, and, swimming till his feet touched mud, stood up and lifted the youngster in his arms.

Mr. Pepys, who had run into the farm-house, appeared at the hedge with a round of rope and a big, raw-boned woman in a blue petticoat and a kind of linen smock. She pushed through, not sparing her brown forearms or her face, and would have taken the child out of John Gore's arms.

But he put her aside kindly, and, laying the boy on the grass under the hedge, unfastened his little doublet, and then held him up by the legs to empty the windpipe and lungs of water.

"Have you a good fire burning?"

"Lord bless you, sir, yes."

"Go and get your blankets ready. We shall soon have him alive and roaring."

John Gore carried the child into the farm kitchen, and, laying him in a blanket almost upon the hearth-stone, rubbed and kneaded him till the skin began to redden. A loud sneeze was the first greeting that he gave them. His mother went down on her knees instantly and huddled him to her bosom, the blanket trailing across the brick floor.

"You be for terrifying me, you God-forsaken little rascal! Playing these tricks on us, with the good gentleman here wet to the skin and his stockings all mud! Won't I smack ye when ye can bear a hand on a spot where a hand can't do much harm!"

XXVII

Mr. Christopher Jennifer came to the kitchen in the middle of all this fussing over the child, with his bill and his hedging-gloves and his boots caked with muck. He was a short, round-headed man with bowed legs and a broad chest, and, after hearing the truth of it all from his wife, he laid the child solemnly and deliberately across his knee. "Come now, Chris, man, he ben't fit for ye yet."

"Oh, ben't he? I reckon it will make him livelier nor cakes."

And he began in the same stolid and unflurried fashion to lay one of his hedging-gloves across the child, till the sound of his roaring sent Death out with ignominy by the back door.

The chastening of youth attended to, Mr. Jennifer and his woman began to make a great to-do over John Gore and Mr. Pepys. The farmer took John Gore upstairs to the best bedroom, fetched out his Sabbath suit of gray cloth with the silver buttons, and gave his guest a change of stockings and of underwear. Then he went and mixed him a glass of hot toddy, remarking, with grave solemnity:

"That water be powerful wet!"

His wife Winnie bustled about the kitchen, banking up the fire with fagots till it roared in the black throat of the chimney, pulling out her best table linen from the press, and talking to Mr. Pepys all the time as though she had known him all her life. The Secretary was just the genial soul for such an adventure. He turned to very gallantly, and pressed himself into Mrs. Winnie's service, tramping to and fro to the larder with her—a larder that smelled of herbs and ale, carrying mugs and platters of hollyhock, a chine of bacon, and a round of beef. He even filled the big, black jack for her from the barrel in the dark corner, taking a good pull to his own content, and declaring that he pledged Mrs. Jennifer's health.

The farmer came down-stairs carrying John Gore's wet clothes, followed by that gentleman himself in Chris Jennifer's Sabbath suit. Mr. Pepys looked at him quizzically, and bunched out his own vest with a significant wink. The farmer's shoes were inches too big for the sea-captain, so that the heels clacked upon the bricks of the kitchen floor.

Mrs. Winnie hung the wet clothes before the fire, while her man stared at the table with the critical eyes of a host whose gratitude meant to prove its warmth by persuading his guests to overeat themselves.

"Turn your chairs to, my masters. Ye'll be welcome to Furze Farm so long as my boots leave their muck upon t' floor. Be it for me to tell ye for why, sir?" And he looked at John Gore steadily, and jerked a thumb in the supposed direction of the pond.

These good people of Furze Farm were so hospitable and so full of honest gratitude that what with the hot liquor, the drying of John Gore's clothes, and Mr. Pepys's happy torpor after a big meal, the afternoon was nearly gone before they remembered the homeward road. Farmer Jennifer would have had them stay the night, but Mr. Pepys roused himself to refuse, remembering the comforts of "The Half Moon" and the dimples of Mistress Green Stays. John Gore changed again into his own clothes (though Chris Jennifer would have made him a present of the undergear), and went above to say good-bye to little Will Jennifer, who had been put to bed and left to meditate over this Tale of a Tub. The boy seemed a little shy of John Gore, who dropped a sixpence on the pillow; for when a child has been smacked before strangers, some allowance must be made for outraged pride.

"I be sure thee had better bide the night," said Mrs. Winnie, as they moved out from the kitchen. "Battle be a good nine miles, and in an hour will come sundown."

Mr. Pepys thanked her very heartily, and declined her kindness with proper grace. They would be grateful, however, if Mr. Jennifer would put them upon the road.

"Get thee up on Whitefoot, Chris, and ride with the gentlemen to the Three Ashes."

Mr. Jennifer brought a big brown filly from the stable, and set out with no more harness than a halter, and a sack for a saddle. Mrs. Jennifer held the farm-gate open for them, looking up at John Gore very kindly with just a glimmer of tears in her eyes, for though Winnie Jennifer had a strong arm and a rough, brown face, she was as warm-hearted a creature as ever creamed the milk.

"If ever it should be that we can serve ye, sir, God see to it, we will not forget."

And John Gore gave her a sweep of his hat, never dreaming for the moment that Winnie Jennifer might one day prove a right dear friend.

Mr. Christopher rode with them a mile or more, saying very little, for he was a silent man, and accustomed to leave the talking to his wife. He looked sincerely puzzled by Mr. Pepys's jokes, tickling his chin with a stumpy forefinger, and grinning occasionally as though wishing to be polite. They reached the Three Ashes, and Mr. Jennifer would have ridden farther with them, but Mr. Pepys, still obstinately sure of his own powers, refused to carry the farmer another furlong. Chris Jennifer gave them some very rambling directions, and after a long, dog-like stare at John Gore—a look that betrayed that he wished to say something graceful and could not—he wished them God-speed, and rode off on the brown filly.

Mr. Pepys professed himself wholly enlightened by the farmer's rigmarole of "keep to t' beech hanger on thy left"—"get ye down into t' bottom"—"second lane ye come by afore t' brook, and t' second yonder along under t' brow wid a turnip-field under t' hedge." John Gore had the seaman's sense of direction, nothing more. Mr. Pepys was accustomed to strange documentary ambiguities, and persisted cheerfully that he knew just how to go.

And thus it befell that the Secretary lost himself valiantly a second time that day, and meeting not so much as a ploughboy to put him right, he lumbered on stubbornly, trusting to good-fortune. The dusk came down and caught them as they followed a rough "ride" that pretended to run in the direction of Battle Town. But it led them ungenerously into the heart of a wood, and then disappeared amid impassable undergrowth that was black with the coming night.

Mr. Pepys could face it out no longer. They were lost, and he accepted the blame of it, ruefully wishing that he had bottles in lieu of pistols in his holsters.

"What's to be done, Jack? No 'Half Moon' for us to-night."

A wind had risen and was beating through the underwood, making a dismal moan and setting the brown leaves shivering. The horses' hoofs sucked at the spongy soil. Woodland and sky would soon be one great black void.

"We had better pick our way back and trust to luck."

"And to think, John, that we left that warm corner of a kitchen! I would give a guinea for the smell of the smoked bacon, and a glimpse of the wood fire licking the chimney."

They began to pick their way back again, the woodland "ride" growing black as the gallery of a mine. Their horses drooped their heads and went mopingly as though feeling as hungry and dismal as their masters. The hazel twigs kept stinging Mr. Pepys's face, and though he swore peevishly at the first flick across the cheek, he pulled his hat down over his nose and took his punishment with the grim silence of a man who has only himself to blame.

A word from John Gore, who rode a little ahead, made Mr. Pepys perk up in the saddle.

"What—John—what?"

"A light over yonder."

"God bless the smallest candle, John, that strives with this infernal darkness."

They had come out from the wood, and could see far below them in a valley a faint glimmer of light. The ground seemed to fall away into a long sweep of vague gloom. The sky had become dark with clouds, and though they could see nothing but that faint spark of fire, they could hear the trees whispering and muttering not ten yards away.

"We had better make for the light."

Mr. Pepys acquiesced fervently, the night growing raw and cold, and full of eerie sounds.

"I begin to think great things of Mr. Bunyan," quoth he; "there is a sermon in yonder candle that makes me remember the responsibilities of my immortal soul."

They rode down through the night, going very slowly, with the heavy sound of tired horses plodding over wet grass, and the wind blowing about them in restless gusts. They could see nothing but the glimmer of the light, nor could they even tell from what place it came, save that it most probably burned behind a casement because of its steadiness against the night.

They passed a few spectral trees that spread out into flat tops from short, knotted trunks. Then a vague, black mass seemed to rise against the opaque sky. Mr. Pepys, who had pushed on a few feet ahead, leaned forward in the saddle, straining his eyes to see what was before him. They had passed the trees by scarcely twenty paces when there was a sharp, scuffling sound, and the ring of something metallic against stone. John Gore saw the shadowy outline of horse and man swerve violently, and back past him over the grass. His beast carried Mr. Pepys into the boughs of a thorn-tree, yet, though tangled up with his periwig in his mouth, he managed to shout and warn John Gore.

"Hold back, John, for the love of God! There's a wall in front of us, and water beyond it."

John Gore dismounted and ran to help his friend, whose scared horse was raking him through the thorn boughs. He caught the animal's bridle and quieted him, so that Mr. Pepys was able to slip out of the saddle.

"Where the devil are we now, John? Heaven help my poor face! I feel as though I had married fifteen wives, and all of them with finger-nails and tempers."

"Hold the horses and I'll reconnoitre."

"Do, good John; but first let me find my hat."

Outlined dimly by the light were two massive pillars that looked as though they flanked a gate. Moving very cautiously, John Gore found a bridge of tree-trunks across a moat, and a heavy gate at the end thereof. Peering through the crevice between the hinge-edge and the pillar, he could see the light burning behind a window near the ground.

"Where are you, John?"

"Here, over the bridge. There is a gate here, barred. The place must be of some size to have such a moat round it. I will try a shout."

He gave a seaman's hail, while Mr. Pepys, who was a man of many tricks, put two fingers in his mouth and blew a shrill whistle.

The light did not move, but they heard the deep baying of a dog, and then footsteps coming out into the yard. The steps paused, as though some one was listening, and a voice growled out an order to the dog.

"Halloo, there!"

The footsteps approached the gate. A man's voice called to them from the other side, and they could hear the dog rubbing his snout along the lower edge and sniffing.

"Who's there?"

"We have lost our way, and want a night's lodging."

"Who's who?"

"Two gentlemen travelling alone. Open the gate, my good fellow, and take us in—"

"Deuce take you, that I shall not."

Mr. Pepys, who had led the horses forward, put in a bland appeal.

"My good soul, why so surly? We are honest men and have the wherewithal to pay. What is more, we are hungry and dead tired."

"How many are you?" asked the voice, while the dog kept sniffing at the gate.

"Two of us, and our horses."

"What will you pay?"

Mr. Pepys gave John Gore a shocked and indignant nudge.

"The foul clod, bargaining with our starvation! A gold carolus, my friend."

"Say five," quoth the voice, laconically.

"Five! Why it's sheer robbery!"

"Stay outside, then; it's no business of mine."

"Five be it, then," said Mr. Pepys, in disgust.

The man went off, saying that he would chain the dog up, because the beast was fierce. They heard him call to some one, and then the sound of voices haggling together and the rattle of a chain. Presently the slow and heavy footsteps came back across the court-yard, with the lighter, quicker tread of a woman following. She had brought a lantern with her, and the light from it played under the gate.

"You can sleep in the barn," said the man's voice. "My woman won't take strangers into the kitchen."

Mr. Pepys expostulated.

"Five gold pieces, you rogue, for a night in an out-house?"

"Warm hay is better than wet grass. We can send you in a jug of beer and some bread and bacon."

"Thank Heaven, John, there is such a place as hell! Open the gate, my man."

"Throw the money over first."

"Deuce take me, I am no such fool. Open the gate, and you shall have the money."

They heard the lifting of the bar and the shooting of the bolts. It was a woman who met them—a cloak over her head and a lantern swinging in her hand. The man stood in a deep shadow behind the gate, and they could see the glint of a gun-barrel and the grayness of his face.

"Money down, gentlemen."

Mr. Pepys felt very much like being held up by a footpad. He glanced over his shoulder for John Gore, who led the horses, and then threw five gold pieces down on the court-yard stones. The woman picked them up, one by one, examining each in turn by the light of the lantern.

"Come this way, sirs."

Mr. Pepys did not like the gleam of the gun-barrel, nor the mystery of the place; but he felt more at ease, now that he had something in petticoats to deal with.

"I must make my apologies, ma'am," he said, intending to try civility, "for disturbing you at such an hour. We have lost ourselves twice to-day on the road. Seeing us to be such quiet gentlemen, you might be persuaded—"

The woman cut him short without great ceremony, and they heard the grinding of hinges as the man closed the court-yard gate.

"You had better walk more this way or the dog will have a bite at your leg."

"Obliged, ma'am, I swear," and he took the hint promptly. "If you happen to have a warm corner in your kitchen—"

"I don't keep a tavern, sir," she said, quietly. "This is my man's business, not mine. If you can't sleep on clean hay, the more's the pity."

Mr. Pepys felt frost-bitten. Here was a lady who meant what she said, and was not to be argued with. Mr. Pepys had studied the sex. "Barn" she had said, and "barn" it would be.

The woman pulled open a door that sagged on its hinges and scraped the stones with its lower edge, and going in she hung the lantern to a nail in the wall. Mr. Pepys saw a litter of hay in one corner, a pile of broken bricks in another, and a few old garden tools and remnants of furniture in a third. He could not refrain from making a cynical grimace.

"This is the dearest and the dirtiest lodging, ma'am, I ever paid for in advance."

"That's as you please, sir; be grateful for what you can get."

She left them and crossed the yard, while John Gore fastened the two horses to a couple of iron brackets in the wall. Mr. Pepys took the lantern down and turned the hay over critically with his boot. Then he went and stood in the doorway, sniffing the night air hungrily, and attempting to decipher his surroundings in the dark.

"I do not stomach this greatly, John. Where the deuce are we? That is what I should like to discover."

John Gore was unsaddling the horses.

"As queer a place as ever I saw—and queer people in it, too. Listen here, John"—and he came in with an air of mystery—"those voices were never trained in Sussex."

"Oh!"

"You hear such sweet strains in London City, John. What the deuce has brought such folk down here into Sussex?"

John Gore laid one of the saddles on the ground. Mr. Pepys stooped over it and pulled a pistol from a holster.

"Look to your powder-pans, John; my hair feels stiff under my wig. They would cut our throats for a shilling."

He smuggled the pistol suddenly under his coat as he heard footsteps crossing the court. The woman came in with a big jug, and bread and cold bacon upon a plate. Mr. Pepys made one more attempt to melt her churlishness.

"Would you be so gracious as to tell us, ma'am, where we happen to be passing the night?"

She kept her eyes to herself as she set the jug on an old stool.

"In Sussex, sir."

Mr. Pepys shrugged his shoulders.

"There is such a thing as a house, my dear madam."

"So I have heard, sir; but there is no house here."

"There is also a commandment, ma'am, that tells us not to prevaricate."

"So I have heard, sir. My man will call you in the morning."

She left them without another word, though John Gore called after her, bidding her to send her man with water for the horses. She came back herself anon, and left them a single bucketful, going out again as silently and sullenly as before. John Gore was holding the bucket under his horse's nose when he heard the barn door grate over the stones, and close on them with a final heave from a heavy shoulder.

Mr. Pepys's face looked blankly scared.

"Halloo, there, what are you shutting us in for?"

"To keep the wind out," said the man's voice. "Good-night, gentlemen," and they heard something thud and grind against the door, as though the fellow had jammed a piece of timber against it.

Mr. Pepys put his shoulder to the door, but could not move it.

"The scoundrel has wedged us in, John!"

Slow, solid footsteps died away across the court-yard. They heard the rattle of a falling chain and the whimpering of a dog. And presently they heard the beast come sniffing at the door.

Mr. Pepys looked at his companion, and then glanced with no appetite at their supper.

"Stars and garters, John! I don't like this at all. Keep away from that beer—the rogues may have poisoned it; I would rather share the water with the nags. Get your pistols out, John. Just listen to that brute of a dog sniffing and scraping to get at us. If you catch me asleep to-night, sir, you may call me a fat fool!"

Nevertheless, Mr. Pepys fell fast asleep on the hay that night, for the Sussex air and the ale at Furze Farm triumphed over his presentiments of violence and murder. The sea-captain, who was of harder fibre than the Secretary, sat in the hay with his pistols beside him and his ears on the alert for any sound that the night might send.

The candle in the lantern guttered about midnight, and John Gore was left in the dark to listen to Mr. Pepys's snoring and the heavy breathing of the tired horses. He could hear rats scrambling and squeaking in the walls, the harsh creaking of a rusty vane over one gable-end of the barn, and the occasional sniffing of the dog's nose at the door. The barn was warm enough, and full of a musty fragrance, what with the heat of the horses and the hay, and John Gore might have followed Mr. Pepys's example had he not come by the habit of keeping watch at sea. And worthy man though Mr. Pepys was, John Gore commended him for falling asleep, being desirous of thinking his own thoughts without the distraction of his companion's tongue.

The place and its people puzzled John Gore, and he trusted them even less than did Mr. Pepys. There might be priests in hiding, or some secret to be guarded, for John Gore guessed that only the couple's greed had persuaded them to give casual strangers shelter in the barn for the night. Their surly aloofness, as though they were risking something for five gold pieces, had set the sea-captain's curiosity at work. The place had a moat and a gate that suggested a manor-house or a grange of some size. Nor did the folk themselves smell of the country. John Gore determined to reconnoitre the place at dawn if he were able to force the door.

Matters shaped otherwise, however, for it was still pitch-dark on an autumn morning when he heard the sound of a door opening and a heavy tread upon the court-yard stones. The man's voice called to the dog, and by the rattle of a chain John Gore guessed that the beast was being fastened. The footsteps crossed the court and paused outside the barn, with the glow from a lantern sending fingers of light through the chinks in the door.

"Halloo, gentlemen—halloo there!"

He hammered at the door, the sound making such a thunder in the barn that Mr. Pepys woke up with a gurgle, as though he were being throttled, and sat up, striking out with his fists into the dark.

"Soul of me, what is it? John! Where are you?"

"Here, watching over you like a father."

"And I have been asleep! My conscience! Call me a fat fool, John, out loud!"

"Time to start, gentlemen."

"Start!" said Mr. Pepys, rubbing his eyes, "why, it can't be much after midnight!"

"Five of the clock it is, sirs."

"Call us again at seven, Solomon; the hay is sweeter than I thought."

The man pulled the prop away, dragged the door open a foot or so, and pushed the lantern inside. But he did not show them his face.

"I go to work in half an hour," he said, stubbornly, "and my woman wants you away before I go."

"Dear soul alive, we shall not eat her, nor even salute her tenderly! And there is breakfast to be considered."

"You can get your breakfast on the road. Up with you, or, by Old Noll, I'll let the mastiff off the chain!"

The fellow's bullying tone roused John Gore's grimness, but he felt that nothing was to be gained by a squabble. Mr. Pepys dragged himself up from the hay, and helped himself to some of the bread and bacon that had been left over from the night. John Gore was already at work saddling the horses, not sorry to remember the warm parlor of The Half Moon Inn at Battle.

The man had moved off, and they heard him opening the court-yard gate. It was still dark when they sallied from the barn, and found the woman waiting for them with a cloak over her head. John Gore loitered and looked about him, but could see nothing but low, dilapidated, thatched roofs, and a vague, shadowy mass looming up against the northern sky. The woman seemed to have no wish to let them linger, and the growling of the dog typified the temper of the humans who owned him. The man had disappeared, but what with the darkness and the raw cold of an autumn morning, Mr. Pepys had no desire to wish him good-bye. He remembered the glint of a gun-barrel as he climbed into the saddle.

"You can at least tell us, my good woman, how to find the road to Battle Town?"

"I never was at Battle in my life, sir."

"Oh, cheering Aurora, how helpful thou art! Can you give us just one point of the compass, ma'am?"

"Ride east, sir; you must come somewhere."

"I agree with that statement, heartily," quoth Mr. Samuel, with a philosophical grimace.

They rode out through the gate and over the bridge of tree-trunks with a vague, black gleam of water on either side. They had hardly crossed when the gate was slammed on them, and they heard the woman laughing, and calling with coarse words to her man.

"The pope deliver us, John, but I congratulate my throat on being sound."

"Did you get a glimpse of the man's face?"

"No."

"Nor did I. He seemed shy of showing it."

"The surly scoundrel! As I said before, John, thank Heaven there is a hell."

They pushed on slowly in the dim light, riding over spongy grass-land that sloped upward toward the west. Everywhere the silence of the night still held, save for the fluttering call of an awakened bird. They had gone little more than a furlong when they came to the outstanding thickets of a wood, the trees rising black and strange against the heaviness of the sky. John Gore drew rein

suddenly, and swung out of the saddle.

"What's your whim, John?"

For he was leading his horse by the bridle toward a clump of beech-trees whose boughs swept close to the ground.

"I am going to wait for the dawn."

"There is some wisdom in that," said Mr. Pepys.

"What is more, I want to have a look at the place where we have spent the night. And the folk yonder will not get a glimpse of us in the thick of these trees."

A slow grayness gathered in the east with little crevices of silvering light opening across the sky. The silver turned betimes to gold, with tawny edges to the clouds, and here and there the faintest flush of rose. The grayness rolled back gradually, with a glimmer here and a glimmer there of a hill-top catching the first gleams. In lieu of the ghastly twilight the landscape began to take on color, and to glow, as though touched by fire, with all the wild tints of an autumn dawn.

As the day came John Gore saw a great house rise in the valley, with water about it, and grass-land and woods on every side. The walls were smothered with ivy, and through some of the empty windows shone the dawn. Above the roofless rooms a square tower rose, showing a few feet of red brick above its mantling of ivy. There were rotting out-buildings beyond the court-yard, and a green space that looked like a wild garden, while in the meadows about the place grew a number of old thorns.

Now there flashed suddenly across John Gore's mind the picture of Donna Gloria in the Purcells's house at Westminster. And he knew as he gazed upon it that this place in the valley was their ruined house of Thorn.

Mr. Pepys was too short-sighted to distinguish the place distinctly.

"Well, John, what do you make of it?"

His companion jerked a look at him as though he had forgotten Mr. Pepys's existence.

"Strange chance, Sam! We have spent the night, without knowing it, at the Purcells's house of Thorn."

"Thorn!"

"I have seen a picture of it before the Parliament men made it a ruin. The windows are out, the roof in, and the walls shaggy with ivy. I wonder that they did not batter down the tower."

Mr. Pepys was screwing up his eyes and shading them with his hand, but things run into a blur at a distance, and much straining made the tears come.

"We had better be mounting, John."

"Wait! Bide quiet a moment."

John Gore's face had a keen, hawk-like look as he leaned forward a little, drawing a beech bough down to shade his eyes. He had seen several white pigeons flutter up from the circular brick dovecote that still stood in one corner of the court, and beat their wings about a narrow window high up in the tower. The dark ivy seemed to give distinctness to the fluttering specks. Two of the birds had perched upon the sill, and it was then that John Gore's far-sighted eyes had seen something that made him wonder. For two faint, white things had appeared at the window, like hands thrust out, and the pigeons had fluttered to them as though to be fed.

"What is it, John?"

The sea-captain ignored the question, and Mr. Pepys began to yawn and fidget.

The white birds had fluttered away again, and the faint hands and wrists showed in the dark framing of the narrow window. They looked like hands thrust up in supplication, the hands of a prisoner who could only see the white birds and the sky.

John Gore turned sharply, and climbed into the saddle with the air of a man gripped and held by some inspired suspicion. He rode off slowly, Mr. Pepys following him, and they began to pick their way through the autumn woods. And fortune was kind to them that morning, for they struck a track that led them to the Battle road.

John Gore fell into a deep silence, a slight frown on his forehead and his mouth firmly set. Mr. Pepys's sallies lighted upon a stubborn and irresponsive surface, for his companion seemed grimly set upon reflection.

"It puzzles me to know," the Secretary had said, "what that man and his woman are doing down at Thorn. Has my Lady Purcell established them there as her retainers, and if so—why? Or have they taken up their lodging there like rats in a ruin?"

Mr. Pepys did not suspect how sudden a significance that same question had gathered for John Gore. The sea-captain kept his own counsel on certain matters, nor did he tell his companion of the hands he had seen at the tower window. They might have belonged to the woman, but John Gore did not imagine her to be a creature who would climb a tower in order to feed pigeons.

And yet the suspicion that had seized him seemed wild and incredible when he thought of the people who were responsible for such a thing. Even in an age when the mad were treated more like caged beasts, no man with manhood in him could have given a mere girl such a prison and such keepers.

John Gore gave his horse the spur suddenly, and took Mr. Pepys into Battle at a canter, the Secretary bumping fiercely in the saddle, much to the delight of certain rude children who watched them come riding into the town.

But at Thorn, Barbara, cold and very quiet, sat on the bed under the window, with the red book in her lap and her eyes full of vague musings. For though those four walls let life in only by the window overhead, her thoughts flew out into the wide world—sad and poignant thoughts that bled at the bosom like a bird that has been wounded by a bolt.

She had heard strangers come and go, and with them the echo of a voice that made her heart hurry and her white face flush, and her eyes grow full of desire and mystery. It had seemed but an echo to her from far away, no dear reality—yet there had been tears upon the page when she read the book that morning.

For many things had changed in Barbara's heart that autumn, with the cold and the loneliness, the wretched food, and the wind in the tower at night. She had grown gentler, more wistful, less sure of her own soul. It was as though suffering were softening her, even ripening the heart in her, despite the raw nights and the shivering dawns. What the future had in store she could not tell, but she fed the birds at the window, and the mouse that now crept out to her in the daytime and not only when dusk fell. And with these childish things some new impulse seemed to quicken and take fire within her, like the life of a child that is reborn in those who suffer.

XXIX

Mr. Pepys looked very glum when John Gore told him over their wine that he could go no farther into the county of Sussex. The business between my Lord Montague and the Secretary to the Admiralty had been thrashed out confidentially in my lord's private parlor in the Abbey the day after the adventurous return from Thorn. Mr. Pepys was ready for the Portsmouth road, and could not or would not be brought to understand for the moment John Gore's humor in deserting him thus suddenly. The sea-captain would only hint at a reason, and Mr. Pepys's curiosity was piqued to the extreme limit of good temper. He even suggested rather pointedly that Mistress Green Stays might be to blame, but John Gore looked so grim at the innuendo that Mr. Pepys pushed his pleasantries no further.

"Well, John," he said, at last, like a man of sense, "let each dog follow his own nose. I gather that you have affairs that need careful watching, and a friend should be able to respect a friend's privacy. If you have any winks to give me, John, let me have them that I may not blab anything that will rouse your wrath."

He was such a shrewd good soul that John Gore felt tempted to tell him everything, but refrained, from a sense of sacredness and pride.

"Rely on it, Sam," he said, gravely, "this is no whim of mine. I am not a man to be blown here and there for nothing. I have happened on something here in Sussex that has made me drop anchor and bide my time."

"And should I return to London before you?"

"Know nothing about me, and I will thank you."

"So be it, John; I will keep my tongue quiet, though I trust you are not for meddling in any mischievous plot."

"I have no finger in any plot, Sam; that is the plain truth."

And though Mr. Pepys looked mystified, and even helplessly inquisitive despite his self-restraint, he made the best of the business as far as his own plans were concerned, and said no more either one way or the other.

He was greatly cheered and comforted next morning by a piece of news that he had from one of my Lord Montague's men. Dr. William Watson, the Dean of Battle, was riding down to Chichester next day with two armed servants who knew the road. Mr. Pepys went instantly to call upon the churchman, and proved himself so amiable and engaging a soul that they were soon agreed as to the advantages of their taking the road together. And so they set out for Lewes on a fine October morning, bobbed to most respectfully by all the old dames and children of the place, and talking perhaps less of salvation than of Cambridge dinners and of wine and the wit that was to be had in college halls. For Dean Watson was an old St. John's man, and had drunk of other things besides the classics.

John Gore, left to himself in Battle Town, spent the day in riding over the Sussex hills, probing the tracks and woodways on the side toward Thorn. He had done much meditating since that dawn amid the beech-trees, and his suspicions, such as they were, importuned him to satisfy his curiosity with regard to Thorn. For he had only his surmises and the strange coincidences of the affair to launch him on such a fool's adventure.

He rode back to Battle soon after noon, with his horse muddy and his face warm with a blustering wind. And being minded to learn what he could in the matter of gossip and common report, he went, after dinner, into the public parlor of the inn and sat down on a settle near the window. A little round man and a great gaunt farmer were drinking and smoking opposite each other in the ingle-nook, and John Gore pulled out his pipe, for gossip's sake, and smoked himself into the pair's good graces.

The little man proved to be the barber-surgeon of the town, a rolling, jolly quiz of a rogue who made his patients laugh even when he was bleeding them, and had a wink for every pretty girl and a pat of the hand or a pinch for the children. He was a communicative person, and had been carrying on most of the conversation with the farmer, who sat with his long legs crossed and the stem of his pipe resting upon his folded arms. The farmer would give his pipe a cock and nod his head when the surgeon said anything he heartily approved of, and scrape the heels of his boots on the bricks and heave himself when he was inclined to disagree.

John Gore had joined these worthies in a gossip on the Dutch wars, and was proving to them how a ship could throw a broadside of shot to the best advantage, when the sound of a trotting horse came down the street, and the surgeon, who never let a cart pass without looking to see what was in it, came to the window to look out. They saw a man in a brown coat and a big beaver loom up on a lean black horse. He pulled in toward "The Half Moon," and, glancing about him for a moment, got out of the saddle as though he were stiff and tired. A hostler came running from the yard, and the man in the brown coat tossed the bridle to him, and, stooping down, lifted his nag's near forefoot. The horse had cast a shoe, and his master looked vexed over it, as though he grudged the delay.

The little surgeon was noticing all these details, but not with the same interest as the man at his

elbow. Something familiar in the man's figure had struck John Gore at the first glance, but it was only when he dismounted that he noticed that the fellow carried one shoulder a little higher than the other, and that his head seemed set a trifle askew. Then suddenly he remembered the man's face, with its sallowness, its roving eyes, and its air of impudence that could change into quick servility. It was the man whom my Lord Gore had spoken of as Captain Grylls, and whom he had met with him by Rosamond's Pool in the park that evening before the gathering at the house of Hortense.

John Gore stood irresolute a moment. Then, after he had turned over twenty possibilities in his mind, he walked out of the parlor and down the passage leading to the stairs. My lady of the inn was standing in the street doorway, waiting till the man in the brown coat should have finished giving orders about his horse. John Gore loitered on the stairs and listened.

"My nag has cast a shoe, ma'am, and I am held up for an hour, and deuced hungry. Get me some good hot liquor and some dinner, and I will remember you in my prayers."

"Will you please to step into the parlor, sir?"

"My best services, ma'am; I have another three leagues of road yet. Your fellow has taken my nag to the smith's."

John Gore heard the bustle of the landlady's petticoat, and retreated up the stairs to the private parlor overhead. He walked to and fro for a while, with a frown of thought on his face, before crossing to the bedchamber to pack his belongings into the little leather valise he carried strapped to the saddle. He was fastening the straps when he heard footsteps on the stairs, and caught Mistress Green Stays coming up with a bosomful of clean linen.

"Betty, my girl, run down and ask your mother to let me know her charges. I am following my friend on to Chichester in an hour."

The girl looked surprised, but, putting down her linen, went below about the bill. Her mother came up betimes with some show of concern, hoping that the gentleman had not found anything lacking. John Gore relieved her from any such doubt, paid her her money, with a gold piece thrown in, and asking her to fill his flask for him and make him a small parcel of food, he gathered up cloak, sword, pistols, and valise, marched down the stairs and out by a side door into the stable-yard.

His horse had finished a good meal of bran and oats when a stable-boy pitched the saddle on again, while John Gore stood and looked on. Through the doorway of the stable he had a view of the street, and kept his eyes upon it, knowing that the smithy lay down in the borough of Sanglake. Mistress Green Stays came in with John Gore's flask and some food tied up in a clean napkin, and John Gore gave her a kiss and a piece of silver while the boy was fastening the girths under the nag's belly. The girl had gone, blushing a little, with the coin in her palm, when Captain Grylls's black horse came up the street with a hostler at his head.

John Gore appeared to remember of a sudden that he had left a bunch of seals in his bedroom, and he walked off, telling the boy to keep the horse warm in the stable, for the beast's coat was still wet with the sweat of the morning. From the window of the upper parlor John Gore saw Captain Grylls come out into the road and look at the new shoe on his nag's foot. He had a roll of brown tobacco leaves between his lips, and looked flushed and comforted by his dinner. John Gore saw that the captain was ready to mount before he went down again into the stable-yard. A clatter of hoofs warned him that his man was on the road, so he mounted and rode quietly out of the yard with his eyes on the watch for Captain Grylls.

The man in the brown coat rode out by the western end of the town, puffing smoke from his cigarro, and looking about him alertly like a man who is no longer tired. John Gore let him draw ahead, so that there was a good space between them, and the curves of the road to hide them from each other. He kept his distance upon Captain Grylls by catching a glimpse of him every now and then over a hedge-top. For from the moment that John Gore had recognized the gentleman, the suspicion had seized on him that Captain Grylls was bound for Thorn. What charges the fellow had there, or whether he were riding on my Lord Gore's service, John o' the Sea could only guess.

There was a good hour's daylight left when they approached the track that led down through the woods toward Thorn. John Gore drew up a little, riding on the grass, and going very warily, so as not to blunder into a betrayal. He had a mind to get to the bottom of this business, and to prove whether he was the fool of fancy or whether his grim surmises were drawing toward the truth. The road ran straight for two hundred yards or more, and the sea-captain, pulling close under some brushwood, reined in to see what Captain Grylls would do. John Gore saw him rein in, pause, and then turn his horse suddenly toward the left, where a dead oak stood, and disappear into the woods. Captain Grylls had taken the track for Thorn, and John Gore brought his fist down on his knee with the air of a man whose suspicions were closing up, link by link.

John Gore shadowed Captain Grylls through the woods, riding very warily till he saw him go trotting over the grass-lands where the waning light from the west beat vividly upon Thorn. Turning into that same thicket of beeches, he tethered his horse where the trunks hid him from the house, and advancing from tree to tree he was in time to see Captain Grylls lead his horse up to the gate. One glance at that window of the tower showed it him as a mere slit of blackness amid the ivy, and he kept his eyes fixed upon the figure at the gate. He could see into the court-yard from where he stood, and as he watched he saw a man come round the angle of the house with what looked like a white cloth tied over his face. Even at that distance John Gore recognized him by his slow, ponderous walk, and by his size, for the man who had taken them in that night stood nearly six feet four.

The gate opened, and Captain Grylls led his horse in, turning to glance up the valley, as though to see if any one were moving there. They crossed the court and disappeared round the angle of the house, and though he watched there till dusk fell, John Gore saw no more of the captain or the man with the white cloth over his face.

He leaned against the tree for a while, eating the food he had brought with him from the inn, and washing it down with liquor from his flask. He was summing up the situation, and wondering what

to make of it, for it seemed more than probable that he would spend a night in the open woods. Captain Grylls had most assuredly ridden into Thorn, and he suspected Captain Grylls to be his father's creature. He remembered also that gathering in Hortense's house, and the hints his father had thrown out to him. Anne Purcell might be in the secret of some intrigue; Thorn was her house and the very place for a refuge in case of need. Then there were the white hands he had seen at the window, those hands that had set all manner of passionate surmises afire within his brain. Yet what a suspicious, speculative fool he might prove himself to be! It was humanly possible and reasonable that the couple down yonder should have a daughter.

Darkness had fallen, and, taking his cloak, he cast it over his horse's loins. Then after petting and fondling the beast as though to persuade him to patience, he started out from the beech thicket over the grass-land toward the house.

He had come within a hundred yards of the moat when he saw a beam of light steal out suddenly from the black mass of the ruin. It came and went, mounting higher each moment, for some one was carrying a lantern up the tower stair, the light shooting out, as it passed, through the narrow squints in the wall. John Gore gained one of the thorn-trees close to the moat and took cover there, about twenty yards from the gate.

An upper window in the tower shone out suddenly, a yellow oblong against the blackness of the ivied walls. The light remained steady. John Gore heard the sound of a rough, bullying voice that would have rasped any man's fighting instinct and made him knit his muscles as though to take an enemy by the throat. For a moment there was silence. Then the voice came down to him again, harsh, threatening, with sharp, fierce words that sounded like oaths. Moreover, there was the sound as of a blow given, and then—shrill and full of strange anguish—a woman's cry.

John Gore straightened where he stood, his upper lip stiffening and his teeth pressing grimly against each other. With the shadow of the thorn-tree over him, he stood there listening, the silence of the night about him, and from the lighted window high up in the tower a faint sound coming like the sound of some one weeping. A dull murmur of voices struck upon his ear. Then the light died away suddenly, the window melted into the darkness, and he heard the rough closing of a door. The light came down the stair again, flashing out where the squints opened, with a muffled thud of feet and the faint growl of voices.

But John Gore, as he stood under the thorn-tree, could still hear the sound as of weeping coming from the shadows of the great tower.

XXX

John Gore let his heart have its way that night, for the impulse in him was too strong to be withstood. Yet, like the cool and dogged man he was, he chastened the adventurous passion of a boy with the quiet hardihood of one who has learned to hold a rough ship's company in awe of him.

Unbuckling his sword, he thrust it into the grass under the tree, for the thing would only have cumbered him, and after drawing off his heavy boots and coat he went quietly to the bridge and across it to the court-yard gate. As on the night when he had waited there with Mr. Pepys, he could see a light burning in a window near the ground and the shadow of some one moving in the room within. Taking a couple of steps back, he made a running jump at the gate, and got his hands on the top thereof with hardly a sound to convict him of clumsiness. The rest was easy, and he straddled the gate and then dropped softly into the court-yard. His chief fear was lest the dog should hear him and give tongue. But there was not so much as the rattle of a chain to show that the beast was on the alert.

Moving along the court-yard wall that edged the moat, he came to the terraceway that ran along the western front of the house. The place was smothered with weeds and brambles, the brambles catching his ankles like gins, so that he was constrained to go warily and set his teeth and his temper against the pricks. The wall fell to a couple of feet where the terrace began, giving a glimpse of the dim black waters of the moat.

John Gore halted when the outlines of the tower rose above him against the night sky. The western face thereof came down to the terrace stones, and in the western face was the window at which he had seen the hands appear. Crossing the terrace, he leaned against the plinth of the tower, almost burying himself in the ivy that hung there in masses. But for the very faint shivering of the leaves he could hear no sound, not even the sound of a voice from the far wing where the couple appeared to have their quarters.

John Gore ran his hands along the plinth, feeling for the main stems of the ivy where they had lifted and cocked the flagstones of the terrace. These stems were stout and tough as a great ship's cable, forked here and there so that a man's foot might rest, and sending out a net-work of ropes over the tower. John Gore thought of Sparkin, and how he would have laid a hatful of gold on the boy's pluck and sinew for such a climb. But since there was no Sparkin to venture such a climb for him, he pulled his stockings up, took a look at the precipice overhead, and staked his neck on a scramble into the dark.

A rat would have thought nothing of such a climb, for you may find them nesting high up in the ivy about a house. A daring boy might have ventured it by daylight, but to scale such a place at night might have made the most monkeyish seaman swear that he was not yet tired of the taverns. John Gore was not a man who had trained as a sea-captain by drinking wine in his state-room and strutting in scarlet upon his quarter-deck. He could make the tops as briskly as any man in his ship's company, and carry tarry hands and shiny clothes to the credit of his seamanship.

But his heart never felt so near his mouth before, nor his fingers so desperately tenacious, as when he had climbed some forty feet up that tower of Thorn. The ivy stems were smaller and gave less grip, while the sheer mass above him made the black void behind and below seem full of a

sense of suction drawing him toward a smashing fall upon the terrace stones. He pressed his chest to the brickwork, breathing hard through dilated nostrils, his teeth set, and his hands clinched upon the cordage of the creeper.

His brain grew steadier anon, and he went on, slowly and grimly, like a mountaineer laboriously and patiently clinging to narrow niches in the rock. Another ten feet brought him to one of the windows. It was barred, but the bar gave him something to hold to, and he found a knotted stem beneath that jutted out like a corbel. He rested there awhile, listening, and he could hear a dull, rhythmic sound above, as though some one were pacing to and fro in an upper room.

Then he went on again, even more slowly and perilously than before, thinking what a mad fool he was, and trying to forget that the return journey was before him. He was so close to the window now, and so grimly intent on keeping his hold, that he had no instinct left in him but the instinct of self-preservation. His whole consciousness seemed in his fingers and his toes. At last he felt one hand go over the window-ledge, and, lifting himself slowly, he got a grip of the stanchions and drew himself up till he could rest his elbows on the sill.

He hung there dizzy and out of breath, yet with a sense of infinite comfort at having his hand upon an iron bar. His fingers were bleeding, and his stockings torn into holes at the toes. Life and the full memory of things came back to him as he lay on the sill of the window. It was no moment for elaborate courtesy, as though he were in a velvet coat and bowing himself gallantly on the threshold of a great lady's salon.

One word came to him as the blood steadied in his brain, and he uttered it in a half whisper, as though it would have the power of a spell.

"Barbara!"

He heard some one move, and the creaking of woodwork.

"Barbara, is it you?"

There was a rustling sound against the wall, and two hands came up to him out of the darkness.

"John—John Gore?"

"Dear, you should know my voice."

"You, John! is it you? Oh, but you frightened me! I heard something climbing, and was shivering in a corner."

Now John Gore seemed suddenly to forget the eighty feet of space below him. His heart had given a great leap and was drumming against his ribs, for the truth that he had discovered went far beyond his dreams. The window was cut in the thickness of the wall, and the stanchions set deeply in it, so that he contrived to drag himself over the sill and wedge himself there with his face close to the bars.

"Thank God," he said, "that I dared this climb! It was a climb into the dark, dear, but I have found more than ever I sought."

He saw her hands come up to the bars. They touched his face, and then drew back as though she had not thought him so near. Her heart was so full of manifold emotions that for the moment she could not think. The suddenness of it had dizzied her, and yet through the strange tumult of it all she felt an infinite sweet joy.

"Barbe!"

His voice roused her suddenly to a sense of keen reality.

"Speak softly, or they may hear. You—you should not have risked so much."

"Barbe, why are you here, and why did they tell me lies?"

"Lies?"

"Yes, may God confound them! Come close to the window, dear; you can trust me to the death."

He heard her catch a short, sharp breath as though some one had dashed icy water upon her bosom.

"John, I can't tell you—I can't!"

"Why, child?—come?"

"Don't ask me—don't ask me anything to-night. I cannot bear it, when you have risked so much."

He could not see her, not even her hands, but he felt that she was very close to him. Assuredly this was not the Barbara of the old sullen days? Her infinite dumb distress went to his heart like wine.

"Barbe!"

She could not answer him for the moment, her thoughts in a tumult with the miserable secrets of the past.

"I cannot—I cannot!"

"Tell me, dear; you can trust me."

She was leaning her arms against the wall and her head against her arms.

"Oh, I was mad, John, and I think I had no heart—then. You must have heard; they must have given you some reason for this."

The wrath in him flashed out for an instant.

"Whether you were mad or not, child, I have no need to ask. They had put me off with lies, and but for God's mercy I should never have chanced upon the truth."

He heard her move with a little sound of anguish in the throat.

"The truth—what truth?"

"Why, that you were never mad, Barbara; God even pardon me for uttering the word."

"Mad—only that?"

"And does that mean nothing to me—to-night?"

She saw that he was only half wise as to the miserable intrigue that had let blood forth, blood that had dimmed her vision and filled her with a hate that now made her shudder. His tenderness would out, beating about her like mysterious movement in the air, making her dizzy and in terror of the past.

"Of your goodness, John, don't ask me anything—don't ask me anything to-night."

She broke down utterly, and though she tried to stifle it, the sound of her weeping would not be smothered. Pity of it went to the man's heart. A great tremor swept across his face. He stretched out an arm between the bars into the darkness of the room.

"Barbe, I ask nothing—I'll know nothing—till you wish. Don't weep, dear heart, when I cannot come at you to comfort."

His tenderness beat in on her, so that she seemed to master herself, only to fall into a new fear, and that lest he should be discovered.

"You must go, John. Why am I keeping you here? If they were to come!"

No words could have made him hardier in his daring.

"Take no care for me, Barbe. This is but the beginning of it all."

She put up her hands to him in appeal.

"No, no; they would kill you, perhaps!"

"I am not so easily dealt with, dear. Answer me one thing. Some brute struck you to-night?"

She leaned her head against the wall.

"Oh, that is nothing—nothing."

"Nothing!" And she could picture the bronzed grimness of his face. "Tell me, Barbe—the big man, or the little crooked rogue?"

"The big man."

"Now I know my dog."

The hardness of the window-stone, and the cramp and stiffness in his muscles, forced him to remember that he had the descent to make, and that it would not do to waste his strength.

"I must go now, Barbe," he said, "before I get too stiff."

She seemed to realize suddenly all the peril of that dark descent, and the dear hardihood that had brought him to her.

"John, if you should slip!"

Her tone held him there, loath to leave her when her voice thrilled so.

"No, I have done my scrambling about a ship's gear. Next time I shall bring a rope."

She put up her hands to the bars.

"But it is so dark, and so deep. Can't I help you, John?"

He hung there, and, seeing her hands so near, stretched one of his to meet them.

"What have you in the room, Barbe?"

"There are the sheets on the bed."

"How many?"

She climbed down and pulled the bedclothes on to the floor.

"Two sheets and the blanket."

"A short three fathoms. They would help me over the worst piece. Are you strong enough to knot them into a rope?"

"Yes, John—yes."

She set to work in the dark, rolling the sheets up and knotting the ends as stoutly as she could. Yet she mistrusted the knots, lest they should slip and dash the man to the stones below. And in her dread of it she pondered the case, and then looked up at the window.

"Have you a knife?"

"Surely, being a sailor."

He fumbled for it, cramped and wedged in as he was, and dropped it down upon the bed. Barbara felt for it, and, cutting off two thick strands of her hair, bound down the ends of the knots with the strands so that they should hold more surely under his weight.

"Here, John."

She mounted the bed and held the end to him, and he knotted it about the bar as firmly as a seaman could.

"Can you reach it when I have gone? Try."

She reached out her hands.

"Yes, easily. Take the knife back. They might find it, and suspect."

Their hands touched and thrilled in the darkness of the night. Then John Gore drew the sheet rope out, trying the knots to see that they were firm.

"What have you bound them with? Why, child, you have cut your hair!"

"Only two small pieces."

"Then the rope is blessed, dear. Good-night."

"Good-night."

"Trust to me, dear; I shall have you away from here before long. Trust me in your heart."

Barbara stood close to the wall, the anguish of the past, with all its memories, flooding back on her, now that he was going. She thought of that secret that seemed to flow between them like a river of doom. Her heart grew chilled and afraid with dread of the truth.

"John!"

He hung there, waiting.

"You must not come again, John. Promise me; it is risking your life, and I—"

"And you?"

"Don't ask me to tell you; I have not the courage; it was all so terrible, and the truth was too great for me. Promise you will not come."

"If I promised that," he said, simply, "I might as well drop and end it."

"Oh—but—John—"

"Barbe, good-night." And she felt the tightening of the rope against the bar. "I cannot part with such wild talk from you. Good-night. God hold you in His keeping."

She heard the rustle of leaves and the dull chafing of the sheet against the stone. Leaning against the wall and listening, her heart seemed to beat but thrice in a minute while she waited to hear whether he were safe or no. The rope slackened, and she heard the faint rustle of leaves go

slowly down the tower. Then all was silent, and there was nothing left but the empty night.

Suddenly, as though bending beneath some great weight of humiliation and utter helplessness, she sank down on the bed with her head resting against the wall. A great shudder ran through her, yet no tears came; for all the dreariness of the hour seemed lost in the miserable menace of the past.

XXXI

John Gore made his retreat from Thorn with nothing more threatening in the way of a betrayal than a low, querulous growl from the mastiff chained in the yard. He scaled the gate, and made his way back to the thorn-tree where he had left his heavier clothes and his sword.

Now the sea-captain's brain might have been a Spanish treasure-ship, and the happenings of the night so many buccaneers by the way they stormed in and put everything to confusion. There were a hundred questions to be asked and answered, and many of them were the worst of riddles. The night sky seemed full of new meanings, new mysteries, new secrets, and Thorn itself a strange dim place where the heart of a man might lose itself in wonder. Yet one truth shone out like a great star above the tower, steady and sure amid so many drifting clouds. He had found the girl with the white face and the dusky hair, and learned that she was no more mad than he was; and for that he gave God thanks.

But setting the romance and the tenderness thereof aside for a moment, John Gore found himself face to face with some very sinister and savage questions. Plodding back over the grass toward the beech-thicket where he had left his horse, he began to scan the past as he walked, beating up memories with the keenness of a lawyer sifting evidence. Why had they mewed the girl up in this ruin of a place? Why had they lied to him about her madness? What had they to fear from her that they had made such a secret of the thing? Barbara herself had seemed haunted by some hidden anguish, some mysterious dread that had made her shudder at the simplest question. He recalled all that he had heard concerning her—the mystery of her father's death, her moodiness and silence, the fears my lord had expressed as to her state of mind. He retold, piece by piece, the tale his father had told him on the night of his return from Yorkshire in September. Why had they gotten her into their power, made some pretence of madness, and shut her up with such keepers, and at the mercy of a ruffian's fist? The inevitable answer was that Barbara had discovered some secret that my Lord Gore and her mother were fiercely compelled to conceal. It had not been madness on her part, but perhaps too much knowledge, that had led them to seize such sinister methods. As for the secret itself, the core and pith of the whole mystery! He could only recall the tale his father had told him, and knit his brows over it like a man meeting the sleet of a storm.

Now John Gore was a man of action, and as such laid his plans that night. He was going to take Barbara out of Thorn, for all the plots and intrigues and miserable shadows of shame the whole world might boast. There was the fellow Grylls to be dealt with, his father's creature, and though his heart smote him at the thought of it, he was grimly determined to lose no chance. Whatever authority the man might have, he might at least be robbed of information. Captain Grylls would probably spend the night at Thorn, and might be dealt with when he sallied out in the morning.

A night watch in the woods opened for John Gore; he and his horse would have to make the best of such quarters as they had, the shelter of the beeches and the litter of leaves and bracken. John Gore swung himself into the fork of a tree, and, wrapping his cloak about him, sat looking toward Thorn, his heart full of the night's adventures. The darker thoughts drifted aside for a season, and he thought only of the woman whose womanhood meant so much to him. He found himself wondering at the change in her, for never before had she shown her true self to him with its flood of pathos, simplicity, and passion. A few moments at a window, a touch of the hands, and they were sharing life and its impulses together. He thought of the long, cold nights in that tower room, the loneliness, the forebodings, the burden of past sorrow. It was easy to understand how the less lovable pride in her had been broken, and how with tears her womanhood had come by its true strength. The very sound of her voice had seemed richer to him; the change in her was a change that no true man would ever quarrel with.

Though mists rose and a frail moon came up to make the dark woods seem more raw and cold, John Gore kept watch all night in the fork of the beech-tree, thinking of Barbara and of the strange things he had discovered. He saw the dawn steal slowly into the east, and with the first gray light thereof the flutter of something white at the upper window of the tower. But with the day and the sound of the stirring of birds, John Gore came down out of the beech-tree, for there was work before him, and he had made his plans. There were his pistols to be cleaned and primed, his horse to be given a canter for both their sakes, and a crop at the grass in the forest ride. He still had some victuals left him, and John Gore made a meal under the tree where he had spent the night, keeping an eye on Thorn for a glimpse of Captain Grylls. Nor had the gossamer and the dew shone for long in the sunlight before he saw a horseman ride out from the gate of Thorn, and push on slowly toward the forest track.

Captain Grylls was jogging along peacefully that morning, thinking of such things as a man thinks of when he feels fat and warm, the money he is making, the clever things he may have done, or the woman he happens to fancy for the moment, when he heard the sound of a horse's hoofs sucking wet grass, and the creak and jingle of harness. The track had broadened into an open place with a number of great oak-trees spreading their branches over it, so that they made a golden dome with the turf green and sleek beneath. A man on horseback appeared suddenly amid the oak-trees, riding at a canter under the sweeping boughs, with his hat over his eyes as though to save his face from the hazel twigs of the track. The stranger bore down straight on Captain Grylls, though that worthy shouted lustily and tried to get his horse out of the path. And even before he could curse the

clumsy folly of the thing, his horse went down like a rammed wall, throwing him heavily, and crushing one leg badly under his flank.

Captain Grylls was stunned, and lay there on his back with his mouth open, a great gobbet of wet mud on his forehead. His nag picked himself up, shook himself till the harness rattled, and then stood quietly staring at the stranger who had blundered into him like a cavalry horse at the charge. John Gore was out of the saddle and bending over Captain Grylls. The fellow was far from dead, though conveniently senseless. John Gore opened his coat, searched his pockets, and found in a brown leather pocket-book a little package about the size of a man's palm, wrapped in a piece of paper that looked like the torn-out fly-leaf of a book. The packet was tied up with worsted and roughly sealed.

John Gore took the thing, slipping the leather pocket-book back again into its place. Then he turned his attention to Captain Grylls's horse, taking out that gentleman's pistols, scattering the powder, and rubbing wet mud into the pans. He searched the holsters and the saddle-bags, but found nothing but a pipe and a paper of tobacco, some food, a change of undergear, and a bottle of wine. He had put the things back again when Captain Grylls came to his senses and sat up.

With the first clearing of his wits he laid a hand to his bruised ankle, and began to swear like a buccaneer at the man who had ridden into him so clumsily.

"Teeth and hair of the Almighty! you blind sot of a jackass, isn't there enough road for you to ride to blazes without blundering into better men than yourself? What the devil do you mean by it, you Sussex clod, you bumpkin, you lousy yeoman? Give us a hand, can't you? Wet grass ain't anything of a cushion, especially when a man has no change of small-clothes with him."

He glanced at John Gore, but did not seem to recognize him, and, getting upon his feet, limped to and fro awhile, cursing. Then he began slapping his pockets with his hands to make sure that his purse and pocket-book were there, looking at John Gore the while out of the corners of his eyes.

"I have not had anything in the way of an apology yet, sir," he said.

John Gore lifted his hat, watching Captain Grylls carefully, to see whether his lack of recognition was a blind or no. He remembered that he had had the collar of his coat turned up that night in the park, and that he himself might not have recognized Grylls but for the wryness of his figure.

"Most certainly, I offer you my apologies, sir. I was in a hurry, and had taken a bridle-track, having business Hastings way by eight."

John Gore coarsened himself to the likeness of a gentleman farmer in his best clothes.

"You will crack your skull and spill your business if you ride about it in such fashion."

"We Sussex folk have hard heads."

"And no manners—either," quoth the man in the brown coat, glancing rather threateningly at the pistol-holsters on his saddle.

He limped up to his horse, and examined the saddle-bag to see that his things were there. Then he jammed his hat down on his head, looked sourly at his muddy clothes, and passed a hand over the wettest portion of his figure.

"A nice start for a thirty-mile ride. I shall have to bait somewhere and dry my breeches."

"A day in the saddle, then?"

"Tunbridge to-night, London to-morrow." He put his foot in the stirrup and climbed up heavily, grunting and swearing to ease his temper. "I wish you a clear road, sir," he said, with sarcasm. "You would do well to lead a charge of horse."

"I can only assure you of my regrets, my dear sir. We farmer gentry ride fast when there is a marriage to be arranged."

Captain Grylls tilted his nose.

"Green youth, green youth!" he said, sententiously. "In ten years, my lad, you will break your neck riding to be rid of the sweet thing's temper. Let the blood be hot for a month or two, till she begins to scold in bed instead of kissing."

John Gore laughed.

"You are a man of experience, sir. Well, I must not waste your time—or my own."

The man in the brown coat went away with a jeer.

"Spend your time on a wife, my lad, and you'll waste it. Learn to spend it on other men's wives—steal the kisses, and leave them the scratches."

"Good-morning to you, sir; I wish I had some spare small-clothes to lend you."

"They'll dry in the saddle, Master Numskull, or I'll sit with my back to the next fire I come across." And he went off at a trot into the autumn woods.

John Gore led his horse aside among the oak-trees, and proceeded to examine the package that he had taken from Captain Grylls. On the paper was roughly scrawled "My lord," and, breaking the seal and the worsted, he found nothing more astonishing than a mass of wool pressed tightly together. But as he unravelled the stuff he came upon something hard that glistened—a gold ring set with a seal and bound round with a piece of red silk. The seal was an intaglio cut in sardonyx—a gorgon's head with a hand holding a firebrand above it.

John Gore knew it to be his father's signet-ring, and this circle of gold, with its seal, cast out all doubt as to my lord's authority in the matter. That ring might carry his father's orders to and fro without his compromising himself by putting pen to paper. John Gore wondered what the piece of red silk meant. The message it carried might have some sinister meaning, for the mystery and the secrecy of it all had drawn many dark thoughts into his mind. How far would Captain Grylls ride before discovering the loss of the packet? Would he return, or ride on ahead for London? Above all, what message had he carried to Thorn, and had his coming foreshadowed some peril for Barbara? John Gore had thought of holding Captain Grylls at the pistol-point and of forcing a confession from him, but he had realized the rashness of such a measure; nor could he have proved that the rogue was telling him the truth. Captain Grylls might be a mere despatch-rider knowing nothing of the news he carried. It would be wiser to let him go his way without his discovering who was meddling in the plot.

John Gore put the ring upon his finger, mounted his horse, and made for the main road. He needed a place where he could lie quiet, and people whom he could trust, and Furze Farm was such a place. He made for it that morning, guided by the shouts of a man whom he found ploughing in a field, and before noon he rode down the grass track that Mr. Pepys had followed, and saw the red farm-house, the dark thatch, the yellow stacks, and the golden beeches against a breezy sky. As he came riding by Chris Jennifer's orchard he saw Mrs. Winnie hanging linen out to dry, while white-poll'd Will paddled round the pond, and surreptitiously threw sticks at the white ducks thereon.

Mrs. Winnie's blue petticoat was blowing merrily, and she had a clothes-peg in her mouth when John Gore called to her over the hedge. She dropped the peg suddenly, while the wind blew an apron across her face.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Jennifer."

"Drat the clothes! Who be it this time of the morning? And me with a short petticoat on!"

She flicked the apron aside, settled her skirts, and came round under a great apple-tree, with a few pullets running at her heels.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Jennifer."

"Sakes alive! is it you, sir?"

"Yes, come to ask you a favor. You had better keep an eye on that boy of yours. He still seems in love with the pond."

She moved along the hedge, smoothing her brown hair down, and showing the muscles in her big brown arms.

"Come in, sir, and be welcome. Will, Will, you little frummet, what be you doing there, terrifying all of us with puddling round in the mud?"

She opened the gate for John Gore and gave him a curtesy, for Winnie Jennifer had served as woman in a great house, and her manners and her speech were less quaint than Mr. Christopher's.

"Come in, sir; my man will be up from the ploughland soon. Dinner will be coming, though it be only rough stuff."

John Gore dismounted, and made Mrs. Winnie a slight bow.

"You offered me your good-will," he said, frankly, "and I have come to take it—as a friend."

He led his horse toward the stable while Chris Jennifer's wife bustled into the house, putting washing-day behind her with good-natured patience. John Gore found her going into the little old parlor with an apron full of sticks, but he protested that the kitchen ingle-nook would do for him, and that he liked the smell of dinner. So he sat himself down in the nook under the hood of the great fireplace, stretching his legs out to the fire, and wondering what he would say to Christopher Jennifer's wife.

There was a pot boiling over the fire, and Mrs. Winnie began to gather her flour and things upon the table for the making of a pudding. She took a great pot of preserves from a cupboard, and set to work very sensibly in her practical, brown-armed way.

"If I had known, sir, I wouldn't have put an old one in the pot."

"Old one?"

"One of the old hens, sir; they're not so bad when you boil 'em. I'll make up some herb sauce to help the old lady down."

Now whether it was the warmth of the fire, or the frank freshness of Mrs. Winnie's manner, John Gore found himself telling her enough of the truth to set the woman in her heartily at his service. She forgot her pudding in her sympathy, even so far as to stir the air with a wooden spoon and to spill jam upon the table. John Gore had come to the pith of the matter when he saw her flourish the spoon threateningly in the direction of the back-yard door.

"Will, you little spying rogue, get you out and look for the eggs."

"There ain't none," came the retort; "t' birds be moultin'."

"Don't answer me, young man; do what I tell ye." And she made a step forward that sent the youngster running for fear of the spoon.

Mrs. Winnie turned to her pudding, casting a look now and again at the grim, brown-faced man in the ingle-nook.

"You move me—powerful, sir. As sure as I love my man, sir, coming to him as a clean maid as I did, with all my linen and my savings, if it be no liberty on my part—I'll ask to serve you—as you please. Come into this house as yours, sir; come and go, and we'll ask no questions. My man and I will thank God for it, that we can give you service for what you did."

John Gore felt that he could trust her, and Mrs. Winnie had no less trust in him. She was a shrewd woman, with some knowledge of the world in her own blunt way, and more sentiment and warmth in her than one would have guessed by the masterfulness of her manner.

"I shall be very grateful to you," said, the man, simply.

"Why, there, sir, it's little enough. There sha'n't be any poking of noses round Furze Farm, I can tell you that. I have a tongue—and a tongue, and my man is a man o' sense. Order your own goings, sir, and we'll just mind our business."

She could not have shown her good-sense or her honor better than by taking the matter as she did. But when John Gore spoke of his more tangible debt to her, she stirred the pudding hard, and would have none of his protests.

"No, sir, we have got good crops in, three milking-cows, a yard full of pullets, all stuff off our own ground. It's just our own stuff, and we shall thank you to eat of it, though it be a bit rough, and not puffed up for a gentleman's table. Charge you sixpence when we kill a chicken, or a penny when I take a bowl of apples down out of the attic? Dear life, sir, not me! My hands aren't made that way."

Chris Jennifer came in about dinner-time, heralding his approach by kicking his muddy boots against the stone step at the yard door. He came in, and received John Gore and his wife's orders without so much as a blink of surprise. He stared hard at his guest for half a minute or so, and then took a big jug from a shelf over the fireplace.

"I'll tap t' new cask," he said, as though that would be his warmest welcome. "Put some apples t' sizzle, my dear. Suppose thee'll be airin' t' best sheets."

"Go on with you," said his wife, bluntly; "do you think I be one to forget such a thing?"

Mr. Jennifer lumbered round to her, stood by her solemnly a moment, and then gave her a very deliberate dig under the arm.

"T' woman stole gentleman Adam's rib; mindings be mendings." And he went off with a chuckle toward the pantry, leaving John Gore to disentangle the meaning of so solemn a jest.

XXXII

Little Dr. Hemstruther, in his rusty clothes, came out from my Lady Purcell's house and entered the "chair" that was in waiting for him, telling the men to carry him to my Lord Gore's, in St. James's Street. He took snuff vigorously as the two chairmen swung along over the cobbles, patted his chest, and beat his hands together to keep them warm. His unwholesome face had a beaky, bird-like alertness, and he appeared cynically amused by something, for Dr. Hemstruther delighted in the quaint inconsistencies of human nature, and had a fanatical hatred of all altruism and the sentiment of religion. Like many sour old men, he was hugely pleased when he had discovered anything mean and scandalous. And yet he was to be trusted in the keeping of a secret, his cynical temper helping him to cover up the follies of those who filled his purse. He merely jeered and mocked at them in philosophic privacy, taking their money, and mocking his own self for being the creature of such hire.

The chairmen stopped before the house in St. James's Street, Dr. Hemstruther waiting in the chair till the house door opened, for a keen northwest wind was sweeping the street. Toddling in at last—a shrewd, meagre figure, his long nose poking forward between the curls of his huge wig—he was shown by the man Rogers into a little room at the back of the house where Stephen Gore kept his books and papers.

Dr. Hemstruther was warming his hands at the fire when my lord came in to him, his florid cheerfulness struggling to shine through a cloud of anxiety and unrest. His suit of sky-blue satin, the lace ruffles at his wrists, the very rings upon his fingers, seemed part of a radiance that was wilfully assumed. A keen eye could detect a certain hollowness in the face, a bagginess beneath the eyes, some slackness of the muscles about the mouth. The silky gloss of his fine manner betrayed through the very beauty of its texture the darker moods and thoughts beneath.

Dr. Hemstruther noted and commented on all this as he bowed his lean little body, and rubbed his hands for fear of chilblains; and Dr. Hemstruther despised my lord, though he covered up his sneers with subserviency and unction. For my Lady Purcell had fallen sick of the small-pox some days ago, and in her panic and distress of soul was sending my lord messages, which he—brave gentleman—put discreetly to one side.

"Well, sir, what news to-day?"

Dr. Hemstruther carried a very solemn face for the occasion.

"Great peril, my lord—great peril."

"What! No better?"

"A threatening of malignancy, my lord."

A flash of impatience escaped from Stephen Gore.

"What is your experience worth, Dr. Hemstruther, if you cannot handle a woman with a fever? The greater part of our earthly wisdom is a mere matter of words."

He walked to the window and opened it.

"Poor Nan Purcell, to have escaped so long with a clean skin! There will be much weeping and gnashing of teeth and covering up of mirrors."

The petulance in his voice betrayed his resentment at the lack of improvement in her affairs. Her sickness was infinitely mischievous at such a moment, and inspired him with an uneasy and savage impatience. He flung down into a chair, with all his sweet loftiness in peril of toppling into a snarl of unseemly temper. Dr. Hemstruther appeared to be intent upon brushing some of the snuff from his coat.

"The danger is not skin deep, sir," he said.

"You find yourself quite helpless, Dr. Hemstruther, eh? There, pardon my peevishness—"

"I would not venture the weight of a feather either way, my lord. And she is a bad patient, mens turbida in corpore ægro."

He sniffed, smoothed his wig, and looked deferentially at his shoes.

"My Lady Purcell is asking for you, my lord."

"Then she is conscious—of everything?"

"Conscious to the quick, in spite of the heat of the fever. If I may be pardoned—"

His eyes met my lord's, and Stephen Gore was the more embarrassed of the two.

"You think that I should do her good?"

"More good, my lord—"

"Than all your draughts and bleedings!"

Dr. Hemstruther bowed, and hid a smile with the obeisance.

"My Lord Gore might find some words to soothe the lady."

"But you forget, man, that—"

He did not complete the sentence, for even his egotism stumbled at the confession of the instinct of cowardice and self-love. Dr. Hemstruther understood him, and mocked inwardly at the great man's prudence.

"There is some danger, my lord; but still I would advise—"

"As a matter of policy?"

"As a matter of policy."

Stephen Gore pushed back his chair and stood at his full height, as though he felt the need of feeling himself taller than this little crab of a man who knew so much, and whose authority was so obsequious and yet so strong.

"Women have no patience, sir, and will scream 'fire' when a log falls on the hearth. I am up to my eyes in a rush of affairs to-day. And my friends will thank me if I breathe a pest into all their faces."

"To-morrow would serve, my lord."

"I may take your word for that? Good. Are there any cautions you would give me?"

Dr. Hemstruther screwed his face into an expression of intense sagacity.

"I will send you a powder to burn, my lord, and a mild draught to clear you. Sit by an open window, and have all the clothes you go in burned."

"My thanks. And now, sir, if you will pardon me, my leisure is not my own."

He unlocked a cabinet, took out a silk purse, and, crossing the room, held the purse out to the physician.

"I am exerting myself in that little affair of yours, Dr. Hemstruther," he said. "It is a pleasure to labor for one's friends."

Both smiled faintly as they looked into each other's eyes. Dr. Hemstruther put the purse away in an inner pocket and made one of his most courtly bows.

"Your servant, my lord. I trust that I am mindful of all your interests." And he went out sniffing, to wrinkle up his nose sardonically, like a grinning dog, so soon as he was out of Stephen Gore's sight.

But if Anne Purcell burned with a fever upon her bed, whimpering and calling continually on Mrs. Jael, who had taken a heavy bribe to bide beside her lady, my Lord Gore was in an equal fever of mind, the fever of a man who has many things to dread. He knew enough of the human heart to remember that the cords of silence char and slacken when Death holds the torch to the secrets of the past. A panic of penitence, the betrayal of others in the mad impulse to make amends, the emotions thirsting for the comfort of the confessional dew. And Stephen Gore was wise as to the gravity of a betrayal, for the man Grylls had ridden into Sussex, and Anne Purcell knew it, and the sealed order that he carried. Moreover, this blood-debt was not the only stain that darkened my lord's consciousness. He was sunk to the chin in other and wider waters, where the breath from a hired creature's lips might stir such a storm as should smother death into the mouths of many.

He stood before the fire, staring into it, and turning the rings upon his fingers. For the moment it was all self with him: self, savage, querulous, impatient, driven to that height of fanaticism whence the sorrows and hopes of a man's fellows seem infinitely small and insignificant. It was the mad, angry self that beats down and tramples on the life instincts of others, crying a savage sacrifice to the Moloch of the ego. And yet this man in the satin coat, so bland, so debonair, so generous on the surface, heard the low clamor of that underworld that every man carries in the deeps of consciousness. He suffered, yet would not countenance his suffering, hardening himself to escape from it with fierce strength and subtlety and anger.

XXXIII

If Winnie Jennifer was not in love with John Gore, she was in love with the love in him, for no man could sit and stare so at the fire, and look so quietly grim over such a matter, without winning over a woman's heart. There was a romance here, and your true woman, be she drudge or madam, has that trick of the fancy that lifts life out of its sordid round and makes her a queen of the fairies, though there be gray in her hair. And when he looked at Winnie with those deepset eyes of his she knew that he was looking beyond her toward his love, and that the heart in him said: "I must go to her, for she has suffered."

Therefore, when John Gore rose up from the ingle-nook about three in the afternoon, and asked her whether Mr. Jennifer could lend him several fathoms of good rope, Mrs. Winnie regarded him with a curious glint of the eyes, and felt a delight in meddling in such a matter.

"To be sure, sir, there is a good round of rope hanging on a harness-peg in the stable. Come you—we will see."

She went out with him, swinging her brown arms and holding her head high, as though proud in her woman's way of sharing in the adventure, and, opening the stable door, showed him a hank of brown rope hanging from the wood.

"How much would you be wanting, sir?"

"Ten fathoms will do."

He took the hank down, and, laying it on the floor, began to measure the rope out, yard by yard, coiling it neatly close by Mrs. Winnie's feet. It was good hemp, unfrayed and unrotted, not too thick and stiff, yet stout enough to carry the weight of three men.

Mrs. Winnie watched him, her eyes inquisitively kind, and her tongue all of a tremble. He was borrowing the rope in the cause of adventure, and she felt flattered in the lending of it, but she wished he would tell her what it was for.

"It is good hemp, sir."

"I should know a good rope, being a sailor. I shall need it to help me in a bit of a scramble."

Mrs. Winnie began to think of all the cliffs and quarries in the neighborhood, for John Gore had withheld the name of Thorn.

"I had better get you a wallet full of food, sir; you may be needing it."

"You think of everything, Mrs. Jennifer. I am going treasure-hunting." And he laughed.

"Treasure, sir?"

"Yes. In a few days I may bring my treasure-trove back with me."

Mrs. Winnie understood of a sudden, and her eyes grew full of light.

"No doubt she is all you desire, sir, and I ask no more questions of you. You have told me enough before to make me want to take and comfort her."

She went away, and returned anon with an extra cloak, a parcel of bread and meat, some apples, and a drop of good hollands in a flask, for the autumn nights were growing raw and cold. John Gore had saddled his horse and hung the rope over one of the holsters. He looked touched by Mrs. Winnie's simple kindness, and by the faith she seemed ready to give to him.

"I shall have a heavy debt before long," he said.

"We don't count by tallies here, sir."

And she was quite happy, good soul, in feeling his gratitude pledge its truth. She watched him ride away along the hedge, knowing him for a brave man and a strong one—a man whom a woman instinctively respects.

Now, at Thorn, Simon Pinniger sat on a tree-stump in an out-house lazily splitting billets of wood with the axe edge of a pick. It was growing dusk, and a pile of white wood lay beside him, with here and there the pink core of an old apple trunk amid the billets of oak and ash. Simon Pinniger was tired of the job, and, filling a basket with split logs, he shouldered it and crossed the court-yard into the kitchen, and dumped the basket down beside the hearth with the air of a man whose day's work was done.

The woman Nance was at the table, peeling apples for a pie, her lips pressed intently together, and three hard lines running across her forehead. The man looked at her a little furtively, and then went to draw some beer from a cask that stood in the corner. He put the jug on the floor under the tap, so that the ale should have a head on it, and stood there watching the liquor flow with the stupid slouching pose of a man whose body was too big for his brain.

"Sim!"

The sharp rasp of the woman's voice brought him round as though she had clouted him on the ear.

"What are you thinking of, man?"

The red-lidded eyes behind the eyelet-holes in the linen looked capable of expressing nothing but fleshly things.

"Supper," he said, curtly.

"Well, you'll wait for it. Quick, you fool, the liquor's running over."

He turned and put a hand to the spigot, muttering as a rivulet of good ale curled across the floor.

"All your tongue, as usual."

"It's always my tongue, Sim, and never your lumpishness. Wipe that slop up; I'm not going to soil my shoes in it."

He obeyed her, and then sat himself on the three-legged stool before the fire, taking the jug with him, and standing it on the hearth.

"There's comfort in the stuff," he said, sullenly.

The woman gave a sharp laugh.

"Courage, you mean, you six feet and a half of fat and folly! You would run away from it all but for me."

"Run!"

"Yes, you."

"You want a week of the branks, my dear. Give me my money and my liquor, and I'm the bully for any man."

"Oh, you're a fine fat falcon—you! Keep a little courage in the cask, Sim, till the business comes. Three days' grace and no countermand. What's it to be—a mattress, or a fathom of rope, or a soft scarf? What are you looking so sulky about?"

For the man had bunched himself over the fire, and was rocking backward and forward on two legs of the stool.

"Let it alone, you fool," he said; "it don't do a man good to think of such things."

She looked up mockingly, and threw a half-rotten apple at him.

"Oh, you soft head!—you piece of pulp! You're no better than a great girl—you, who pulled Adam Naylor's windpipe out and broke in that Frenchman's chest. You, to make such a blubber over this!"

"Who's afraid?" he asked, savagely.

"My sweet conscience! Oh, dear, good saints! I'm a poor sinner, a poor snivelling sinner—"

"Nance, shut your trap!" And he opened his chest and roared at her with sudden fury.

She took it with a laugh.

"Better, Sim, better. Put a little temper into it. I'll give you a pint of hollands when the night comes, and smack you across the face with a firebrand to make you mad."

And she filled her apron with the apple-peelings, and came and tossed them into the fire.

A west wind blew fitfully about the tower of Thorn. The ivy rustled, leaf tapping against leaf; and the clouds passed slowly across the stars. An owl was beating up and down the edge of a neighboring wood, hooting as he went, now strangely near, now faint in the distance. From the court-yard came the dull "burr" of the dog's chain as he fidgeted in his kennel.

Barbara had been at war with herself all day—distraught, troubled, afraid to believe that which she most desired. And with the dusk her uneasiness and her wavering suspense had deepened, heralding an anguish of self-hatred and humiliation that shirked the ordeal of another meeting. She dreaded lest John Gore should come, and yet listened for his coming, fearing and longing for him in one breath, the past and present fighting for her desire. Twice she rolled up the sheets to succor him in his climb, and twice unrolled them with a fever of indecision. Her heart labored with the secret that it held, striving against the untellable, yet trying to beat out nothing but the truth. There was that eternal blood-debt between them, lurid to her, now that the night had come, like the glare of a fire reddening the sky.

Barbara walked to and fro awhile, and then stood listening, leaning against the wall. Nor had she been long motionless when there was a faint rustling of the ivy, a sound as of something moving, of something drawing near to her in the darkness. She climbed the bed and put her hands to the bars. A faint whisper came up to her out of the sibilant shiver of the leaves.

"Barbara!"

The fever of doubt and of fear left her suddenly.

"John!"

"Can you help me?"

"Yes; wait."

She was down instantly, rolling the sheets and knotting them into a rope. The strands of her hair were under the pillow. She took them and wound them round the knots, and, making them fast to a bar, threw the end thereof out of the window. But the rope would not run by its own weight, and she had to thrust it out foot by foot, standing on the bed and leaning her bosom against the wall.

The rope tightened, the knot straining at the bar. Then a shadow blotted out the window.

"Dear heart!"

She stretched out her hands to him, and then drew them with a sharp sob into her bosom, bending down her head and feeling the old despair taking possession of her heart.

"Barbe!"

He had forced himself into the stone framing of the window, and she could hear him breathing hard with the grimness of the climb.

"Where are you, child?"

He lay there with his face to the bars, and heard nothing but sudden passionate weeping. The sound of it went through him to the heart. He stretched out an arm and was able to touch her hair.

"Dear heart, what is it?"

She shivered and drew away.

"You should not have come—"

"No, no."

"John, you should not—"

"My life, child—come, speak to me—I cannot bear to hear you weep."

She knew that he was trying to touch her, to be nearer to her, even with all the deep tenderness of his manhood. It was so easy and yet so difficult, so sweet and yet so full of torment. She felt that she could not bear out against him; and yet—how could she tell?

He spoke again.

"Barbara!"

And then:

"Dear heart, do you not trust me?"

Something seemed to break within her, and she thrust up her hands to him with a cry as of one drowning.

"John, I am afraid! John, I am afraid!"

"There, my life."

"Take my hands—hold them—keep me; I am afraid, John! Dear God, what can I say!"

Her courage and her will had gone, and a storm of trembling shook her. John Gore felt the quivering of her body coming along her arms to him. Her hands strained at his, as though he were the one sure thing left to her in the anguish of it all.

"Barbara!"

He drew her as close to him as bars and wall would suffer.

"Tell me, child, everything."

"I can't, John! oh, I can't!"

"Dear, do you think there is not one heart in the world? Look up, and tell me; I cannot let you go!"

She was silent a moment, still trembling greatly.

"John, you will hate me!"

"No! no! no!"

"Your father—"

His hands tightened on hers.

"My life, courage!"

"Your father killed my father, John!"

"Child!"

"And I—I tried to win revenge."

She buried her face upon her arms, and then lifted it suddenly toward him in the dark, as though in an agony to know what he was thinking. His hands still had hold of hers, and there was no slackening of his fingers.

"John!"

"Dear heart!"

He bent his head, and drawing her hands to him, pressed his lips to them. Below him he could see the dim, appealing whiteness of her face.

"Barbe, you should have told me."

"I was mad."

"Who shall judge us, dear? You should have told me. I might have spared you much."

He drew her hands close into his bosom, and she leaned there, letting the tears flow silently and the sorrow in her take refuge in his strength.

"You will not condemn me, John—you?"

"I! What am I, child, to condemn you?"

"But I have learned and I have suffered, and, John, in the long, silent nights I have prayed to God that He would be merciful to me—that I in turn might be more merciful."

He kissed her hands again.

"God is with us, child, here and now."

"How good you are, John! If I could only tell him—and my mother."

"Dear heart, let that rest awhile. It is you I pray for—you that I remember."

He was silent awhile, like a man waking to life from some strange dream. Then he pressed her hands in his, and spoke very dearly through the bars to her.

"Barbe, I must get you away from here. I would do it without violence for your sake—for the sake of every one. It would be easy for me to kill that man, but I would not have blood with the memory of this."

She looked up at him and sighed.

"Listen: you can trust me. I have a rope here round my body; take it, when I am gone, and hide it in your bed. I will come again to-morrow and file these bars through. Do you know how the door is fastened?"

"With lock and bar."

"A tough customer. Do they leave you alone the whole night?"

"Yes."

"Time, an auger, and a good knife will serve then. I have a place to take you to. You will trust me in this?"

"John, need you ask that?"

"Dear heart of mine, no, no. Now for a rope's-end. When I am safe below I will give three twitches to the rope. Draw it up, dear, and hide it in your bed."

"Yes."

"And, child, if you are in danger, or fear anything, tear off a piece of linen and tie it to one of the bars. I shall storm in then without by your leave or welcome, and deal with those gentry at the point of the sword."

He kissed her fingers, hung there a moment, and then unwound the rope from about his body. Fastening it, he touched her hands through the bars of the window and went down into the night.

XXXIV

There were two link-boys waiting outside Lord Gore's house in St. James's Street when a short, stumpy woman came hurrying along with the hood of her cloak down over her head. The street door of the house was open, and a servant waiting on the step with a fur cloak over one arm and a sword under the other.

His master came out as the woman paused at the steps—a thin, swarthy, sallow man, with alert eyes and a brisk manner. He took the cloak from the servant and swung it over his shoulders, putting his chin up as he fastened the cloak, and making his lower lip protrude beyond the upper. Coming down the steps he looked hard at the woman who was leaning against the railings, a look that was half gallant, half suspicious, and even paused to stare in her face as though he thought she might have some message for him. But since she hung back and waited for him to pass, and was, moreover, woolly and middle-aged, he gave an order to the link-boys for the Savoy, and went away at a good fast stride with the servant following at his heels.

The woman ran up the steps and spoke to Tom Rogers, who was holding the door open and staring curiously after the retreating figure. Her voice was importunate, and even threatening—so much so that he let her in and closed the door, and went about her business without demur, as though knowing that she had some right to hustle.

My lord was in the little library at the back of the house, sorting and looking through a litter of papers on the table with a feverish, irritable air. There was a good fire burning, and charred fragments of paper littered the hearth and fluttered in the draught at the throat of the chimney. My lord had taken a roll of letters, and was thrusting them into the heart of the fire with the tongs when Rogers knocked at the door and entered upon privilege.

His master glanced at him with a gleam of impatient distrust.

"What is it now?"

"My Lady Purcell's woman, sir."

"Where?"

"In the hall, my lord. She says that she must speak with you."

Stephen Gore's face had the dusky look of a face gorged with blood from drinking.

"Send her in, Rogers. Take warning, I am at home to no one, not even to the King."

The roll of letters was a black mass spangled over with sparks and corroding lines of fire when Mrs. Jael came in with the hood of her cloak turned back. She waited till Rogers had closed the door, and even then looked at it suspiciously, as though afraid that the fellow might be listening. Stephen Gore understood her meaning. He opened it, found the passage empty, and, closing the door again, stood with his back to it and his hand upon the latch.

"Your message?"

Mrs. Jael fidgeted her arms under her cloak, and looked hot and a little scared.

"My lady has sent me, my lord—"

"Well, well?"

"She must see you to-night; she will take no denial; I am bidden to bring you back."

Stephen Gore frowned at her didactic tone and the menace in her manner.

"Indeed!"

"She cannot bear it alone, my lord; she must speak with you; we fear that she is dying."

"Dying?"

"Yes, sir; yes—don't curl your mouth at me. She bade me say that unless you come to her, she

will—”

The expression of my lord's face so frightened Mrs. Jael that her voice faltered away into an almost inaudible murmur. He stood staring at her, his flushed face seamed with the passions of a man whose courage and patience had already suffered, and on whom all the hazards of life were falling in one and the same hour.

“I will come.”

He pressed back his shoulders, steadied his dignity, and crossed the room to where hat, cloak, and sword lay on a carved chair. His hands fumbled with the tags of the cloak as he fastened them. Mrs. Jael kept her distance as he walked toward the door, for there was a look in my lord's eyes that night that made her afraid of him. He was as a man driven to bay, and ready to stab at any one who should venture too near his person.

Stephen Gore walked the short distance to Anne Purcell's house in grim silence, heartily cursing all women, and in no mood to humor a sick sinner. The whole thing was accursedly vexatious and inopportune, and he hardened himself against all sentiment with the savage impatience of a man who is harassed and menaced on every quarter. Mrs. Jael was a snivelling fool, an emotional creature who had helped to froth up her mistress's panic. Both of them, no doubt, needed ice to their heads, and a couple of gags to keep them quiet.

Yet the great house was so solemn and dim and silent, and the woman's manner in tragic keeping therewith, that Stephen Gore felt chilled and uneasy as he followed her flickering candle up the stairs. The place seemed ghostly and deserted, full of dark corners, draughts, and mysterious empty rooms. Stephen Gore had come in with his pulses thrumming lustily, and the hot intent to put all this meddlesome nonsense out of his path. But the house had much of the eeriness of a moorland in a fog, with quags ready to suck at a man's feet, and a strange, vast silence to unnerve him.

Mrs. Jael led him along a gallery, and opened a door at the end thereof. She stood back waiting for him to cross the threshold, and then, as though she had had her orders, she swung the door to and turned the key in the lock.

Stephen Gore turned with a start, hesitated, biting his lip, and then let things take their course. The room was lit by a single candle; the boards and walls were bare, and there was little in it save the four-post bed. A great fire burned on the hearth, and the air felt hot and heavy, and full of the indescribable scent of sickness.

“Stephen!”

He forced back his shoulders, gave a tug to his cravat, and turned toward the bed. The curtains were drawn back, and on the white pillow he saw a dusky, swollen face—a face that might haunt a man till the day of his death.

“Stephen, are you there?”

My lord looked shocked despite himself, as though thinking of the face that he had kissed not many days ago.

“Why, Nan, how is it with you?”

Her breathing was labored, her lips cracked and dry, and the hand that she stretched out to him swung up and down, like a branch in the wind.

“I cannot see you; my eyes are touched.”

He looked at her helplessly, half loathing the thing he saw, and yet unnerved by a blind rush of pity that beat and shook the pedestal of self.

“Stephen, don't come near me if you are afraid.”

She might have reproached him with the pusillanimous prudence he had shown in keeping away from her until this night. And, vain woman that she had been, she felt that it was the threat alone that had brought him to her. Yet she spoke calmly at first, and feebly, like one who had come to a sense of awe and of the end.

My lord put the best dignity he could upon it, but he felt the heat and the wilfulness in him growing cold.

“You have sent for me, Nan—”

“It is not the first time.”

“I should have come before, but I have been pressed and driven by a hundred things.”

Instinctively she turned her face toward him on the pillow, though she could not see him because the disease had blinded her.

“Let us make no excuses to-night, Stephen. Do you know that I am dying?”

“No, Nan—not that.”

She gave a long sigh, and her hands moved to and fro over the coverlet.

“Yes. I am dying. You know why—I have sent for you.”

“What is your desire?”

He stood looking at her in some astonishment and with unwilling awe, for she whom he had always led seemed mistress of herself under the shadow of death, and not the weeping, pleading, terrified thing that he had thought to find.

“Stephen, you must go to-night.”

He faced up as though to attention.

“Go? Where?”

“Need I tell you that?”

“My heart, you are ill—and distraught.”

She raised herself on the pillow with a sudden energy of passion; her poor marred face could not express it, but her voice had a deep, fierce thrill that came from the heart of the world.

“Man, man, do not play with me to-night, as you have played with me these many years!”

“Anne, if you will listen to me—”

“Listen! What have I to hear? This thing lies in my throat—and stifles me. I cannot bear it, I cannot bear to die with it—smothering my breath.”

He breathed out, and tried to hold himself in hand.

"Nan, it is impossible—"

"No, no."

"I cannot go to-night. There are matters—affairs that it would be death to me to leave. I tell you, I tell you—my honor is pledged here."

She held out a rigid arm toward him, her blurred, sightless eyes at gaze.

"Stephen, I warn you—"

"I tell you, you do not understand—"

"Your honor! You weigh your honor against this thing! Stephen, I warn you—"

"For God's sake, listen: I—"

"No, no. Save the child, I charge you, or before I die I will tell the truth."

Her hand dropped and then went to her throat, for a spasm of choking seized her, and he could see the muscles straining in her throat and her dry lips praying for air. Stephen Gore thought that death had her that instant, but the strength of her purpose bore her through.

"Stephen, promise me."

He held out his hands appealingly, helplessly; but the gesture was lost upon her blindness.

"Promise."

"It is impossible."

"Man, man, have you ever loved any one but yourself? Have you never stood on the edge of the world—and looked over—over into darkness? I cannot go to it—with this thing stifling me. Stephen, I ask you, if you have ever loved me, do me this last mercy."

He walked to and fro with a quick, rigid step, and paused at the far end of the room, feeling the air hot and poisonous, and the blood drumming at his temples.

"I am to sacrifice myself, Nan. You ask that?"

She propped herself upon the pillow, her head swaying slightly from side to side.

"I ask you not to face your God, Stephen, with more blood upon your hands."

He cried out at her with bitterness.

"Woman, woman, what can I do?"

"What I have asked. Ride down to Thorn—to-night. And, Stephen, do not think that I shall die—so soon—that you can play with me—and shirk it. You may wish that I were dead now—and silent."

He leaned against the wall, spreading his arms against it as though to steady himself.

"Before God, Nan, not that!"

"Stephen, if you have ever loved me, do not stoop to play a coward's trick upon me now."

He leaned there against the wall, almost like a man crucified, his face haggard, his forehead agleam with sweat. He had come to temporize, to dissuade, to cheat the truth with a few glib words, and he found the heart plucked out of him, and his self beaten against its anger and its will.

"Nan, I will go."

"There is time—yet."

"A night—and a day."

She held out her hands as though with a piteous sense of loneliness and leave-taking; but though he was humbled, shaken, he could not look into her face.

"Nan, I will go. Let that help you to live. What will come of it God alone can tell."

She felt instinctively through all the tumult of it that he could not look at her without a shudder, he who had always loved sun and color and richness about him—a soft skin and pleasant lips. Yet she was too near the veil, too close upon the eternal mystery, to cry out over a lost desire.

"Stephen, for God's sake, go!"

She fell back on the pillow as he turned to the door and shook it, forgetting in the chaos of his thoughts that the woman Jael had turned the key. He beat upon the panels with his fist, and when the door opened for him, pushed past her without a word, and went heavily down the dark stairway to the hall where he had left his cloak and sword.

My Lord Gore was within twenty yards of his own house when a figure that had been loitering in the shadow came slantwise across the road to meet him, and stopped on the footway as he passed. My lord had a glimpse of a pair of shining eyes and the white oval of a man's face between the drooping brim of a beaver and the upturned collar of a cloak.

"Good-night, my lord—fugax, fugax, solvendo non sumus."

He was pushing on with nothing more than a low, soft whistle when Stephen Gore caught him by the arm.

"Blake!"

"Softly, for God's sake, sir; I have loitered here for half an hour to give you the wink and the text."

My lord still gripped his arm.

"What is it, man?"

"Boot and saddle for me, sir, before midnight, and the godsend of a boat across the Channel. Coleman's correspondence has been seized."

"The fool—the Jesuit fool!"

"The poor devil will be in the Protestant purgatory soon, sir. If you are wise, ride—ride. There will be bigger titles than yours, my lord, bumping in the saddle to-night."

He looked about him uneasily, and then freed himself quietly from Stephen Gore's grip.

"Your pardon, sir, but the hawks will soon be on the wing for some of us poor popish pigeons. Good-night."

"Blake, thanks for this."

"Nonsense, sir; you helped me once, and I am an Irishman. Good-night."

He went away at a good pace, leaving Stephen Gore standing on the footway, with the wind blowing his periwig about his face. He stood there for half a minute watching a faint shadow melt into the night. Then he seemed to steady himself like a tree between the gusts of a storm, and, turning, walked on slowly toward his house.

But Stephen Gore did not sleep in Westminster that night, for he went alone into the stable when the grooms had gone and the servants were in bed, and saddled and bridled a horse with his own hands. He had thrown his periwig into a corner, put on the oldest clothes he could find, to ride out like a sturdy crop-head of a Britisher daring enough to venture on the roads at such an hour. Pistols, money, and food he took with him, and leading his horse out into the street, went away at a brisk trot into the black chasm of the night. He might be knocked out of the saddle at any corner, but Stephen Gore hazarded the chance, since he might be given an axe or a halter for his badge.

XXXV

Chris Jennifer was too busy a man to worry his slow brain greatly over other people's affairs, for when a man farms for the children who shall come after him he can give all the daylight to the land, and trudge home to feed and sleep without much communion with the philosophers and poets. There is always work upon a farm, save for those who have sore heels and a chronic thorn in the forefinger. For these autumn and winter months ploughing, hedging, ditching, carting fagots and stacking them for the winter, spreading the muck abroad, taking odd carpentering jobs in hand, to say nothing of the feeding and tending of sheep and cattle, the fattening of pigs and bullocks for Christmas, the trapping of vermin, and the netting of the accursed cony. Chris Jennifer's most luminous moment was after a rat-hunt about the barns and out-houses. To take by the tail the carcasses of sundry strapping rats and heap them in a funeral pile was an act that made Mr. Jennifer feel that Satan can be confounded in this world and his imps punished for stealing a farmer's com. For if Chris Jennifer hated anything it was a rat, and next to the rat he hated couch-grass, while the purple-poll'd thistle came in a bad third.

When Mrs. Winnie's husband went to bed he slept the deep, sonorous sleep of a round-headed peasant whose lungs had been breathing in clean air all the day. And not even the facts that John Gore had borrowed his best rope and that his wife was dabbling her hands in affairs that did not concern her could keep Master Christopher awake and talking. All he had deigned to hope was that "us be not goin' agen the law," and that "this fine gentleman ben't feedin' on hot pie-crust." Then he drew his nightcap down, turned on his right side, and went to sleep with the ease of a dog.

Mrs. Winnie, being a woman, and more impressionable and imaginative, remained very wakeful all that night, thinking of all manner of strange adventures, and not a little afraid of John Gore's neck. She had banked the kitchen hearth up with logs, left some supper on the table, and the door unbarred, so that there should be some welcome for him if he came home after bedtime. Yet in spite of all this satisfying forethought she kept awake to listen, and even when she dropped away toward Christopher's oblivion Mrs. Winnie came to with a start, thinking that she had heard sounds.

Daylight came, with a west wind swishing in the beech-trees and making a low murmur in the chimney, and the adventurer had not returned. Mrs. Winnie jerked an elbow into her man's back, rose up, and began to dress. She was down and at work in the kitchen getting the fire alight before Chris Jennifer got a very stout pair of legs out of the bed.

Mrs. Winnie had piled up the fire, lit the dry brushwood under it, and was kneeling to help the blaze with the bellows, when the door swung open, and John Gore walked in. He looked muddy as to the boots and breeches, and rather white about the face, like a man who has been out long in the cold, though his eyes had a quiet steadfastness that proved he had no pallor at the heart.

Winnie Jennifer twisted round on her knees.

"Body of me, sir, you are here at last! I've been kep' awake most of the night through thinking of ye, and listening."

He smiled down at her, and when he smiled the mystery that was in him seemed to glow and to exult in a way that made Mrs. Winnie hanker after her own days of being courted.

"You should not have troubled your head about me, Mrs. Jennifer."

The fire was blazing now, making a brave crackle, and John Gore looked at it as though he were cold and empty and dead tired. Mrs. Winnie was up and bustling in an instant.

"Sit you down, sir. Why, bless my heart, you must be cold and damp as a dish-clout! I'll fetch Chris down to see to your horse."

"I have seen to him myself, Mrs. Winnie."

She pushed forward the great box of a chair that was padded with horsehair and leather, and had been polished to a rare sheen by her husband's breeches.

"Just you pull off your boots, sir, and rub yourself dry. I'll have something hot in ten minutes, and a dish of bacon and some eggs."

She was bustling with curiosity as well as with good-will, for there was something in the man's manner that told of mystery and of strange things accomplished, and perhaps of looking deep into other eyes. He sat down obediently before the fire, and, pulling off his boots, spread himself to the blaze. Overhead they could hear the stumping of Chris Jennifer's feet as he tumbled into his clothes with decent circumlocutions.

Mrs. Winnie came to hang the kettle on the chain, and while she was bending forward with the firelight on her face John Gore sat forward in his chair and laid a hand upon her shoulder.

"I am giving you a great deal of trouble, Mrs. Jennifer," he said.

"Dear life, no, sir."

"Can I ask you to do something more for me?"

She knelt and looked around at him, her honest, comely face perfectly trustful.

"To be sure, sir."

"Then I must make my terms with you."

"You can talk of them, sir, though I may not be for listening to them when you have told me what you wish."

John Gore sat back in the chair again, his eyes on the fire.

"Mrs. Jennifer, I want some one whom I can trust. I want to bring her to you here, away from people who wish her out of the world."

Mrs. Winnie took up the poker and made a thrust or two at the fire.

"It's good of you, sir, to give me the honor—"

"There shall be no danger to you or yours, I can promise that."

"There, sir, I was not thinking of any such thing! We are only farming folk, and the lady may have prettier notions than—"

He bent forward suddenly and looked into her face.

"She would bless you, Mrs. Winnie, as I should, for the very warmth of a fire. She has not felt the warmth of a fire this month or more, and she is half starved into the bargain."

Mrs. Jennifer opened her eyes with indignation.

"What! not a stick of fire! Who be they who have the caring for her? And no victuals!"

"Then you will let me bring her here—if I can?"

"Dear heart, sir, yes. I'll have my best blankets out, and make cakes and pasties. And perhaps she would like a nice young pullet, sir. We will put her in the parlor ingle-nook, and melt her heart, and give her stuff to make the color come."

John Gore held out a hand.

"You do not know how I thank you for this. But there are my terms to be considered."

"Oh, get along, sir."

"I shall pass over to you three gold pieces a week."

Mrs. Winnie looked ready to scoff and laugh.

"Three sixpences would be nearer the mark, sir. Why, Jem and Sam and Nicholas, our men, wouldn't eat and drink a third of that in seven whole days."

"Never mind your men, Mrs. Jennifer."

"Not mind them! And where should we be in six months, the lazy loons! No, I tell you, sir."

John Gore tried her on another quarter.

"Very well, Mrs. Winnie, take the money and put it in a stocking for your boy."

"But, sir—"

"Take it, or turn me out of the door. I hold to your good-will and your trust with all my heart, but live on you I will not, just because I happened to pull the youngster out of the pond."

The woman gave the fire three more pokes.

"I wouldn't do anything to hurt you, sir."

"Then you will put the money aside for the child's sake."

Mr. Christopher Jennifer had had great faith in his wife's wisdom ever since she had elected to marry him in preference to a gay sprig of a harness-maker at Lewes, a gallant who could write verses after the fashion of a gentleman, and had deigned to dazzle both with dress and address. Chris Jennifer in his courting days and season of rivalry had fallen violently foul of this same harness man for the love of Mrs. Winnie. Chris, who had never been a quarrelsome man, had put his bristles up at last under the provocation of his rival's genteel and foppish impertinence. He had led the harness man by the ear into the back-yard of Mrs. Winnie's father's house, and there had smitten him, and in the smiting had won his way to Winnie's heart. For she was a woman who must have strength of a kind in a man, and silence and shrewd sense, nor could she abide a ranter or a puff-bag, nor a fellow who was always talking big about the gentry, and telling how he had dined at the justice's table. Men with long tongues were not after her fancy, seeing that length of tongue generally goes with a league of silly vanity and boasting, and that men who talk much are still talking while your quiet man has ploughed his furrow.

Therefore, when Mrs. Winnie threw out a downright hint to her man that Gentleman John was likely to bring his lady-love to Furze Farm, and insisted upon putting sundry gold pieces into son William's pocket, Mr. Jennifer humphed and nodded, and supposed there would be no harm in it "if t' parson be not left out in t' cold." Mrs. Winnie snubbed him for his sneaking prudery, and protested that he had no wits in him to see when a gentleman was of clean, brave blood and the very stock of honor.

"The lad's in love, Chris, as a lad should be, though he be past thirty by the set of his jaw and mouth. He ben't one of your gilliflower gentlemen, prancing along and tweaking his chin to and fro to see how the women fall to him. It be none of my business to spy and to speculate, but the woman he be after, Chris, must be a woman worth winning."

Mr. Jennifer was heaving a couple of fagots into the wood-shed while his wife dropped these suggestions into his ear. Son William had been sent out with a basket to pick blackberries, and the men were down in the fields.

"I hope it be nothing agen t' law, Winnie."

"Go on, you great coward!"

"Woa, my dear!"

"When ye smacked Peter Tinsel on the mouth that day for love of me, did ye think of the law, Chris?"

He stood and looked at her with a slow, broadening grin, as though he were proud of her cleverness and her courage.

"T' law be damned; that were what I told Peter Tinsel."

Mrs. Winnie stuck out her elbows as though to express the word "exactly." But her husband came up to her and kissed her on the mouth with a manly vigor that swept away any sense of superiority on her part.

Mrs. Jennifer was busy over many things that day, seeing that Furze Farm might be turned into a refuge for romance, and that she had people of quality to cook for. Yet she found time to have a short gossip or two with John Gore over the parlor fire, and that which struck her most was the grim foreshadowing of something in his eyes, as though he had an enemy to meet or a debt to wipe

out in the cause of honor. Had Mrs. Winnie been able to read his thoughts as he sat before the fire and cleaned his pistols after sending the bullets splashing into the pond, she would have hugged her bosom and have understood that grim look about his eyes and mouth. For in the silence of the night, and amid the wet, black woods where he had seen the dawn gather, John Gore had suffered a revelation that would have made any man's heart heavy and ashamed. He had never greatly loved his father, nor had they ever trusted each other with the inner intimacies of life, yet a son cannot lay bare his begetter's true nature without recoiling from it when he beholds rottenness and hidden sores. The tragedy was so plain to him, so terribly simple now that the scattered rays of his conjectures had been gathered by the burning-glass of truth. And John Gore had ridden into Furze Farm that morning with the cold raw air of the wet woods in his blood and the heart numb in him but for the thought of Barbara. The warmth of the fire and a tankard of ale had driven some of the poisonous taste from under his tongue, but the truth galled him like a bone in the throat, filling him with wrath and shame and pity.

Mrs. Winnie found herself called upon to provide more tools for him that day, and after some rummaging in an oak locker in the harness-room she found him what he needed—namely, a file and a half-inch auger. He also borrowed the pillion on which Christopher Jennifer took his wife to market at Battle, Hailsham, or Robertsbridge. By reason of these details Mrs. Winnie understood that the romance was deepening to a crisis, and though she kept her tongue to herself in the matter of asking questions, she cordially commended John Gore in his prison-breaking, having a hearty contempt for authority when true sentiment was threatened.

While John Gore rode through the woods when the evening mists began to dim the splendor of the trees so that they were like shrines of gold seen through the drift of incense, Simon Pinniger sat in the kitchen at Thorn drinking to get his temper up and his blood hot and muddled against the night. He would spread out his great hands before the fire and look at them with a kind of sottish pride, keeping an uneasy eye upon the woman Nance, who in turn kept a keen eye on him.

"What is it to be, Sim?" she asked, with the air of one who must keep a surly dog in good temper with himself.

The man drew off a great red neckerchief that he was wearing, made a loop, and, putting one fist through it, drew the ends tight with his teeth and the other hand.

"That's my trick," he said, dropping the end from his mouth; "them Spaniards have a liking for it, and Spaniards are particular in the playing of such tricks."

XXXVI

There was to be a moon that night, and the thickets were black at sunset against the cold yellow of a winter sky. Frost hung in the air, with a gusty, arid northeast wind that came sweeping south with a sense of coming snow, while great purple cloudbanks loomed slowly into the north. The grass was already stiffening, and the leaves made a dry thin rattle as John Gore drew up in the beech-thicket over against Thorn. He had brought an extra cloak with him, and a loin-cloth for his horse, and after some searching he found a little hollow where dead bracken stood, and where the beast would be sheltered from the wind. He buckled the bridle about a young ash whose black buds and branches stood out against the sky.

John Gore took his sword, pistols, and tools into Thorn with him that night, tying them up in the end of a red scarf, and swinging them after him as he straddled the gate. He hid the sword and one pistol in the ivy at the foot of the tower, and set out on a reconnoissance, holding close under the deep shadow of the walls, and keeping a long knife ready in case the dog should be loose and on the prowl. There was a faint silvery glow low down in the eastern sky, but no moon as yet, and John Gore, meeting the keen north wind, thought of Barbara in that cold room, and felt his heart warm to her, and to Mrs. Winnie as he remembered the blazing kitchen at Furze Farm.

Probing about in the dusk, he found the doorway that led into the ruined hall, and in the corner of the hall the rough stone stair and door that gave access to the tower. It might have seemed simpler to have set to work straightway upon that door, but he chose the safer, slower method of forcing the window and then working from within.

The rope was dangling from within reach when John Gore returned to the foot of the tower, and he went up it hand over hand with the tools slung behind him by the scarf. He was soon under Barbara's window, where the rope ran taut over the sill, and, reaching in for a grip of the bars, he called to her in a whisper.

"I am here, John, waiting."

He felt the wind on his back, and guessed how miserably cold that room must be.

"Poor heart, the blood must be numb in you."

"No, John, not quite."

"Let me have your hands, dear."

He lay in on the window-ledge with his face against the bars, and stretched his arms in. His hands groped for hers and found them, and of a truth they were like ice.

"Why, my life, you are all a-shiver!"

She was shuddering a little—half with the cold, half with a deep thrill from within.

"No, it is not only the cold, John."

"No?"

"It is all so strange—and hazardous."

He held her hands between his, and then began to chafe them to get them warm.

"We will soon have you out of this. I have found a warm nest for you, where they pile the wood half-way up the chimney, and look glum if one does not eat more than one needs. You must rest there, Barbe, and forget everything for a while, and let the past die, dear, if you can. I suppose the

folk below will not meddle to-night?"

"No. Yet it is strange, John, they have brought me no food to-day."

"No food, child! Why?"

"Oh, I had a little bread left."

"The brutes! And here am I chattering like a starling instead of getting to work."

He drew up the scarf, and unfastening the knot about the tools and pistol, laid them before him on the sill. Then he made a loop in the rope, so that the end should not be left dangling near the ground and betray him in case the man Pinniger were in a vigilant mood. He had brought a rag with a slip of lard in it, and he greased the bar with the fat where the file was to work, so that the tool should make less sound. The steady "burr" of the steel teeth soon told of their bite upon the rusty metal. The three bars were as thick as John Gore's forefinger, but they had rusted away more at the lower ends, where the damp gathered and the rain had stood in tiny pools. A strong arm would be able to thrust them in after an hour or so's steady filing.

Barbara stood on the bed, leaning her arms against the wall and listening to the stubborn rasping of the file. There was a sweetness even in that rough, shrill sound to her, for life and desire were breaking in with strong arms and the beat of a man's heart. She no longer felt the cold, but stood there conscious only of the dearness and mystery of it all, letting a sense of infinite peace steal in. She fell almost into a dreamy, wandering mood like one near to the edge of sleep, hearing him speak to her from time to time. Now and again he would stop and rest, and stretch a hand in between the bars, and she felt him once take a strand of her hair and lay it across his lips.

John Gore had filed through one bar and bent it back, when a sudden, clear, ringing sound came up to them out of the silence of the tower, like the clash of something metallic upon stone. Barbara woke from her stupor of dreams like a frightened sentinel, and put up a hand as though in warning.

"John! Did you hear that?"

He had heard it, and hung there with every sense upon the alert, hating the wind that made the ivy rustle. Barbara had stepped down from the bed and crossed the room to the door. She knelt and laid her ear to the lock, holding her breath, her lips parted, her eyes at gaze.

A vague suggestion of movement came to her from the dark well of the tower stair—a dull, slow, scraping sound that came up and up with moments of silence in between. There was no glimmer of light as she looked through the key-hole, nothing but that slow, cautious sound like some big thing crawling in a dark and narrow place.

Shivering, her skin a-prickle as with cold, she went back to the window, climbed the bed, and gave the man a whisper.

"John, there is some one coming up the stair."

"Lie down on the bed, child; I will slip out and wait."

She heard the rope chafe slightly against the window-ledge as John Gore lowered himself cautiously so as to be out of view. He hung there as a sailor can, with feet and knees gripping the rope, and one hand on the butt of the pistol that he had thrust into his belt. He had left the tools on the window-sill, and no one would see them or the knotted rope about the bar, unless they climbed up from the bed to look.

Hanging there, with the wind shaking the ivy, he could hear no sound in the tower and see no glimmer of light coming from the squints. The rising moon was beginning to throw gleams down into the valley, but the western quarter of the tower was as dark as a well. It was a moment when a man may feel scared by some vague, indefinite peril invisible to him in the darkness. Or he may clinch his teeth and keep his right hand ready, knowing, if he be a man who has had his share of adventure-hunting, that his own imagination may be far more sinister than any living thing on earth or sea.

There was a sudden faint click like the twist of a turned lock, a sound that made John Gore lift his chin heavenward and listen with both his ears. Then came a slow whine, as though an uncoiled hinge were turning. The door of Barbara's room had been opened; he had no doubt of that. Probably she was feigning sleep, thinking that one of my lord's creatures had come to see that all was safe. A harsh gust of wind shook the ivy on the wall, making John Gore curse the leaves for setting up such a flutter.

But above the rustling of the ivy he heard an abrupt and half-smothered cry, and then the sound as of people struggling. The bed creaked; there was an inarticulate choking as of some one striving to call for help through the smothering folds of a cloak. The black room within seemed full of movement, of piteous effort, of hoarse, savage whisperings that made his mane bristle like a furious dog's.

He gave one shout as a challenge and a warning, and then slid down the rope without heeding how it chafed his hands. Plucking out his sword and pistol from the ivy at the foot of the tower, he ran for the doorway that led from the terrace into the hall, his face meeting the moonlight that poured down through a broken window.

XXXVII

The door at the foot of the tower stood open, and John Gore plunged in with his sword forward and his pistol at the cock. The place was as dark as a pit, and he thrust out right and left with the sword, the point ringing against the walls till he found where the gap of the stairs opened. He went up silently, for he was in his stockings, but there was more grimness in that swift and silent climb than any clangor and clash that armed men might have made. His blood was up, the devil awake in him, and the spirit of murder howling in his ears. He seemed to see all the gross, smothering horror of the scene above, and he set his teeth as he wondered whether he would come too late.

A quick shuffling sound came down to him in the darkness. A hurrying human thing was close to

him, and John Gore challenged and lunged without pity. There was a hard sob, and a dim shadow of a figure dragged down his sword's point in its fall. He freed the blade and went on with hardly a thought, as a stormer pushes on over the bodies in the throat of a "breach." A sudden gleam of light slanted down the stair, and he heard the tread of heavy feet and a harsh shout of "Nance! Nance!" Rounding the last twist of the stair, John Gore came upon a man with a white cloth over his face, standing on the landing outside Barbara's room and holding a shaded lantern in his hand.

There was no parleying between those two, and Simon Pinniger, caught without arms, lifted up the lantern as though to dash it in John Gore's face. The sea-captain flung up his left arm, and firing straight into the man's body, saw him go lurching back, the lantern falling at his feet. John Gore sprang up with his sword ready, thinking for the moment that the bully had it in his heart. But Simon Pinniger's ribs were tough enough to turn a pistol-bullet, and he recovered himself and came at the rescuer like a bull.

He tried to beat the sword aside with a sweep of the arm, but the lantern still burned upon the floor, and John Gore was too grim a gentleman to be tricked so easily. He avoided the blow with a backward step and a swift back swing of the right arm. The point was still to the fore, and lunging with the whole weight of arm and shoulder, he felt the blade grate between the fellow's ribs. Then he was caught full face, like a bluff ship by an ocean roller, and knocked backward down the stairs by the mass and impact of the man's charge.

The sword broke a foot from the guard, but John Gore held to the hilt, even while the brute bulk of the man was grinding over him down the steps. Twisting free, he slipped aside against the wall, only to feel a hand grasping at his throat, and the sound of hoarse, wet breathing mingling with savage curses. He struck out with the hilt of the sword, broke the man's grip, and came up top dog despite Simon Pinniger's brute, plunging fury. It was like the death-thrashing of a leviathan amid blood and spray. They struggled, clawed, and smote for a moment, till a chance stab went deep into the fellow's eye. He crumpled down into the darkness; John Gore heard his head strike the wall, and the breath come out of him like the wind out of a stabbed "float."

The man was mere carrion, and John Gore sprang up the stairs, finding the lantern still burning, though the grease from the candle had guttered through upon the stones. He picked it up, and was about to push forward into the room when a black square in the flooring caught his eye. A flagstone had been turned upon its side against the wall, uncovering the mouth of some oubliette or pit, and for a moment he bent over it, trying to probe its depths, as though dreading lest that dear body should be lying broken in the darkness beneath.

A glance through the open door of the room showed him Barbara lying upon the floor, with the bedclothes half covering her as she lay. He was down beside her with a cold sweat of fear on him as the light from the lantern fell upon her face. A red scarf had been wound about her neck, and her two hands were still straining at it, pathetic in their impotence to let in life and breath. John Gore set the lantern down, caught her up and unwound the thing, cursing as he did so the marks where the white throat had been bruised by brutal hands. There was froth on her lips and dusky shadow covering her face, yet the lips were warm when he pressed his cheek to them, and, putting an ear to her bosom, he found that her heart still throbbed.

An inarticulate "Thank God!" came from him, but the cry of the moment was "Air! air!" Taking her in his arms, he bent for the lantern, and swinging it by the ring from one finger, he started down the stairs. He hardly heeded the two bodies lying there, save to step over them, and so, with all his manhood praying and striving for the life in her, he came out into the cold night air and the pale gleam of the moon.

Now John Gore remembered a trick that an old buccaneer surgeon had taught him at Port Royal—a trick that had saved men who had been cut down from the gallows or pulled out senseless from the sea. He laid Barbara on the wet grass that grew in the old hall, and, kneeling at her head, took her two arms at the wrists and began to move them gently from the shoulders, spreading them wide, and then crossing them with slight pressure upon her bosom. Nor did man ever thank God more than did John Gore when she began to breathe feebly of her own sweet self, and the rise and fall of her bosom showed that the tide of life had turned. He bent over her and wiped her lips, touched her bruised throat tenderly with his fingers, and then leaned back and looked at the moon, as though that broad, white, heavenly face could understand what all this meant to him.

He lifted her up again in his arms, and seeing a yellow glow beating along the passage that led from the hall into the kitchen, he made for it and found a huge fire blazing on the hearth, the light from it making the place far brighter than in the day. There was a rough sort of couch under the window, and John Gore laid Barbara upon it, and drew the thing up before the fire so that the warmth should hearten the life in her. And then, for the first time, he took notice of the swelter he himself was in, his shirt hanging open and showing his chest, blotches of crimson staining it, his very stockings soaked from the blood of the two dead creatures upon the stairs. A man in such a war tackle was not a savory thing to meet the eyes of a frightened girl.

John Gore bent over her a moment and saw a faint pink flush creeping into her cheeks, while her breath came and went steadily with a quiet sighing. There was an oak chest in the kitchen, and John Gore found some clothes in it: a rough shirt that had belonged to the dead man and some woollen hose. He went out into the yard where the dog was rattling his chain and making a great whimpering, as though calling for his supper, and, knowing that there was a pump by the stable, he stripped himself to the waist, washed, and put on clean gear. Then he unbarred the gate, and brought in his coat and riding-boots from under the thorn-tree, so that he should seem something of a gentleman, and not a ragged scoundrel hardly fit to touch a woman's hand.

Barbara was still lying like one asleep before the fire when he returned, for she had been so near to death that life seemed to steal back softly and slowly as though still afraid. John Gore had never looked thus at his love before, as a man might look at a sleeping child or at some fair valley under a golden dawn. He saw the faint flush upon her cheeks, the shadowy sweep of the long lashes, the little dark curls of hair falling with such a sheen of sweetness over her forehead, the line of the red

mouth, the soft warmth of her skin. She looked thin, poor child, frail and tragical, and yet the suffering that she had borne had shed a glamour over her that made her more lovable and more womanly than of old. His heart went out to her with all the awe of a man's desire as he stood and watched the coming of life—and love.

There was a fluttering of the shadowy lashes, a long-drawn breath, a movement of the hands, and then the low cry of one waking to some revolting memory. John Gore bent over her and took her hands in his.

"There is nothing to fear, dear heart."

A shudder ran through her as she looked at him, and some moments passed before light and understanding swept the shadows from her eyes. But the look that came into them when her soul awoke made John Gore long to take her in his arms and to hold her close to him, so that he could feel the beating of her heart.

"John—is it you?"

She spoke huskily, from the bruising of her throat by Simon Pinniger's murderous hands.

"It is all over, Barbe. We are king and queen of the castle."

He wished to hide all the grimness of the night's work from her, seeing that her great eyes were ready to grow frightened and full of fear, showing that she had borne too much already in body and soul.

"John, I remember it all now—they were smothering me in the dark!"

He took her face between his two hands, and looked dearly into her eyes.

"Barbara, you are in my keeping; try and forget all that, dear heart. I came in time to scare those wolves into the night. Now you must suffer me to have my way."

She looked up at him almost timidly, as though conscious of his nearness and the homage in his eyes. It had been dark at the tower window, but now they saw each other in the light, and a mysterious coyness covered her face.

"I will do all that you wish, John."

"I shall take you away to-night."

"Yes, yes; take me away from Thorn."

Her hands went into his.

"There is a moon, dear, and I have a pillion for you, if you are strong enough."

"Oh yes, I am quite strong now."

She made as though to sit up on the couch, but she grew faint instantly, so that John Gore held her with one arm about her shoulders.

"More spirit than strength, Barbe, yet."

Some of her old obstinacy appeared in her for the moment.

"No, I am only a little giddy."

"Lie down again."

"No, I must make a start."

She dropped her feet in their worn shoes over the edge of the couch, glanced at him a little wilfully, and then looked away with a rush of color and a tremulous flash of the eyes.

"You must try and be patient with me, John."

"It is not a matter of patience, child, but food and good wine."

She put a hand to her throat.

"I could not touch anything in this place."

He looked at her with a smile.

"Not even if it came in my pocket?"

"I will try, John."

"Of course you will. I have work to do here before we start."

He brought out a flask from his pocket, and food that Mrs. Winnie had wrapped up in a clean white napkin. There were some little cakes and some baked meat laid in slices between slips of home-made bread. Barbara looked at them, and then gave him a first sad smile.

"It is gross of me, John, but those cakes make me feel hungry."

"The very best confession, dear."

"Will you have some?"

He had laid the cloth upon her knees.

"No, child, not yet. Can you bear to be left alone awhile?"

"I am quite brave now, John. But—"

"Well, sweetheart?"

"You are not going far?"

"No. Only into the tower to get the rope which is not mine to leave. Is there anything that you would wish to take?"

She looked down thoughtfully, her dark lashes sweeping her cheeks.

"There is a book, John, bound in red leather. I would not leave it here—because—it has helped me—taught me—almost as much as you have done."

XXXVIII

John Gore had grim things on his mind that night, and a task before him that he did not wish to come to Barbara's knowledge. She, poor child, with Mrs. Winnie's food in her lap—food such as she had not touched for many a day—would have had no heart to eat and drink had she known of the dead on those dark stairs. He wished to spare her the horror of it, for the night had been gross and violent enough, and after all the suffering she had borne he was afraid for her in body and mind.

Taking the lantern, he made his way to the tower, closing the door in the passage that led from the kitchen into the ruined hall. Nance Pinniger lay dead upon the stairs, her mouth open and her hands clinched over the place where the sword had entered, and John Gore shuddered as he looked at her, wishing, for the sake of her womanhood, that he had held his hand. He went higher to where the man lay half doubled against the wall, the cloth that covered his face caught between his teeth in the death spasm. The fellow's bulk seemed a veritable barrier against burial, and John Gore, hardened as he had been to the rough life of the sea, felt a vital horror of this huddled mass that seemed gross and gluttonous even in death.

Remembering the open pit, he went and held the lantern over the black hole in the floor, but was still unable to fathom its depth. Here was a ready vault if he could but get the dead to it—a pit that seemed to scoff with open mouth at those whom Fate had cheated.

To make short work of a grisly business, even as John Gore did, he took one of the sheets from Barbara's room, and knotting it about the dead man's ankles, contrived, thanks to his great strength, to draw the body to the edge of the pit. Unknotting the sheet, he turned Simon Pinniger down into the darkness, handling him daintily so as not to foul his own clothes. For the woman he underwent a like labor, letting the bloody sheet slip after her, and turning the flag down into its place. He had the feelings of a man who had played scavenger to a headsman upon a scaffold, and he still seemed to hear the souging rush of wind from the pit as those dead things went to their last resting-place in the secret depths of Thorn.

When he had drawn the rope up from the window, unknotted and coiled it, and gathered tools, pistols, and his broken sword, he searched for and found Barbara's red Bible, and retreated, with all his gear, out of the tower. The memory of the place made his gorge rise, and he was glad of the night air and the light of the moon. He drove his feet through some clumps of grass and weeds, yearning to wipe off every stain of the place before taking this child out into the world.

In the kitchen he found Barbara warming herself before the fire, and the spirit of maidenhood in her, the smooth, virginal contours of her face and figure, filled him with a sense of freshness and of awe. He saw the play and counterplay of shadow and light within her eyes, and held it to be witchcraft miraculously pure and sweet, bringing down God to him, and beauty, and clean living. Somehow he felt that night that he could not go close to her, that he had a butcher's hands, and that it would be impiety to touch a thing so goodly. Moreover, there was a delight in holding a little aloof from her, in watching all her half-coy sweetness, so fresh and new to him in her altered womanhood. He could mark the shade and sunlight in her glances, the passing gleams of color on her face, the birth of that dear consciousness that strove to smother that which could not be wholly hid.

"How long you have been, John!"

"I had dropped some of my things and had to hunt for them. I found your book."

He gave it to her, and, throwing the ropes and tools upon the table, he busied himself with reloading the pistol that had sent its lead into Simon Pinniger's body, having a small ivory powder-horn and a bag of bullets with him.

"I heard such strange sounds, John, while you were away!"

"Oh!" And he seemed intent on ramming home the charge.

"It was like something falling in a cellar under the house."

"Old houses are full of such sounds," he said, looking up at her suddenly. "Thorn sheds bricks and plaster most nights in the year, with the ivy working its way everywhere."

He made so little of it that Barbara did not press him further, for she had no knowledge of the pit that had been opened for her, with its well-like shoot cut in the thickness of the tower wall. John Gore began to gather up all that belonged to him, and, finding a sack in one of the cupboards, he tumbled the tools and rope into it, tying the mouth of the sack with a strip of stuff torn from the quilt of the couch. His own sword was broken in its scabbard, so he took the hanger down that hung over the fireplace, and also the long carbine that had a strap for slinging across the back.

John Gore had brought his horseman's cloak with him from under the thorn-tree, and he took it and laid it upon Barbara's shoulders. Moreover, Mrs. Winnie had lent him a woollen scarf and some gloves, which he had stowed away at the bottom of his holsters, and he knew that the girl would need them because of the keen wind.

"I have left the horse in the woods, Barbe. What sort of shoes are you wearing?"

She showed him them, and he did not commend their flimsiness.

"You must let me carry you, child, or you will have your stockings soaked in those boggy meadows, and we shall be somewhere on the road."

She glanced at the table where the sack and the arms lay, and then gave him an unequivocal smile.

"And you think you can carry me as well as all that, John?"

"It can be done."

"I am not so selfish as that. I have stolen your cloak already."

"There is another on the horse."

"Instead of carrying me, John, give me something to carry."

He looked at the thin hands she held out to him.

"There is your book."

"Yes, but I can take more than that."

"As for that, we will see what the grass is like when we get over the moat."

They went out together into the court-yard, where the moonlight came down upon the checker of stones outlined and interlaced with grass and weeds. Above them rose the black tower, dark as with mystery, while on every hand dim, silvery hills rose toward the frosty curtain of the sky.

"I had forgotten the dog."

The mastiff had come out from the old cask that served him as a kennel, and was clanking his chain over the stones and growling.

"Some one will find him, John; they may come back when we have gone."

But John Gore knew better.

He did not like the thought of leaving the beast chained there to starve, and he was debating whether a pistol bullet would not be the kinder end, when something far more hazardous challenged his attention. The wind was beating about Thorn, shaking the ivy on the walls, while the clank of the dog's chain had a suggestive ghostliness. Yet beyond these sounds came the dull, rhythmic thud of a horse trotting over stiffening turf, the muffled cadence coming down upon the wind as they stood in the court of Thorn and listened.

"Quick, dear, we must play at hide-and-peek. It is that fellow Grylls riding back again."

They were close to the open gate at the moment, and John Gore took Barbara by the hand and drew her aside along the wall to where a stunted bush had made roots and grown despite the stones. He pressed Barbara back within its shadow, and stood covering her, a pistol ready and the hanger at his belt should he need cold steel.

"Not a sound, Barbe; be ready to slip away when I take your hand."

They could hear the steady thud of hoofs over the grass, and even the heavy breathing of the beast, as though he had been pushed and hustled by the spur. John Gore guessed that his rider was skirting along the moat. Then came the sharper clatter of the iron shoes upon the timbers of the bridge. The dog set up a savage barking, and in the moonlight they saw a man ride into the court of Thorn, steam rising from his horse like smoke, so that the beast looked huge and spectral. The man himself, though outlined against the moon, showed nothing but the sweep of a cloak and the droop of a black beaver.

He sat motionless a moment in the saddle, and then, dismounting, led his horse by the bridle toward the mist of light that came from the archway leading into the kitchen. John Gore felt for Barbara's hand, and they glided along the wall toward the gate, for the man's back was toward them, while the barking of the dog and his grinding against the chain drowned the sound of their footsteps utterly. They made the gate, and went out hand in hand over the bridge and away over the moonlit grass-land, with the barking of the dog dying down into a hoarse whimper. John Gore had thrust the pistol in his belt and swung the sack over his left shoulder. He put his right arm about Barbara's body and swept her along by main strength toward the towering beech-trees that shone in the moonlight while the seal of silence seemed over Thorn.

XXXIX

It was Stephen Gore who had ridden that steaming horse into the court-yard of Thorn—Stephen Gore, with jaded, twitching face, and eyes that looked weary with straining and gazing into the deeps of the night.

No man can be constantly and statuesquely selfish through life; the very whims and impulses of human nature are against such a frozen constancy in self-seeking. Nor can a man ever swear to being master either of himself or of his future; the whole gamut of the emotions are arrayed against him; a child may prove his vanquisher or a woman his seducer.

Stephen Gore exchanging epigrams with some princely wit or bending over a pretty woman's chair was a different creature from Stephen Gore shabby, saddle-sore, jaded to death, riding with an imagined price upon his head and a prophetic mist of blood before his eyes. Throw a man out of his natural environment and he may lose all the genius of self, and even the poise of manhood. Milton seated upon a boat's thwart in the midst of mad, cursing Jamaica buccaneers would have probably seemed contemptible and a coward. March out a fop in vile clothes, and he may prove a sneaking, cringing, self-shamed thing, for all his soul was in his coat. We are so much the creatures of habit that our habits flatter us like well-trained and obsequious servants, and we lose our dignity and even ourselves without their ministrations.

So it had proved with my Lord of Gore that November night after a reckless, memory-haunted ride from something he feared toward something that he was being taught to fear by the bleak, wind-swept loneliness of wild roads in night and in winter. Nature is powerful to work upon a man's mind when all the primal instincts of hunter or hunted come again to the surface. All the damned out of hell might have been rushing on him through those gibbering, moaning woods. The very trees had grotesque and sinuous hands stretched out to catch and strangle. There had been the physical weariness of it all, the chafing of the saddle, the stiffness, the lust for speed, the floundering of a tired horse, the hundred and one vexations that break the heart in a man when it has no inspiration to keep it whole. And as the poise and the self-grip of the colder will had slackened, so the emotions had taken law of license and had scrambled abroad over the man's consciousness. The cool, eclectic, cynical, civilized gentleman gave place to the credulous, elemental, emotional savage. Primitive instincts came to the surface: an awe of death and the invisible, a dread of the dark.

My Lord Gore's nerves were as tremulous as the nerves of a coddled boy when he reined in his steaming horse under the shadow of Thorn tower. His face looked flaccid and yet under strain, he had lost that power and precision of movement that is second nature to a man bred among pomps. He nearly fell as he climbed out of the saddle, looking about him with quick, scared glances such as a child might have given in a dark garden at night.

The dog seemed alive enough, and sufficiently lusty to scare away ghosts, but my lord cursed him for the infernal pother he made, being out of heart, and therefore out of temper. He led his horse toward the kitchen entry whence the light of the fire came out, and stood there waiting in the throat of the short passageway, as though expecting some one to come out to him and at least be decently servile. But since no living soul appeared to answer the barking of the dog and the clatter of hoofs on the stones, he hitched the bridle over a hook in the wall and marched in slowly, yet with the slight swagger of a man who has no reason to be proud of his courage, and yet is determined

not to be put out of countenance by anything he may see or hear.

But there was nothing tangibly alive in Thorn that night, save the dog in the yard; nothing but the crusts and embers of life, and a silence amid the rush of the wind that made the place seem cold and ominous. A man's nerve may come back to him again when he has got a grip upon realities, but surmises and conjectures at midnight are apt to run toward emotionalism and panic. There were the blazing fire, the remnants of a meal upon the table, the whining of the hungry dog to prompt him to a conclusion. But my Lord of Gore began to shiver inwardly, and to become conscious of an empty feeling under the heart and of a vague horror that seemed to penetrate the air.

Yet a lust to see the end of it, and a blind impatience that set aside shadows and suspicions, gave him sufficient animal courage to light the lantern his son had left and to go exploring through the ruins. The ways of Thorn seemed known to him, for he went first to the tower; nor did he need to go beyond the first few steps in order to discover the ooze of a tragedy staining the stones. None the less he went on doggedly, as though carried upward by the very ferment of the passions in him, greatly dismayed within himself, yet greatly afraid of missing the whole truth. And so the lantern went jerking upward into the darkness of the tower, its movements seeming to signal some restless, devil-driven quest after unhallowed spoil.

When Stephen Gore came back again into the blaze and warmth of the kitchen he looked shrunken and ashy about the mouth, and he walked in a stooping, hollowchested way like a man huddling into himself because of the cold. He closed both doors, and even the doors of the cupboards, after peering into them, as though he were afraid of the dark and of any dim, unlit corner. Then he drew the couch up close to the fire, spreading his hands to it, and staring at the flames with a vacant, colorless face. The horror of some unseen thing seemed in his eyes, and his lips fell apart and loosened like the lips of a very old and feeble man.

At midnight there had been a moon, but before dawn snow came, a great, gray, shimmering gloom drifting through the vague world. The dry leaves shivered and crackled in the wind as the myriad flakes came sweeping down, ribbing the boughs and the curved fronds of the bracken, piling itself amid the moss at the roots of great trees, and scudding over the open lands with a fierce, withering haste that left the grass tussocks white like stones catching foam from a rushing stream. The dawn came as a mere grayness, with a flocculent, drifting chaos of snow in the air, and a bite in the northwest wind that sent spikelets of ice bearding the fringes of ponds and ditches.

Now Mrs. Winnie had been awake most of the night, and had risen very early full of an instinct that strange things were about to happen, what with such a storm of snow the first week in November. She had lit the fire in the kitchen and was standing at the window watching the snow come down when she heard a horse neigh in the stable, as though the beast had caught the sound of a comrade's coming. And, sure enough, through the maze of snow she saw something dark draw up toward the gate, and knew in her heart that John Gore had returned.

Going to the door, she lifted the bar and saw the snow come whirling in with a hungry wind that went deep into her bosom. There was the click of the gate, and a man came up the path between the drooping stocks and the withered, swaying rose-bushes with something wrapped in a cloak lying in his arms. Mrs. Winnie went out to meet him, her woman's nature caught by the spell of such a love tale.

"Mrs. Winnie!"

"Thank God, sir, and you have brought her back."

The breast of his coat was white with snow, for he had wrapped both the cloaks about Barbara to keep her warm. And he looked down anxiously at the face that lay against his shoulder, as though he feared that the cold had gone to her heart.

"We lost our way, and only luck helped us back again. A warm fire, Mrs. Winnie; she is half frozen."

Christopher Jennifer's wife had taken a sly peep at this desired one, but she was as brisk and concerned as John Gore was, and not a woman to talk and dally.

"Come in, sir, out of this wind; it bites into the blood of the child. Such a storm, with autumn only half out of the door! Let me have her, sir; I know what the cold be on these Sussex hills."

John Gore carried Barbara into the kitchen, for he had ridden with her in his arms to keep her warm, guiding his nag with a touch of the knee. She had fallen asleep with weariness and the cold—a dazed, numb sleep that was not pleasant to consider. Her lips were white and her hands like ice, so that she looked more like a sleeping snow-maiden than a living girl.

Mrs. Winnie had shut the snow and the wind out, drawn her man's chair forward, and was running and rummaging for pillows, wraps, and blankets. Son William put his head in, and was sent packing with the flick of a flannel across his cheek, much amazed and not a little delighted. Mrs. Winnie wellnigh took Barbara out of John Gore's arms, as though this was a woman's affair, and not a matter for a man to meddle with. The wood fire had roared up to a great red mound, and was flinging out such a heat that the very air seemed a-simmer. Mrs. Winnie had Barbara propped up before it, with her head on a pillow and her bosom open to the fire.

"You will find a brick, sir, holding the pantry door open. Put it in the fire to heat."

John Gore did as she bade him, while she reached for the chain with an iron crook and slung the kettle on it.

"There be the tongs, sir. I'll wrap the thing in a bit of flannel and put it to the child's feet. Poor, dear young thing—lady, I mean, sir. Mercy o' me, her shoes are wet and almost froze!"

She knelt down and stripped off the shoes and stockings, and began chafing the little feet, admiring them in her blunt, frank way, and calling them the feet of a lady of quality. She had noticed the marks on Barbara's neck, and John Gore, seeing her eyes fixed there, nodded grimly and put a hand to his throat. His eyes held Mrs. Winnie's, and she understood the need for silence.

"Where be that brick, sir?"

John Gore brought it out with the tongs, and Chris Jennifer's wife patted it into a piece of flannel and set Barbara's feet upon it with a smile of satisfaction.

"Now for some hot toddy, sir." And she went away to mix it.

John Gore bent over Barbara and touched her cheek, for a faint color was creeping back, and he felt that even Mrs. Winnie might be kissed at such a moment. But being a quiet man, he went out to see to his horse, hardly noticing that his own feet were still like frozen clay and that his arms were stiff from carrying his love.

There was a brave breakfast cooking, and the fire was a red, shimmering slope of wood ash when Mr. Jennifer came stumping down the stairs to pause and stare in astonishment at Barbara as he opened the stairway door. She was lying back in the chair with her eyes open, but with no real soul in them as yet, her hands hanging over the chair-rail, her black hair bathing her face.

Mr. Jennifer came in softly and discreetly, and stood about three yards from her, fingering the side seam of his breeches. Then he made a bob and waited, and then a second bob, with a stolid, persistent desire to be proper in the matter of politeness. But though Barbara hardly had sight or hearing for anything as yet, Mr. Jennifer stood stolidly to his convictions, and scraped his feet to make the lady look at him.

Mrs. Winnie caught him at this bobbing and scraping, with a puzzled stare in his eyes and his thick head full of kindness. He glanced at his wife with extreme cunning, and gave her a whisper behind his hands.

"Come ye here, Winnie. What be t' lady a-staring at? Here be I makin' a knee to her—"

"Get out with you, you great fool!"

She gave him a cuff across the ear. But Mr. Jennifer still gazed at Barbara.

"She be purty enough. But what be a-terrifying me—be—why she won't blink them eyes o' hers."

"Get along with you, Chris Jennifer, you great booby! Can't you see she be dazed with t' cold? And will she be thanking you for standing there and staring like a cow? Go and help the gentleman with his horse."

"And did them come all on one horse, my dear?"

Mrs. Winnie looked at him, and Mr. Jennifer went.

XL

With the coming of winter there had been strange happenings at the Purcells' house in Pall Mall, for my lady had died the night after Stephen Gore's going, with no one to comfort her but Mrs. Jael. The servants had all fled, and the house stood deserted save for the live woman and the dead one; the very tradesmen shirked the steps; friends had business elsewhere; and Dr. Hemstruther himself, being a keen Protestant when popery was especially perilous, kept his distance, knowing that my Lord Gore's influence had been paramount there in heart and body. For my Lord Gore was one of the Catholic gentlemen upon whom the Plot-men longed to lay their hands.

It happened that when poor Anne Purcell died that there was some store of silver and of plate in the house, also her jewels and trinkets, and sundry precious things that belonged to the Purcell family. Mrs. Jael showed some little care for the corpse by covering it with a clean sheet, but she showed far more care for her own concerns and for the valuables that were at her mercy. She ransacked the whole house, gathering every small thing of value into a heap on the floor of one of the attics, gloating and smiling over it, and promising herself great joys. For Mrs. Jael had picked up a sweetheart, a rough, sturdy fellow from Aldgate way, and she crept out one night to warn him of her good-fortune, and to persuade him to help in spiriting away the plunder. The man was a common thief, and had tricked even the smooth, sly Jael for three months past, pretending that he was in the cloth trade, and that he hankered greatly after a comely widow. He was ready enough to join in the adventure, and cared as little for small-pox as for the reek of an open drain. And thus Mrs. Jael let him into the house by night, and they packed up the plunder between them in a couple of sacks, and so went their way into the darkness. But the man no longer had any desire for the voluptuous embraces of a widow, and in some way Mrs. Jael came to her end that night, and was found weeks later afloat in the Thames, an unrecognizable and nameless body.

Now Jael, during the time that she was gathering the treasure together, had left lights burning in my lady's room to make people think that Anne Purcell was still alive. She had put new candles to burn the very night she had fled out to her death, and so an eerie thing befell, for officers in quest of papists, and my Lord Gore in particular, broke into the house, having heard the rumor of small-pox and considered that it might be a trick. But they found Anne Purcell lying dead in her bed, a sheet covering her, and the candles burning, not a living soul in the whole house, and every chest and cupboard rifled. So the Law stepped in, beat round for witnesses, and buried my lady at night with a bushel of quick-lime and extra pay to the man who buried her. Then there was a learned to-do, much hunting out of documents, and much puzzling over facts. For Mistress Barbara Purcell was her father's heiress after her mother's death, and Mistress Barbara had come within the chancellor's ken by reason of unsound mind, yet no living soul seemed able to tell where this same Barbara Purcell was. The lawyers looked wise over it, and sat down cheerfully to make their pickings, Chancery claiming authority in the case, and not caring greatly how long the dilemma lasted so long as they handled the property. For every man's mind was full of the Plot those months, and not for many years had the wigs boasted so much business.

Titus Oates had come toward full notoriety in October by harrowing the public with the fulminations of a furious imagination. Then had followed Sir Edmundbury Godfrey's murder, the seizing of Coleman's correspondence, and a panic in London, with mobs shouting in the streets. The Protestant beacon had been fired, and blazed with terrified fury, while Oates threw fagot after fagot to feed the flames. Catholic peers were cast into the Tower; two thousand or more smaller people

were arrested; all papists commanded to leave London. The train-bands marched through the streets; executions were soon to begin; it was nothing but Plot—Plot—Plot—from Parliament to Pulpit.

At Thorn, in Sussex, my Lord of Gore hid himself from the knowledge of all these things, a man shrunken strangely from his former buxom self, a man without nerve or energy for the moment, vacillating between plans on a dash across the Channel for France, and the timidity of a hunted thing that fears to leave its hiding-place for the open. Even as Monmouth the Protestant prince at the head of an army differed from Monmouth the panic-obsessed fugitive skulking in a ditch, so the Stephen Gore of Whitehall differed from the Stephen Gore of Thorn. Some blight seemed to have fallen on him, turning his manhood into a white-faced, memory-haunted thing afraid of the very shadow of its own thoughts. That brief, fierce burst of winter may have helped to chill the marrow in the courtier's bones, with the wailing of the wind and the whirling of the snow. For a man cannot do without food and fire, and Stephen Gore had to turn drudge to his own need. At first he had tried to dispense with a fire for fear the smoke should betray him, but when he had shivered and ached for two days his caution surrendered to the lust for warmth, and he brought in fagots and with great trouble made a blaze. He had found a store of salted meat, ship's biscuits, and other stuffs still left in the place, and though Thorn had a horror for him, he clung to it like a fox to his "earth," knowing of no other place wherein to hide himself. For there seemed hardly a better place in the kingdom than Thorn, for Pinniger and his woman had not been molested all those weeks. There would be a score of open ways for a bold and resolute man to take later, but the heart was utterly out of Stephen Gore, and the spirit of yesterday was not the spirit of to-day.

Yet what, after all, had he to fear, setting visions of judgment and other worlds aside, but the passing fury of a Protestant mob and the wild tale of a double murder? A month ago these menaces would have stung the self in the man to thrust them aside with audacity and resolution. But a climax had come and gone; something was breaking in him and taking his cool self-trust away, and he felt like Samson shorn of his hair. Perhaps the bile had congealed in him with the cold, for nothing can make a man more tame and listless than a clogged and sluggish liver. Perhaps he had lost faith in his own genius for success. Perhaps he was penitent. This last would have been the pretty, saintly end, confession and absolution, penance, the lighting of tapers and saying of masses, and all the saints in the calendar stretching out succoring hands. Yet there is something incongruous in the idea of a strong, selfish, cynical man huddling himself feverishly into the habit of religiosity when Retribution comes knocking at the door. It often fails to impress the conscience. It is not always convincing, even in romance.

Probably the secret of all this crumbling up of courage lay in the nature of the man's very self. Vanity may be a rare cement in the walls of a man's fortune so long as there is no corroding acid in the air. And Stephen Gore's genius had rested upon his vanity, not in his dress alone, but in all those attributes that a man desires to see given to his splendor. His vital force had been fed upon the pleasant things of life; he was a self-inflated, artificial creature, who was strong so long as he could be flattered. But, like an orthodox believer smitten to the heart with doubt, he began to find his convictions dissolving into chaos, and the adulations of self-worship becoming a mockery despite his efforts to believe them real.

Voices—sharp, sneering, sardonic voices that he had had the strength to stifle of old—began to cut him with his own cleverness, using the very gibes against him that he had used in the gay salons to his own glory. For when a cynic falls into misfortune he is likely to discover that he has nurtured a devil that will use its claws upon the master who has reared it.

Stephen Gore had often said that—

"A man who begins to think his virtue shabby is a man who cannot afford to pay his tailor—the priest."

"Never confess to yourself any cause for shame, or you will soon find your feet in the mire."

"Men may regret; only women and fools repent."

"Consciousness is life; therefore a man ought to suffer himself to be conscious only of pleasant things."

And my Lord of Gore was having a wider consciousness forced upon him in the narrow world of that ruined house. And where were the studied pleasantries of consciousness? A fine gentleman feeding on salt beef and onions, scraping his own fire together, and living in devout horror of a prosaic thing called death. So much so that he was possessed by a species of "morsomania" grim enough to prevent him seeing the cynically comic side of his own condition.

XLI

A man in love is not supposed to think of his lady's clothes, but only of the brightness of her eyes and the beauty of her body, the way her lips curve when she smiles, and how she may look coy or mischievous, or sad and silent with some mysterious desire. Yet there is a delight in practical things when shoes are for certain feet, and the petticoats to hide a certain comely pair of ankles. John Gore had inquired of Mrs. Winnie as to the shops in Battle Town, and qualified her enthusiasm somewhat to himself when she vowed that Mr. Bannister's mercery and haberdashery shop might have served the Queen.

Chris Jennifer was riding into Battle that week, for the wind had backed into the southwest, and the snow had thawed in a day. And John Gore set forward to ride with Mr. Jennifer, Mrs. Winnie whispering to him that her man could carry a power of things, being accustomed to suffer all manner of commissions. For Barbara had nothing but the clothes she stood in, and was wearing a pair of Mrs. Winnie's shoes when she went down the garden path to watch John Gore mount for Battle. Mrs. Jennifer was always taking her man by the coat-tails when these "young things" were

about together. Poor Christopher had no peace in his own house, being ordered out of the way wherever he might go, and told that he was a blind booby for not keeping the corner of an eye open, and for not thrashing those lazy, gossiping rogues—his men—for loitering and hanging about the buildings. Yet Christopher took it all very patiently, going out to the stable to smoke his pipe and teach son William to make “jumping-jacks” and bird snares and pop-guns out of elder wood.

Mr. Jennifer and John Gore came to Battle Town that day and pulled up outside Mr. Bannister’s shop, where Mill Street ran toward Mountjoy and The Mills. Chris Jennifer had business at the farrier’s and the grocer’s, so he left John Gore to his own affairs, promising to be back in half an hour in order to help load the baggage. John Gore called a boy to hold his horse, and went into Mr. Bannister’s shop with the grim air of an Englishman who is tempted to feel shy.

A young woman came forward with ribbons in her cap, and a saucy, giggling look that seemed to rally the gentleman on his surroundings. John Gore had no use for her at all. He looked round the shop and saw no one else but a little old woman carding wool.

“Is Mr. Bannister in?”

The girl stared, and the old lady put down her wool. John Gore took off his hat to her.

“May I see Mr. Bannister himself, madam?”

“Titsy, go and see where the master is.”

And Titsy went, with a flaunting fling of the shoulders, for the man had not taken off his hat to her.

Mr. Bannister was a mild man in rusty brown. John Gore could see that he had just washed his hands and bustled into his Sunday wig, for he had put it on awry. He came forward with the walk of a man who suffered from chronic rheumatism about the spine, and he was wearing at least five pairs of stockings, to judge by his bulgy legs.

John Gore persuaded him to the end of the counter next the door, not at all pleased to see that Titsy of the ribbons had come back into the shop and was listening with both her ears.

“Good-day, sir. In what way may I serve you?”

“I want some of these stuffs here, God knows what you call them, stuff for gowns and petticoats—and—things!”

The need seemed rather vague and extensive. Mr. Bannister worked his mouth about, and wondered who the stranger was and whether he had proper money. The girl Titsy began to giggle, and John Gore half wished that he had let Mrs. Winnie come and do the shopping for him, though her taste was crude and monstrous in many ways.

“The fact is, sir, I have been made the guardian of a young gentlewoman, and I find that she is not clothed in the style she should be. Come here to the door, sir, to get out of range of that confounded girl of yours, whose manners might be mended. Now, Mr. Bannister, I have heard your shop well spoken of, and I want proper stuffs for a wardrobe. The—the—you know what I mean—I leave it to you; but show me your cloths and silks and ribbons.”

Mr. Bannister was a man of tact, especially when a gentleman produced a purse. He turned Titsy and the old lady out of the shop, locked the door, and commenced business. John Gore was soon handling all manner of dainty stuffs: silks, brocades, cloth of red and green and blue, cottons, and the like. Mrs. Winnie had truly praised Mr. Bannister’s store of treasures, and the lover soon had all that he listed for the glorifying of his lady.

Gold passed across the counter. Mr. Bannister had begun piling certain dainty linen aside with the mystery of a man of sentiment.

“Can I send these by the carrier, sir?”

“Thanks; my friend and I can take them, if you will cord the stuff so that we can carry it aboard our horses.”

“Very good, sir, very good.”

Mr. Jennifer came in at that moment, his hat on the back of his head and his face trying to kill a grin. Mr. Bannister glanced at him a little severely, and was more surprised to see the stranger own him as the friend he had referred to.

“What be all these doings here, Mister Bannister, in Battle, hey?”

“What doings may you be referring to, Mr. Jennifer?”

“Doings! Why, there be old Squire Oxenham out on his gray ‘oss on t’ Green, with a pair of sodgering fellows in red, and half a score yeomen, and Lawyer Gibbs, and a little gen’leman in a great wig, with a face like a raw side of beef.”

Mr. Bannister had heard of none of these doings, and they went to the door, all three of them, and stood on the footway, looking toward the Green. Squire Oxenham was there, sure enough, with a couple of troopers and the yeomen—all mounted, and one or two more gentlemen to watch the mounted men, who were keeping their horses moving, all save Squire Oxenham, the lawyer, and the red-faced man in the big black periwig.

“What be ut, Garge?”

Mr. Jennifer accosted a man in a leather apron who came swinging along the sidewalk.

“Devil a bit I knows. Some of these papistry gentry to be taken, I guess. Squire Oxenham’s keeping mum.”

Mr. Bannister pulled out a pair of tortoise-shell spectacles and took stock of the scene. He had hardly adjusted the spectacles when the two troopers came riding up the street, followed by the yeomen, Squire Oxenham, and the rest. A rabble of small boys followed at their heels, till the Squire made free with the whip he carried and drove the boys back like a lot of dogs. They swept past Mr. Bannister’s shop, Chris Jennifer running forward to hold the heads of his and John Gore’s horses. They saw the cavalcade go westward past the Watch Oak, the Squire’s gray horse and the red coats of the troopers standing out vividly from the duller tints of the rest.

Mr. Bannister folded up his spectacles and remarked that “the times were troubled, and that a king who gave all his days to women could not keep a kingdom clean.” And he looked severely at the row of heads protruding from the windows all down the street, and caught Miss Titsy’s

beribboned cap bobbing back to escape his censure.

"The parcels yonder are for you, Mr. Jennifer."

The farmer went in to survey the bales on the counter, while John Gore passed three doors down the street to a cobbler who sold gentlewomen's shoes. He bought a pair of red leather slippers with silver buckles, and also some strong, stout shoes fit for the wet grass-lands in winter, for it was his desire that Barbara should bide at Furze Farm till he knew how matters fared in other quarters.

Christopher Jennifer was a genius at piling baggage about a horse, and they were soon on the homeward road, John Gore thinking not a little of the things he had seen in Battle Town, and wondering whither that cavalcade had ridden, and what their business might be. For when a man has a secret in his heart he is always jealous of the vaguest threat, and ready to imagine that his secret may be meddled with by all the law and the prophets. And John Gore had no wish for the tragedy of Thorn to be dragged into the light as yet. He thought of Barbara before all else, and of any peril that might threaten her new-found health and hope.

Son William was packed off to bed early that night, and Chris Jennifer went out into the wood-lodge to cut logs for the fire. In the parlor were the bales that John Gore had brought in from Battle, and Mrs. Winnie's fingers itched to open them, but Barbara knew nothing.

It was after supper that John Gore took his knife and cut the cords, and, turning back the sacking, left Barbara and Mrs. Winnie to look at the things together. He left them to it because he was the giver, and because he knew that there were some matters that he could have no hand in. He had told Mrs. Winnie what to say, for Barbara had fallen to like Mrs. Winnie very greatly, and Chris Jennifer's wife was no less fervent in her eagerness to mother "the little lady."

John Gore was sitting alone before the kitchen fire when the parlor door opened very softly and a shadow fell athwart the clean red bricks. Barbara was standing there with some ruddy silken stuff held up over her bosom and falling in rich folds to her feet.

He turned in his chair, smitten with the thought of how fair she looked with her swarthy beauty and that ruddy sheen of silk to heighten it. There was just a flash of woman's vanity in her eyes that moment, a thing new in her since he had come.

"Barbe!"

She came to him, holding the stuff in her two hands, and they could hear Mrs. Winnie singing with purposeful vigor in the parlor.

"John, how good of you! But you must let me—"

"Let you do what, my soul?" And he rose and stood looking at her very dearly.

"Pay you, John."

"What pride—and nonsense! But that silk is sweet, now, is it not?"

She met his eyes, blushed, and looked down at her own figure. And then, suddenly, she let the silken stuff fall to the floor, put her two hands up over her face, and burst into tears.

"How wicked of me—how utterly wicked!"

"Why, Barbe, child?"

"Don't speak to me, John. To think that I should give thought to such things when all this is over you—over us both!"

He went to her, putting an arm about her shoulders, touched her hands gently with his lips.

"Weep not, dear heart, if it be wrong that you should have these pretty stuffs, it is I who am to blame for loving you."

She let her hands fall and looked up through a mist of tears into his face.

"John, can we—can you ever forget the past? Can you forgive?"

"What have I to forgive, dear heart?"

"Ah yes; but—"

He held her at arm's-length, his two hands upon her shoulders, and looked into her eyes.

"Barbara, it is not your heart that is hard now. God has given this love to us, and what God gives, who shall forbid?"

She hung her head and sighed.

"I am wondering, John."

"Well, my life?"

"What will happen, what we must do—what the end may be."

He looked at her a moment in silence, and then spoke like a man whose strength is in his own heart.

"Child, there is one good and certain thing with us—let us hold to it, you and I together. I will take shame from no man, and no lie from any living throat. If there should be dark days, let them come; I will not let you go from me—no, for here life is, nor can there be sin or shame in that which God has given."

She looked up at him quickly with a great brightness of the eyes.

"John, I cannot, I could not, stand all alone now."

"Why, my desire, what more can a man pray for!"

And they still heard Mrs. Winnie singing as though she were singing at a harvest-home.

In a little while they went back together into the parlor hand in hand. Chris Jennifer's wife was standing with her back to them, posing herself before a little old mirror with a bright piece of stuff—pink roses upon a green ground—folded about her bosom. She turned with a start, and whisked the thing away as though shy of a piece of matronly vanity.

"Why, Mrs. Winnie, you have picked out the very thing!"

"Me, sir? I was only trying how my little lady would look in it gathered up over the breast—just so, Mr. John."

"But I bought that piece of stuff for you, Mrs. Winnie."

"Now, come, my dear good gentleman—me with pink roses!"

"Well, I should praise you in it."

"Pink roses and a face like a side of bacon! Dear soul, but it be too young for me."

Barbara went to her suddenly, and, taking the stuff, unfolded it, and held it to Mrs. Jennifer's figure. And in truth she looked comely with the sweet colors of it, turning her coy, brusque face this way and that with self-conscious pride.

"You look like a bride, Mrs. Jennifer."

"Go along with you, Mr. John, you be as bad as the rest of them with your tongue. But, by my soul, dearie, it do look sweet!"

XLII

It would almost seem that Stephen Gore was a little mad those first few days in Thorn, what with the fever of a chill he had taken in the saddle, the utter ghostliness and melancholy of the place, and the cold, raw mists that hung about the moat. The cold went to his marrow and the sinister solitude of the house to his brain, for at night Thorn was a veritable goblin castle where a man might imagine all manner of dim horrors. The wind made strange noises and whisperings of dismay; plaster crumbled and fell; slants of moonlight sprang in as the clouds drifted over the moon; the ivy rattled on the walls; worm-eaten beams creaked and cracked; and the wind was everywhere like a haunted spirit. Stephen Gore had found only one candle left in the place; it had lasted him but one night, so that when the dusk fell he had no light but the light of the fire. And he would lie awake on the couch in the kitchen, the hot blood simmering in his brain, and a sweat of shivering fear on him, while he fancied that he heard voices in the thickness of the walls and a sound as of things moving in the darkness.

However dainty and superfine a man may be, his flesh takes command of his spirit when the smaller necessities of life fall to his own hands. It would have delighted some of the cynics of Whitehall to have seen this fine gentleman in his shirt-sleeves splitting firewood with pitiful clumsiness, and disciplining his stomach in an attempt to boil salt beef. For Stephen Gore was repeating some of the experiences of a Selkirk, save that his solitude was of his own seeking, and yet not a matter of choice.

What with misery of mind and body, the *malaise* of the fever, and the utter melancholy of the place, my lord's manhood and his moral courage were in ruins within a week. He gave way to a sense of panic and to a delirious lust for self-preservation that would have seemed ridiculous but for the very real torment he was in. Whether he was hunted as a conspirator against the state or as a spiller of innocent blood were possibilities that pointed only to the one grim issue. A morbid belief in their having "sinned against the Holy Ghost" has sent superstitious mortals to Bedlam. A morbid dread of death seized on my lord with equal grimness, and in a week he had lost that larger consciousness, that cool sanity and shrewd sense of humor, that give a man power over the chances of life. His intelligence began to drop to the level of the animal that seeks to cover its tracks from possible pursuers. Sagacity gave place to cunning and a blind passion for the annihilation of everything that might betray him.

He sent his horse adrift, driving him out with savage prickings from his sword, so that the beast fled panic-stricken into the woods. As for the dog, he put a pistol bullet through his head, tied a weight to the carcass, and sunk it in the moat. Saddle and harness he buried in the garden, keeping the bar up across the court-yard gate, and going out from the house only at dusk. He even made his fire on the floor in the middle of the kitchen, enduring the smoke and the smarting of his eyes, so that the smoke might leak away through doors and windows and crevices instead of pluming up out of the chimney. He burned all the rough furniture in the place, save the couch and an old stool, and, taking up two of the flagstones in the floor, dug a hole under them to hide the store of food, not realizing, perhaps, that the stuff would be mouldy and rotten in a month. It was his feverish purpose to blot out every trace of life from Thorn, so that should it be raided by the Law there should be no clews. The marvel was that he found such a life worth living for the sake of the life he hoarded. But Stephen Gore was not wholly sane those days, what with the fever, and the sweat of fear in him at night, and the thoughts that haunted him as thirst haunts a straggler in the desert.

Nor was all this cunning of his wasted upon chimerical possibilities and feverish fancies, as the event soon proved. It was the day of John Gore's ride into Battle Town with Mr. Jennifer, and Stephen Gore had fallen asleep on the couch in the kitchen, for he could sleep in the day if not at night. About two o'clock in the afternoon he awoke to find that the fire had burned itself out, for the erstwhile philosopher had much to learn in the simple matter of building a wood fire so that it should not be out in an hour. He scrambled up rather sourly, and was about to cross the court to the wood-lodge when he heard a faint "halloo" coming from the misty stillness of the wooded slopes of the valley.

Stephen Gore turned back into the kitchen like a man who has escaped walking over a cliff in the dark, and stood listening a moment with his hand to his ear. Then he pushed the couch away toward the window, and, kneeling, swept the ashes of the fire on to the hearth-stone with his hands, thanking Heaven for the providential perverseness of the thing in burning out while he was asleep. Climbing the lower story of the tower, he looked cautiously through the narrow window to see nearly twenty mounted men coming down over the grass-land at a fast trot. My lord's knees rubbed together as he recognized the red coats of the two troopers, and the more sombre and magisterial look of the gentry who followed.

Days ago Stephen Gore had searched out a hiding-place for himself, and his choice had lighted on nothing cleaner and more distinguished than the chimney in the kitchen. He had climbed up by the chain, despite the soot—he who could hardly wear the same shirt twice in a week—till the throat of the chimney narrowed so that he could use his hands and feet. About fifteen feet from the ground he had discovered a little recess in the brickwork where a man might stand and not be seen by any one looking upward. He had eased the ascent to this possible niche of refuge by knocking in

an old nail or two that he had found in one of the out-houses.

A great amount of majestic cant has been written about the stately courage of the Gentleman. There are very few Sir Richard Grenvilles in the world, but far more Falstaffs ready to take refuge in the washing-basket at a pinch. To have played the proper heroic part my lord should have gone out calmly to the gate of Thorn and courteously dared these gentry to take him while he lived, or at least to have awaited them with aristocratic composure and delivered up his arms like a great captain surrendering a fortress that he has no longer the power to hold. Such should have been the picturesque setting of the scene, but the meaner impulses of human nature triumphed, and the gentleman Went up the chimney like any sweep's boy, barking his knees and elbows, and coloring his dignity with most satanic soot.

Squire Oxenham and his party came to the gate of Thorn, and sent one of the yeoman over it to drop the bar and let the others in. Three men were left to guard the horses and the gate, and two more to patrol the borders of the moat, while magistrate, attorney, king's rider, and the rest spread themselves abroad to ransack the place, keeping their steel and powder ready in case they might come to grips with desperate men. But for all their bravery and bustle they found nothing but silence and emptiness in Thorn, as though the place had remained lifeless since the old Scotch folk left it in the autumn.

Squire Oxenham and Lawyer Gibbs found their way into the kitchen and went no farther in the man hunt, being content with the work done. The lawyer noticed the discolored stones in the floor and some wood-ash lying in the crevices. And had he touched those stones, instead of staring at them in a perfunctory and superior way, he would have discovered that they were warm, and that a fire had been lit there that very day.

Squire Oxenham, being an old and plethoric man with threatenings of gout in the right foot, sat down on the couch and pulled out a flask of hollands. He and the lawyer began gossiping together, and the Knight of the Chimney could hear every word that passed.

"We shall have an appetite for supper, Thomas, though we may not set eyes on Mr. Shaftesbury's lord. Deuce take me if I can get my blood hot over the notion of sending some poor devil to the block. What are you staring at the floor for, Thomas?"

"There has been a fire here, Squire."

"Months old, man; the place where Sandy Macalister smoked his Sabbath clothes before sneaking into heaven without crossing Peter's palm. Have a drop of spirit, Thomas Gibbs. I wonder what made those Westminster wolves scent out Thorn as the man's hiding-hole. The fellow Maudesly tells me that the Purcell woman—Halloo, Sacker, my man, have you found anything except owls?"

"Not a thing, your worship."

"Just as I thought, Mr. Gibbs—just as I thought. Any man of sense with a warrant out against him would have been in France days ago and eating French dinners instead of freezing in a damned rubbish-heap like this. But these Jacks in Office must pretend to know everything. Some noodle at Westminster would be ready to tell me how much to allow my wife's sisters, and how often my cess-pit ought to be emptied. Well, Mr. Maudesly, have you had enough of Thorn?"

The little man in the big periwig came in looking testy, and not to be trifled with. The men trooped in after him, while the Squire passed his flask round to the gentlemen, and condoled with them satirically on having drawn a "blank." Stephen Gore in the chimney heard them gossiping there awhile before they tramped out into the court-yard to take horse for Battle Town before dusk fell. The thunder of hoofs went over the timbers of the bridge, and slowly, almost eerily, as the water of a stagnant pool settles over the stone that has been thrown into it, the heavy silence closed again over Thorn.

It was probable that my lord felt some elation over his escape, and that he was not a little eager to be out of so black and draughty a refuge. He was also very stiff and cold from having stood in that narrow recess for over an hour. At all events, he began the descent clumsily and carelessly, and, bearing too much weight on one of the nails that he had driven into the wall, the thing broke away from the rotten mortar, and, though he drove out his knees and elbows in an attempt to wedge himself in the chimney, his weight and bulk carried him heavily to the hearth below. Coming down on his right flank, his right thigh struck one of the iron fire-dogs about a hand's-breadth below the great trochanter of the hip. And Stephen Gore felt the bone snap as a dead branch snaps across a man's knee.

In the agony of it he rolled over and over till his body was stopped by the couch that Squire Oxenham had drawn forward from the window. He gripped the lower stretcher of the wood frame with both hands and took the sleeve of his coat between his teeth, as a seaman will clinch his teeth upon a rope's-end to save himself from screaming when the surgeon's hot iron sears the stump of a mangled limb. Then he lay on his back, breathing deeply and slowly, his hands tugging at the collar of his shirt as though the band were tight about his throat. His right foot had fallen outward, and when he tried to move the limb there was nothing but a spasm of the muscles and a sense of bone gritting against bone.

XLIII

The days were pleasant enough at Furze Farm, with Barbara gaining in health and color, and in a womanly winsomeness that made even Mrs. Jennifer wonder. It was as though the real soul had come to life in her again, and her heart, that had been a thing of moods and sorrows of old, had warmed into a richer consciousness of life, so that the beautiful shell began to glow with the light of the beautiful spirit within. There was a sweet sparkle of youth in her that began to play over the surface of sadness, and though the past still shadowed her, she stood free from the utter gloom of it

and saw the golden rim of the sun. She made friends with little Will Jennifer, played hide-and-peek with the boy, and told him tales in the dusk before he went to bed. She and Mrs. Winnie, too, were busy making up the stuffs from Battle into gowns and petticoats, and though Mrs. Winnie's craft was simple and somewhat crude, the colors lighted up Barbara's comeliness, and the very simplicity of the frocks seemed in keeping with that Sussex fireside. She even besought Mrs. Winnie to let her learn the lore of the dairy, the art of butter-making, and the like; for the primitive, busy life of the place seemed good to her, and full of the warmth and fragrance of a home.

John Gore took her riding with him over the winter fields, for he had bought her a quiet saddle-horse in one of the market towns. Yet though the days were magical for lover and beloved, there were the sterner issues of life to be confronted, nor could they forget those clouds that had withdrawn a little toward the horizon. Moreover, John Gore began to feel the very material need of a replenished purse, and an insight into the future that concerned him and his love, even unto the death.

He laid everything before Barbara one evening as they rode homeward toward Furze Farm, with a red, wintry glow in the west, and the hills wrapped in bluish gloom. Riding very close to him, she listened to all his reasonings, accepting things that went against her heart, because she knew that he loved her, and because she felt him to be shrewd and strong.

"Do that which you think best, John," she said, with an upward look into his face; "I trust you with all that life can hold."

And so their nags went homeward side by side, so close that the man's arm was over the girl's shoulders, and her breathing rising up to him in the keen, clear air like a little cloud of incense.

One morning early in December John Gore took the London road, following the same course that he and Mr. Pepys had taken—by Battle, Lamberhurst, Tunbridge, and Seven Oaks. Nor could he help contrasting the difference of the ways, and the different spirit that inspired him, though the woods were bare now, and the country gray and colorless when no sun shone. His thoughts went back over the Sussex hills to that farm-house with its broad black thatch, its beech-trees, and its uplands, its brick-paved, low-beamed kitchen with the fire red even to the chimney's throat, and the kindly folk who moved therein. But chiefly he thought of Barbara sitting before that winter fire, her great eyes full of the light and dreams thereof, and her Spanish face betraying new depths of womanhood because of the suffering she had borne and the spirit of beauty she had won thereby.

John Gore put up at an inn in Southwark, meaning to keep his distance from the precincts of St. James's, and from that intriguing, cultured, cruel world that had held his own father as a murderer and a paramour. He had heard of grim things in the Spanish Provinces and the Islands, but nothing that had brought home to him the shame of the goddess self in passion as this tragedy in an English home had done. He could only think of the man—his father—with pity, and a kind of revolting of the honorable manhood in him. It was almost a subject beyond the pale of thought; a thing rather to be realized and then—buried.

Now John Gore was innocent of all knowledge of Oates's Plot and of the wild ferment the City was in, for the news of it had not trickled as yet into the by-ways of Sussex, and he had kept to himself upon the road. His plan was to hunt out Samuel Pepys and hear the news of the surface of things, whether my lord was in town, and whether the Secretary would act for him in receiving and forwarding his Yorkshire moneys. His first visit across the water was to the Admiralty offices, and there, when he had sent his name in, Mr. Pepys came out in person with a mightily solemn face. He took his friend straight to a little private cabinet of his own, locked the door, and pushed John Gore unceremoniously into a chair.

"Well, John, you have come here, have you, with a lighted candle to look for sixpence in a barrel of gunpowder. Where have you been all these weeks?"

Mr. Pepys's manner was the manner of a man who had some reason for being honestly perturbed.

"Within ten miles of the place you left me at, Sam. I have come up for news and money."

Mr. Pepys looked at him steadily, yet with a species of alarmed awe.

"News, John! Gracious God, we are shaken in our shoes with fresh news every other day! You have heard of the Plot, of course."

"Plot! What plot?"

Mr. Pepys's silent stare expressed infinite things. He stepped forward, tapped John Gore on the chest with his forefinger, then stepped back again, and made him a reverence.

"Can I bow, sir, to a gentleman who has never heard of Titus Oates? Alack, John, I fear me I have many sad and solemn things to tell you! I thought that you had heard everything, and that you were wintering in the country—like a wise man. For it is not flattering at present to bear the name of Gore."

He saw the sea-captain straighten suddenly in his chair and look up at him keenly.

"What do you mean, Sam?"

"Mean, sir? Did I not warn you that the papists were likely to burn their fingers? And we are in the thick of such fire and fright and fury because of them that we are all afraid to catechize our own souls. News, my good John! The Protestants raging, informers making Ananias seem a simpleton, Catholic peers in the Tower, hundreds in jail, Coleman the Jesuit tried and executed, a warrant out against your father, who has taken to his heels and fled."

"Good God, Sam! Where?"

"That is what certain people would like to know, sir. I pity your innocence, John, but we are all of us shaking in our shoes. Even the Queen has not been pitied."

John Gore sat forward in his chair, his hands on his knees, his eyes looking into the distance. He was silent a moment, while Mr. Pepys fidgeted with his feet and glanced nervously at both door and window.

"I have not seen my—Lord Gore since I left London with you, Sam."

"No?"

"I have heard nothing of all this. What is more, I have had matters of my own."

Mr. Pepys stroked his chin.

"There is yet another piece of news, John."

"Well?"

"Concerning the Purcells."

The sea-captain looked at him sharply.

"What?"

"Anne Purcell died of the small-pox a month ago."

"Anne Purcell!"

"Yes; it would have been the talk of the town but for this furious belcher of accusations, even the man Oates."

John Gore looked at him in silence.

"She was found dead in her bed in her house in Pall Mall. All the servants had fled, and the house had been rifled. But there also appears to be a mystery about the daughter. The lawyers have discovered that she was put away in the autumn for being of unsound mind; and now that all the property seems to have fallen to her, not a living soul knows what has become of the girl."

The sea-captain smiled very slightly, with a grim light in the eyes.

"Who has the control of the matter?" he asked.

"It has fallen into Chancery."

"Like the traveller to Jericho, Sam, in the parable. How long is it since my Lord Stephen hoisted sail?"

"Somewhere about a month ago—before I returned from Portsmouth."

"Did Anne Purcell die before then?"

"Heaven help me if I know, John. But what has that to do with the case?"

"More than you know, my friend—more than you may suspect."

He had the air of a man who was troubled and perplexed by many difficulties.

"Sam, I want your help and advice. I can trust you."

Mr. Pepys made him a little bow.

"Where are you staying, John?"

"In Southwark. I had my reasons. Can you give me supper to-night, and an hour's private talk? I have many things to turn over in my mind before then."

The Secretary laid a hand upon John Gore's shoulder.

"A friend's trust is a friend's affection, John. Come and sup with me; what I can do I will."

The Secretary's wife was feasting with friends that night, and Mr. Pepys and John Gore had the table to themselves. When supper was over, Mr. Samuel took the sea-captain to the library, locked the door, and prepared to play the part of counsellor and friend. For Mr. Pepys was a shrewd, sound man of the world, for all his oddities and love of news—a man who had walked the slippery path of public responsibility, and who knew the world's deceitfulness, even to the latest lie from the lips of a king.

But even this critic of court scandals, and of the vanities of himself and of mankind at large, was flustered a little by John Gore's account of his doings, and of the tragedy that had taken place at Thorn. Mr. Pepys could pass over a gay intrigue, but this darker and more sinister affair gripped the manhood in him, and made him understand his friend's grimness.

"On the Cross of our Lord, Sam, I pledge you to silence over this. I know you are to be trusted where questions of life and death are concerned."

There was no need to question the inteness of the Secretary's sincerity. He was a man of oak whose foibles and frivolities were merely the flutter of leaves in the wind.

"Have no doubt of that, John. But upon my conscience, this is black villany or something marvellous like it. Iago, oh Iago, thou dimest with us and smilest at us in church, thou art not only a thing of the stage!"

John Gore sat thinking, smoking his pipe, and snapping the thumb and middle finger of his right hand.

"It is the girl who has to be considered, Sam. She has borne enough, suffered enough, and from my own flesh and blood; that's where the rub comes."

Mr. Pepys sat and considered.

"The Chancery folk are such a dastardly meddling lot," he said.

"I am not afraid of the lawyers, Sam; we can take our chances over the sea, if needs be. But there is this man—this father—to be considered. And, by my hope in Heaven, I will kill him as he killed Lionel Purcell if he meddles further with the girl's life!"

Mr. Pepys looked a little shocked despite his sympathy. He had been a good son himself, and the word "father" had its true meaning for him.

"Softly, John, softly. There is always the other side of the case; we cannot always see into another man's heart."

John Gore stared at the floor grimly.

"What I have said, Sam, I have said; even one's father is not privileged to seduce and murder as he pleases. I shall put my sword to his breast and say: 'Sir, no further.' He has his life in his hand."

Mr. Pepys looked at him kindly.

"Have you not thought, John, that it may rest with the girl?"

"With her—how?"

"If she chooses not to speak, to play a part."

John Gore met his friend's eyes.

"Why should this—this man be shielded? There is blood upon his hands; he has stained the lives of others. Who shall consider him?"

"John, John, you talk like a man who stabs fiercely at a shadow. No man is wholly the devil's creature, and, say what you will, his loins begot you."

"The greater the need, Sam, to put aside false sentiment. Still, he is out of our ken at present. We must bide our time—and watch."

Mr. Pepys rubbed his knees with the palms of his hands.

"Do you know what I would have you do, John? Go back to this quiet farm; let the child come by her health and happiness. Keep the lawyers out of it, and marry her, if you can."

"You are echoing my own thoughts, Sam."

"Good; very good. See what a seal, my friend, you might set upon the past, if God granted you children and happiness, and the long love of wife and man."

John Gore understood his meaning.

"The blood-debt might be wiped away, Sam, for the sake of the future."

"God grant it. And now, John, you will want money."

"Money! How do you know that?"

"John, my man, when I was in love I was always poor. I know how Dan Cupid picks a man's pocket. Besides, money is above the law, John, and at a pinch you might find it useful."

"I have money enough; it needs handling, that is all. There is all my property in Yorkshire."

"Give me a written authority, John, and I will act for you."

"Sam, you are a friend."

"I am a man of business, sir. I can receive and hand on rentals, can I not? And as for the present need, I always keep money in my house. Take what you want; the security is good enough."

John Gore began to thank him, but Mr. Pepys rose up from his chair and put his two hands on his friend's shoulders.

"Man John, there may be two or three souls in the wide world whom a man may love without prejudice and without disaster. The friends of a life are few, John, and we find them without forethought. Men come to me for favors, scores of them in the year; most of them are sycophants, rogues, hypocrites; I know it, and there is no deep pleasure in what I do. But there are some men, John, to whom the heart goes out in the game of life. To be a friend to a friend comes not so very often. A man who has seen life will swear to that."

XLIV

Rain was falling and the wind beating about the chimneys of Furze Farm as the daylight waned toward a gray night like a fog coming up from the sea. Barbara and Mrs. Jennifer were sitting before the kitchen fire, the girl watching the sparks fly upward, the woman's brown hands busy with thread and needle. Gusts of wind came down the chimney, making the wood-ash shimmer at red heat, even blowing flakes of fire out on to the bricks. Now and again the drippings of the rain fell on the red mass, rousing the fire to spit like an angry cat.

Chris Jennifer's wife, looking up from time to time at her "little lady," could see that Barbara was listening for something beyond the mere roar of the wind in the chimney and the swish of the beech boughs in the gathering dusk. The pupils of her eyes would grow large of a sudden, and she would lift her chin and keep her bosom from breathing, as though she heard some sound far away in the coming night. Mrs. Winnie knew well what was passing in the girl's heart. Nearly a week had gone since John Gore had ridden for London, and her thoughts were out on the wet road, wondering whether he were facing the wind and rain.

"I be thinking, my little lady"—and Mrs. Jennifer gave a tug to the gown she was making—"I be thinking that a bunch of red ribbon would look just fair for a shoulder-knot to yon scarf. My man Christopher has a liking for red in the winter, it being the color of the berries, he says, and warm and comely when there be snow about."

Barbara only woke to the sense of Mrs. Winnie's words when the good woman had come to the middle of her statement.

"Is that why they wear red stockings so much in the country, Mrs. Winnie?"

"Lor', my dear, what a fancy! If I thought that about Christopher, I'd be talking to him with a broomstick. Red stockings for a man to stare at on market-day! No, my lady, red be a warm and comfortable color, like holly berries, and that shoulder-knot would just be a touch to t' green."

Barbara listened to the wind.

"How heavy the roads must be!" she said.

"Honest mud never harmed nobody, my dear. Lord bless you, we don't think anything of mud in Sussex."

"Are the roads dangerous at night?"

"And what may you mean by dangerous, my lady?"

"Footpads and rough men."

"London way there be them kind of creatures. Puddles and ruts be our great trouble, and the mud-holes when the ways be rotten. A horse may break his leg in one of 'em; but there, God's providence be powerfuller nor mud-holes."

She went on with her stitching, watching a red slipper tapping a little restlessly on the brick curb about the hearth, as though beating out the furlongs and the miles. Dusk was falling rapidly, and though the fire was bright, Mrs. Winnie was thinking of lighting the candles when the red slipper ceased its tapping, and the figure before her remained motionless and alert.

"I can hear a horse, Mrs. Winnie."

Mrs. Jennifer listened.

"It be a loose bough of the old plum-tree clapping against the wall."

"I am sure it is a horse."

She rose up and went to the window, and leaned her elbows on the sill. Mrs. Jennifer gave a nod of the head, as though assuring herself that youth must have its way. She knew every sound in and

about the house when the wind blew from over the sea.

"I will put a candle in the window, Mrs. Winnie."

She went and took one from the shelf, lit it, and put it upon the sill. And she was returning again toward the fire when she paused and stood listening, her head held a little to one side.

"There, do you hear it?"

Mrs. Winnie stopped her stitching and listened. This time she did hear something beyond the clapping of a bough against the wall.

"Why, yes, little lady."

"Listen, there is the farm gate."

She turned quickly toward the door, opened it, and stood looking out into the dusk.

Mrs. Winnie put her work aside, gave a glance through the window, smiled to herself, and then discovered that she had business in the dairy. In the dusk she had seen a man dismounting from a horse, and her husband plodding across the yard to welcome the traveller and take his nag to the stable. Mrs. Winnie was a woman of tact. She caught son William sneaking in by the back door, and took him with her to inspect the milk-pans.

Barbara stood framed in the doorway with a warm light playing about her, and the brown wainscoting, the great beams in the ceiling, and the red bricks for a background. Yet the impulse of the moment failed in her, and a shy panic took its place, so that she went and stood before the fire and turned her head away so as not to see his coming. For there was something in the intense truth that almost made her afraid, and she might have fled away to her room but for the thought that he had seen her at the door and might not understand the whim of a woman.

She heard his footsteps on the path, and when she looked he was on the threshold, wet and travel-stained, but with eyes that were very bright. He came and took her hands, but stood a little apart because of his wet clothes, and also because there was a sense of awe between them. His eyes searched her face to see whether there were any shadow of pain or sadness thereon. And now that he was so near to her, her shyness and her confusion fled, and simple love alone had utterance.

"John, how wet you are! Come to the fire, and let me dry your coat. I had a feeling that you would come to-night."

She led him to the fire; yet though the initiative was hers, she went with his arm about her waist.

"You are looking wondrous well, Barbe!"

"Am I?" And she colored, and hid her eyes from him a moment. "I am glad, very glad, to have you back, John. I was afraid, with this rough weather, and the roads so bad, and you riding alone."

"And yet I was not alone," he said, touching her hair reverently. "I shall never be alone again, pray God."

"Yes, dear, I understand." And she put her face up for him to kiss her, her eyelids closed and the lashes shading her cheeks.

Then she made him sit down in the chair before the fire, and, fetching the rough towel that hung on one of the doors, she rubbed his coat while he sat patiently and tried not to look amused. For there was something infinitely quaint and sweet in this ministration to a man who had seen the wild world in its cups and in its quarrels. He caught the two hands and kissed them, and looked up into eyes that were full of a mysterious tremor of light.

"Do you know, child, what you bring into my mind?"

"No, John."

"All the rough, blasphemous, accursed things that a man must see in this world, whether he wills it or not. They come to me, dear, as so many black memories, and I lift up these white hands—so—and I see what is clean and what is pure."

She looked at him an instant, and then fell on her knees beside the chair and hid her face upon his shoulder.

"John, you forget; you make me ashamed when you speak thus; we women are not angels; we are quick, selfish, passionate things, though we may be unselfish when we love."

"Dear, I forget nothing of that," he said. "Do you think that I would choose to love a saint?"

"I am nothing of a saint, John."

"Thank God," said he.

John Gore told her nothing that night of her mother's death, for the evening in that great warm kitchen seemed too goodly and dear a time to be marred by evil tidings. Perhaps self had some weight, too, with him that night, for it was a delight to watch the warm blood mantling under the soft skin, the radiance of her eyes, and the way she would look at him suddenly and color. John Gore's eyes could not leave her that evening as they sat round the fire with Mrs. Winnie busy at her stitching, and Mr. Christopher smoking his pipe and trying to pretend that he was half asleep.

The eyes of the day were empty of tears on the morrow, the world full of winter sunlight, the sky all blue, the woods all purple and gray. John Gore borrowed Mr. Jennifer's nag, for his own beast needed a rest, and, saddling Barbara's horse, he took her out with him for a canter along the grass track that wound past Furze Farm and onward into the vague lands. It was a grass track that might have come down from old Celtic times, before the Romans spaced out their Itineraries, a highway that had run south of the great weald that stretched from the marshes of Portus Lemanis to the plains of Gwent.

John Gore waited till they were on the homeward road and not a mile from the farm before telling her of Anne Purcell's death. They were riding along the ridge of a hill, with Beechy Head a great blue shadow far away, and the silver bow of the sea bent against the land. Barbara rode on beside him, with the light gone suddenly from her eyes, and a shocked silence making her mute. Her mother had borne and bred her, little more; she had even been ready to sacrifice the child to save her paramour and herself; and yet Barbara felt a great pity for that poor, gay woman who would paint her cheeks no more, nor ogle herself in the glass to see how her eyes beckoned. Barbara's heart had changed greatly those months. She had a wider consciousness, more sympathy, more insight. It had become easier to pity than to hate.

John Gore saw that she was weeping the tears of compassion and of regret rather than the tears of passion. And he let her weep, pushing his horse a little ahead of hers to give her privacy, for there are times in life when every soul must meet its intimate thoughts alone.

They were within view of the farm when he heard her call to him, and her voice was very gentle, as though there were no malice and anger left in her.

"Death brings things home to the heart, John," she said, softly; "it is like a great silence that compels one to think."

He looked at her very dearly.

"My life, what can I say to you?"

"Tell me; John, that I was fierce and revengeful, and it would be the truth. Who are we that we should judge? One cannot gauge another's temptations. She may have suffered while I was blind to it."

John Gore reached for her bridle, and they rode the last furlong side by side. And compassion for the dead seemed to hallow the love in their hearts.

John Gore had said little concerning his father, save the news of the Popish Plot, and my lord's flight with many others who were concerned. He was believed to have found refuge in France, and yet at Thorn, not five miles from Furze Farm, a miserable, maimed thing dragged itself to and fro like an animal that has been crushed in the jaws of a steel trap.

A long splint, sand-bags, and six weeks in bed—such should have been Stephen Gore's portion; but when a man with a broken thigh is alone in a ruin he must either crawl or starve by inches. Destiny had hipped him, and Necessity had him at her mercy. It was with labor and a sweat of anguish that he went like a worm upon his belly, for the belly hungered and tortured him with thirst, and the worm still wriggled with a blind instinct toward life.

December was cold and raw at Thorn, but there was no fire, and the man lay on the stone floor with nothing under him but the cover and the padding that he had torn from the couch. There was no drink either in the kitchen of Thorn, and the quenching of his thirst became an ordeal that made his flesh quiver. Once a day a miserable, unwashed figure would go crawling across the court-yard to where the pump stood in a corner. The face of the thing that crawled resembled the face of a swimmer who feels a limb seized by the jaws of a shark. Slowly, with infinite carefulness, and a tremor of the whole body, he would prop himself against the wall, reach for the pump-handle, and trickle the water into the leather bottle that he had dragged after him by a strip of linen. Then he would crawl back again, agonized, cursing the pain of those grinding splinters as the leg came over the stones, the toe catching in the grass and weeds. Sometimes the water in the bottle would last him more than one day, for he husbanded it like a miser, knowing that each drop meant the sweat of his very blood. The food was an easier matter, for he had only to drag himself to the hole in the floor. But from the cold there was no escape. It froze into heart and marrow at midnight, keeping sleep from him, even making him weep like an idiot child.

What a change, too, on the surface of things! Hands grimed, nails black, a stubble of gray hair over the jowl, holes in the cloth over knees and elbows, the dirt of the court-yard upon his linen. A squalor about his bed on the stones such as is found in foul jails.

Even the lust for life, such life, would flicker out in him at times, and he would take his sword as he lay with the broken bone galling him like hot grit in the flesh, and run his fingers along the blade, and look at it, and consider. More than once he bared his breast and set the point of the sword over his heart, feeling for a gap between the ribs so that the steel should make no error. But the cold pricking of the point against the skin seemed to frighten even the despair and weariness in him, and he would lay the sword aside, cover his chest again, and stare at the beams in the ceiling. He had the blind lust to live, but not the blind courage to die. For even life in its most squalid misery may seem better, kinder than the black, unfathomable unknown.

XLV

Though all the gay stuffs, the reds and the greens and the rich brocades, were put aside for a season, and though Barbara wore a plain black gown that Mrs. Winnie bought of Mr. Bannister at Battle, they made ready for Christmas at Furze Farm in country fashion, with a great abundance of food and liquor, with a yule-log the size of a tub, and holly boughs gathered out of the woods. Mrs. Winnie would have quieted the day out of courtesy to her "little lady," but Barbara would have none of their pleasure spoiled because she wore a black gown for her mother. To cheat the living of their good cheer would not comfort the sleeping dead, and the very kitchen seemed warming itself for the wassail-bowl, and the beef and the pies, and the women with their ribbons.

Now, Barbara had no money and a great deal of pride despite her love, so that John Gore, who knew how matters stood with her, had to resort to a lover's stratagem to fill her purse. He told her a solemn tale of how the lord chancellor managed the affairs of the nation, and how she was her father's heiress, though the estates were in the lawyers' hands till the time came for her to step forward and prove herself a very comely young woman without a mad whim in her head, save that whim of loving a sailor. He also related that a very good friend of his had certain matters in hand, and was likely to receive on her behalf certain moneys that had been found in the house in Pall Mall. That money might come to her any day by private messenger, and so it did, though delivered to John Gore, and greatly to the girl's secret delight, for she knew nothing of law, and, believing the lover's invention, guessed not that the money was his.

Yet here John Gore wellnigh landed himself in a dilemma. She began to plead that she owed him money for all the things he had bought at Battle, nor could he silence her for a long while, and then only by pretending to be a little hurt. Whereat she dropped the money as though it had burned her, and went to him and asked his pardon.

The gold pieces had rolled hither and thither over the kitchen floor, and they gathered them and counted them into little piles. Barbara's eyes had begun to dance with a multitude of generous desires, and she was already planning how to spend it.

"I must go a-shopping, John," she said, "for Christmas. If we could only borrow Mr. Jennifer's wagon."

"A wagon, sweetheart! Do you want to empty all the shops in the town?"

"No, dear; but I feel that I cannot give enough to these good people here. It has been a home, and a very dear home, John; I shall not forget it to the day of my death."

Now, John Gore talked privately to Mr. Jennifer, and Mr. Jennifer took counsel privately of his wife, and the result of all this talking was that Christopher prepared for a day's jaunt into the county town of Lewes. He cleaned up his wagon, put straw and bracken in the bottom thereof, tied his horses' manes with ribbons, and put out his Sabbath best. One of his men and his wife came into Furze Farm for the day, while the household went a-wagoning to Lewes, starting two hours before dawn because the roads were heavy and the days short. Barbara, Mrs. Winnie, and son William rode in the wagon, and John Gore on his horse, while sturdy Kit marched beside his cattle, his whip over his shoulder, and a sprig of holly in his hat.

Barbara had a radiant face and but little money left by noon that day in Lewes, for even if the heart has cause for sadness there is joy in giving others joy. She seemed incarnate womanhood that Christmas-tide, taking a delight in all the little mysteries and mummeries of the season and in the revels that were held. John Gore had bought all manner of merchandise: a new gun for Mr. Christopher; a great family Bible for the wife; toys, sweetmeats, and oranges for son William and the laborers' children; a beautiful chain of amethysts for his love. There was much giving and receiving that Christmas-tide at Furze Farm. The three laborers came with their wives and youngsters to the state dinner in the kitchen. Mr. Jennifer brewed punch, got a flushed face, and talked more than he had talked for a whole year. Little Will nearly fell into the fire while roasting chestnuts. John Gore played with the Sussex children till Mrs. Winnie exclaimed at "the gentleman's good-nature." Pipes were smoked in the ingle-nooks. The three countrywomen tried their best manners, and stared hard yet kindly at "the lady" about whom there was a mystery that had set their tongues a-clacking. Yet a woman who is sweet to other women's children wins a way into the hearts of mothers. "A gracious lady, surely," they whispered to one another, and thought the better of her because she touched their children's lips. And when ribbons and blankets and good woollen stuffs came to them from her hands, they may have regretted the disobedience of Mrs. Winnie's orders as to the minding of their own business, for Mrs. Jennifer had forbidden them to gossip about the "quality biding at Furze Farm." Yet gossip had gone abroad, for all Mrs. Winnie's caution, and even the lazy parson knew that there were strangers in his parish.

With Christmas fare and festivity questions of the past, and St. Stephen claiming his day in the calendar, Mr. Jennifer had his cart-horses out for a gallop to sweat them well before the yearly bleeding, for it was the custom to give horses a warming and then to bleed them on St. Stephen's day. Whether John Gore subscribed to the superstition or not, he saddled his own beast early and went out alone for a canter, having the Christmas dinner upon his conscience, and, what was more, a certain hankering to visit Thorn. For several weeks he had intended riding over to the place, but Barbara had been nearly always with him, and they had taken happier and less sinister paths. He desired to see whether there were signs of folk having been there since that November night when the horseman whom he had taken for Captain Grylls had ridden back to inquire after his lost packet.

It was a still and rather misty morning with moisture dropping from the trees, and the grass wet and boggy. The fog did not hinder him greatly, for he had learned to pick up his landmarks at every furlong, and the track was familiar and simple when once known. About ten of the clock he came into the valley of thorns, and saw the dim mass of the tower glooming amid the mist. The place seemed infinitely melancholy with the fog about it, and the dripping thorn-trees and the black, stagnant water that showed never a ripple. The very ivy looked wet and sodden with the raw vapor of that December day.

John Gore tethered his horse to one of the thorn-trees, and, finding the gate open, much as he had left it, he crossed the court-yard where the mist hung in the air like breath upon a mirror. He saw that the dog was gone, but, what was more, the kennel also, and this slight detail puzzled him a little and made him more cautious in his exploring. Going to the kitchen entry and finding the door ajar, he stood there and listened. The moisture was pattering down from the ivy leaves all about the house, yet from the kitchen came a sound that could not be easily mistaken—the regular, heavy breathing of a man in a deep sleep.

John Gore saw that his sword was loose in its sheath, and, pushing the door open cautiously, he passed on into the kitchen. The figure of a man lay upon the floor with nothing between him and the stones but what appeared to be a tatter of rags. A sword, a leather bottle, and two mouldy biscuits lay beside him. His head was thrown back and his throat showing, with the stubble of a beard making the jaw look gray and slovenly.

John Gore crossed the room softly, and recognized in that ragged, haggard thing my Lord Gore—his father.

It was well past noon when John Gore mounted his horse again, and rode away from the mist and shadows of Thorn, with the look of a man who had spoken, even as Dante spoke, with some soul in the deeps of hell. He was thinking of an old, yellow-faced man, maimed, dirty, servile, with clothes worn into holes, and an intelligence that had flapped between emotional contrition and paroxysms of selfish fear. This thing had been the mighty man of manners, the serene gentleman of Whitehall and St. James's, whose body had smelled of ambergris and whose fine raiment had shamed the sheen of tropical birds. Pride, vanity, even self-honor, in the dust and dirt! A white, flaccid, furtive

face that had lost all its buxom boldness, most of its intellect—almost its very reason.

What had they said to each other, those two?

Murderer and adulterer; lover and son.

Yet John Gore had filled the leather bottle for his father that morning, lit a fire with odd wood gathered from the rotting out-houses, and brought in an armful of musty straw to soften the sick man's bed.

And my lord had wept—miserable, senile tears that had no dignity and no true passion. He had fawned on the man, his son, grovelled to him without shame, till the son's manhood had revolted in him, for he would have welcomed savagery and cursing rather than moral slime. It had been like a polluted river bringing all manner of drift to the lip of a weir. And though he had ministered to his father, he had kept an implacable face and a firm mouth. He had acted as a man who knew everything, and chosen to let my lord realize that he knew it, even assuming the truth that Barbara was dead.

XLVI

John Gore rode for Furze Farm with many turbulent thoughts at work in him, and the raw mist that thickened from over the sea making the wet woods no more comforting than the degradation he had found at Thorn. He had been fierce at first with the man whom he called father, till my lord's squalid ignominy had become apparent to him, and he had realized that he was dealing with a creature and not a man. For there had been no sense of strength opposed to him, no pride, no will, not even savage passion, nothing to struggle with, nothing to overcome with shame. My lord was dead in the better sense. Those weeks in Thorn had starved and frozen the soul out of him, and he had become half a savage, yet a timid, fawning savage whose consciousness was bounded by elemental things. At first there had been nothing but abhorrence and disgust for John Gore. This cringing thing with the face of an imbecile, embracing his own son's knees, lying amid his own offal! What could a man say to this shadow of a self? Where lay the promise of judgment or of appeal? Good God! He could remember the time when he had stood in some awe of this same man because of his fine presence and his habit of command.

Yet as John Gore rode through the white mist the impressions and instincts of the morning began to sift themselves and to piece up a broader, saner picture. Incidents, acts, details started forward or receded into clearer, truer perspective. The offensive flavor of the thing began to prejudice him less. He tried to see the whole untarnished truth with the sincerity of a man who is not content with mere impressions.

Perhaps what he saw was this: a man bred in luxury, a bon-vivant, a lover of pleasure, thrown down, broken into a species of dark pit where the mere physical miseries of existence would bring him near to death in body and mind. Pain, sleeplessness, cold, hunger, are grim inquisitors fit to break a man on the rack and tear the very senses from him. John Gore had looked into the hole where his father had kept his food, and had seen meat going putrid and biscuits covered with mould. He remembered, too, very vividly an incident in the Indies when he and his ship's company had found a man who had been marooned on an island that was little better than a reef. The man was a Norman, and his sojourn there had been but a matter of days. Yet he was skull-faced, parched, abject, and as mad as an idiot child. He had run from them, screaming, when they landed, though his legs had given under him before he had gone fifty yards. And he had died on board John Gore's ship, and they had buried him at sea, and often afterward at night the sea-captain had fancied that he still heard the man's wild cry: "J'ai soif, mon Dieu! mon Dieu, j'ai soif!"

Now Stephen Gore had been a proud man, and a man of sentiment after his own ideals. He had had other things to torture and humiliate him besides anguish in the flesh. Proportionately as a man's physical strength wanes, so the menace of spiritual suffering grows the more quick and poignant. This man had spilled blood and betrayed friends. A well-fed cynic might have put such things under his feet and trampled them. It would be otherwise with a half-starved, memory-haunted, isolated being shivering the nights through, listening and ever listening, while the solitude hung like an eternal silence, and the slightest movement of the body set bone grating against bone. Who could shrug his shoulders through such an ordeal and come forth smiling with an epigram? Would not the very intellect curse itself and die by its own hand? Innocent blood; the betrayal of honor and of friends; lies, inevitable self-salvation. These thoughts would grip such a man, throttle him, spit at his very soul. They would not be conjured or persuaded. They would be awake with him through the winter nights; scoff when some spasm of pain made him curse and set his teeth; watch him with cold eyes when the light of the dawn came in. The same miserable dragging of the days, the same miserable passion-play of the crucified soul. Where would a man's manhood be at the end of such a chastisement?

The glow of the winter fires reddened the windows of Furze Farm as the shadow of the house loomed up through the mist. The orchard hedge was dripping with dew, the grass gray and sodden, the beech-trees like phantom trees, the coming of the dusk mournful and full of a heavy silence. Yet the windows of the house, with their lozenged latticing outlined by the fire, sent John Gore's thoughts back with a sudden shiver of pity to dreary, ruinous, fog-choked Thorn. He dismounted heavily, and leading his horse to the stable left him to Mr. Jennifer, who was sitting astride a rough bench mending harness by the light of a candle.

In the kitchen Barbara came out to welcome him, with just the faintest glimmer of shyness that made her love the more desirable. Mrs. Winnie was above, turning out her linen cupboard, little Will in the wood-lodge cutting firewood with the hand-bill—a thing he had been solemnly forbidden to do. Barbara and John had both kitchen and parlor to themselves. No candles had been lit in the house as yet, but the burning logs threw a rich light upon the wainscoting.

"You have had a long ride, John."

He hung his cloak on a chair and took her hands, her pale face with its new ripeness of color seeming to bring to him freshness and perfume after these abhorrent hours at Thorn. Yet his heart was stern and troubled in him because of the man, his father; nor could even his love's eyes flash a complete smile into his.

"They will be pleased with this fog at sea," he said. "I can fancy that I hear the bells ringing. What have you been doing all day, little woman?"

She looked at him with questioning intentness. Rarely can a man hide care from the world—very rarely, indeed, from the eyes of the woman who loves him.

"Mrs. Winnie has been teaching me to make button-holes, John. Will and I went out after dinner, and were nearly lost in the fog. You look tired."

He had dropped her hands, but he caught them again with the impulsive frankness of a man who knows himself to be but a poor dissembler.

"I am tired, Barbe—heart-tired; I cannot pretend that I am not."

"John!"

Her voice had a touch of appeal in it.

"This morning I went out innocently enough, child; but I have returned with more than I foreshadowed."

"Where have you been, John?"

"To Thorn."

"Thorn!"

"Yes."

She hung back a little from him, reading the forethought and trouble in his eyes, and the tired yet generous calm of a man thinking of others rather than himself.

"You are troubled, John. Tell me."

He looked down at her reflectively, and his eyes seemed to say: "Shall I or shall I not?" Womanwise, she appeared to understand.

"You are afraid for my sake, John."

"A little."

"Is it because you cannot trust me?"

Her eyes held his, and for once it was as though she had the greater power of will.

"No. Because I wish worry and care away."

"John, do you think I shall leave all the burden of life to your shoulders? Are we so little to each other? Am I so selfish?"

She felt his hands tighten on hers.

"Barbe, I have found my father."

"At Thorn?"

"Yes."

She shuddered slightly, despite herself, and he saw her eyes darken.

"John, did you speak to him?"

"Without mercy."

"Does he know?"

"He thinks you dead."

"Why is he at Thorn?"

"Hiding from the law because of this Plot; hiding from us, a miserable wreck of a man, half starved, almost mad."

She saw his face grow haggard and stern, the lines deepening about the mouth, his eyes staring fixedly at the fire, as though he were looking upon a thing that revolted him. The instinct in her was one of a strong, pure passion to be of use. He had feared for her courage, perhaps for her magnanimity. Yet it was she who took the torch that evening, and carried it so that the darkness seemed less dark.

"John, my heart, tell me everything."

She drew him by the hands into the inner room, and shut the world out, save that world at Thorn. He looked down at her, as though wondering at the will in her, and feeling a strength and courage near him that might have the power of turning destiny into providence. She was calm yet infinitely vital, and her face had a radiance that drove scorn and bitterness and malice into the dark. He beheld a transfiguration—love bending toward love, beautiful with the beauty of sacrifice, pity, and desire.

"John, do you fear for me?"

He opened his arms, but paused with a sudden awe of her, and, bowing himself, touched her hands.

"No, not now."

"Then tell me everything."

And he told her, sitting in the firelight, with his hands clasped upon his knees.

Silence held them awhile in thrall. Barbara was leaning against the jamb of the chimney, one hand laid along her cheek, her eyes full of the past. It was as though some sharp struggle were passing within her, and for a moment her eyes had a glitter of anger. But the gleam passed from them, and her mouth softened.

She looked down at the man with a mystery of a smile—a smile with no mirth in it, but full of sadness, yearning, and self-reproach.

"John."

He started, almost as though he had forgotten her.

"Do you love your father?"

The question seemed to stagger him; he frowned at the fire.

"Love that!"

She rested her head upon her arm; his scorn had made the heart leap in her.

"I did, John, my father. And then—What misery! What greater shame!"

"But you—"

"John—John, what must it be to lose everything, even the love of one's own son? That touches me, even to the heart. Is it not strange that I should feel that, even more than you?"

He looked at her questioningly, mutely. She had not seen what he had seen—cowardice, squalor, bestial fawning that was infamous in a man. And yet her words woke a depth of feeling in him, something finer and more delicate than his man's nature had fashioned of itself.

He opened his mouth to tell her more of the gross truth, but some impulse rebuked him. He waited instinctively for her.

Barbara had raised her head. For a moment she stared at the fire and then turned to him with a look he would never forget.

"John, it may help you if I tell you what is in my heart."

"Child!"

"It is this, John: I can forgive—yes, I can forgive."

He looked at her wonderingly, and then sprang up, opening his arms. She went to him with a low, inarticulate cry, and let him hold her to him, while a great tremor passed through her, as though the old self were vanishing with a last spasm of pain and bitterness.

"Barbe, you can forgive!"

"Yes."

"But it is for my sake?"

She raised her head, and her eyes were full of tears.

"Yes—partly; you have changed me; and yet—it is of my own will."

He bent, and kissed her lips.

"Child, you make me ashamed. It is you that shall teach me. God keep you!"

XLVII

For three weeks John Gore rode almost daily to Thorn, starting out from Furze Farm toward dusk, sometimes spending the night at the ruin and riding back with the breaking of the day. He took over food with him, blankets, clean linen, and a keg of spirits, carrying something on each journey, yet keeping the whole matter as secret as he might. Mrs. Winnie and her man had to be enlightened in some measure, and they were folk who could be trusted when once their love had been won; for Sussex folk are often slow and surly in their likings, but they make good friends when once they have forgiven the strangeness of an unfamiliar face.

Nothing had ever gone more grimly against John Gore's nature than those first days of ministrations to the refugee at Thorn. It was a question of will and effort, an ordeal of self-compulsion, lightened by a vague glimmer of magnanimity that Barbara's renunciation had inspired; for John Gore had closed heart and hand against his father with the determined passion of a man whose nature was strong and combative, and none too gentle where infamy was concerned. The romantic rush of the past months was still with him. It was not easily hindered or turned aside into a sordid, shallow channel. Even in the flush of fighting, a man may throw down his sword and hold out a generous hand to a beaten enemy whose gallantry had touched his manhood. But the refugee at Thorn had roused no generous impulses as yet. Courage respects courage, even in a rogue; my lord seemed half an imbecile, half a coward. None of the finer manliness seemed left in him: he was servile, unclean, furtive, suspicious as an animal, lacking in all the grace of the nobler feelings. It was as though the perfumes and the colors of that complex flower, "the gentleman of fashion," had evaporated and decayed, leaving the raw and naked self stripped in its ugliness to the last husk.

John Gore had made a rough splint and bound his father's leg to it, and contrived a bed with straw and blankets that should keep him from sores and from the cold. A spark of my lord's easy cynicism had flashed out momentarily in the midst of his degradation.

"Mending a leg to break a neck, John; you are Puritan enough for that."

But it was a flash in the pan. Even the polite insolence seemed dead in him. He had caught his son's arm and clung to it pleadingly.

"Think better of me, John. I came here to save the girl: I swear that, before God."

And then he would show great cunning behind the chatterings of dismay, trying to worm from his son all that he knew, and also how he had come to know it. But John Gore kept a shut mouth and the face of a flint, the heart hard and contemptuous within him when he remembered the look in Barbara's eyes when she had spoken these words: "I can forgive." Surely there was no soul here worth forgiving. Better dead. That was the grim judgment his heart uttered.

Such was the first week at Thorn, with the dark rides to and fro along the woodland roads, the mournfulness and dolor of the winter landscape, love by the fireside, retribution amid ruins. Sometimes Barbara would walk out a little way toward Thorn in the hope of meeting John Gore upon the homeward ride. She could not but mark the bitterness in him, a certain questioning look about the eyes that seemed to gaze toward some inevitable end. The riddle would have been baffling enough even if his heart had been in the solving of it. Granted that the past were given to oblivion, his father was a proscribed man; there was some risk even in shielding him; any day he might be discovered and taken.

Nor could he tell Barbara all that he saw at Thorn. It was too sordid, too contemptible; and yet his very reticence led her to understand. Perhaps she had more sympathy, more vision than John Gore that winter. She knew what Thorn could be even to one without guilt, without physical pain, without an eternal dread, and with some one to bring food. This man had gone down into the deeps

of misery and degradation. He had been starved and broken. That was her thought.

Once she asked John Gore to let her see him, but he shook his head and would not hear of it.

"He thinks that I am dead, John," she said.

"Then let him think it. God! Are we to make the thing so easy?"

"John! John!"

His fierceness hurt her a little, seeming to wake a clash of discords in her, as though the brazen gates of that closed tragedy were jarring wide again.

"John, don't speak like that, dear."

His tenderness shone through the anger in him.

"Barbe, you may forget; I cannot. When I touch your hand, when I see the life in you, I remember."

The memory of that night came back, and she shuddered: the dark room, those throttling hands, the violence and horror in the dark. She looked at her lover and understood.

"It is hard for you," she said, very gently.

For to John Gore at that time it was like pampering a man who had sought to betray the honor of his wife.

The old year had gone; the new was in with white hoar-frost on the grass and the boughs each dawn, and a silvery smoke of mist melting into clear blue mornings. January went plodding on—a heavy, toothless, torpid month, despite the frost and the shimmer of sunlight; for January has little of the likeness of a child; rather it appears as a gray old man laboring in the dusk and the mists of the morning at some task that no man sees. It is a month when gnomes work below the ground, laboring for the mystery of beauty that is to be, touching the hidden seed with fire, breathing into brown roots the colors of the flowers that shall come hereafter.

With January, Stephen Gore's life seemed to sink to the lowest level of lethargy. Torpor fell upon him till he was like a frost-nipped plant with the sap congealed, the leaves shrivelled and gray. He would sleep for hours, and even when awake lie staring at the beams in the ceiling above him, his face blank and without intelligence. He hardly ever spoke. Even the fever of fear left him. He asked for nothing, not even food. John Gore thought that my lord was dying, and even picked out a place in the garden where he would bring him when he was dead.

Yet it was not death with Stephen Gore, but a stupor that nature had brought upon him even as the winter fields lie inert and frost-crumbled under the sky. Fresh food and the warmth of the bed had a narcotic effect upon the man. The half-starved body seized greedily upon everything and bade the mere mind sleep, and so the mind slept on for many days, as though helping forward the old adage—"*Mens sana in corpore sano.*" For the body is but the stem of the tree of the senses, and the sick body is often the cause of the sick mind.

Toward the last week in January John Gore saw a slow and subtle change in his father, a change that came like the first thrusting of growth through the winter soil. The flabbiness melted out of the man's face; his eyes grew brighter and full of the intelligence of inward life. He was still very silent, but it was the silence of growth, not the silence of paralysis. John Gore would find his father watching him, not with the old, furtive, cringing look, but with a kind of sadness, a mute perplexity that betrayed the mind working behind the eyes. More than once he had made tentative little attempts to show gratitude, always watching his son's face as though conscious of its imperturbable sternness. His son's face began to be a dial of destiny to him. He could read the truth about himself in the younger man's grave eyes.

It became evident that Stephen Gore's manhood and his self-respect were returning to him slowly as he lay in the kitchen of Thorn. What his thoughts were John Gore could only guess, though he was struck by the change in his father, the indefinable refining and strengthening of the outer and inner man, as though my lord had ceased to be the animal, and had come again to the cognizance of higher things. They seldom spoke to each other, these two, nor did they venture beyond the trivial needs or happenings of the day. Both were conscious of the imminent and dark shadow, and faltered before it, sheltering behind reticence and procrastination. Yet John Gore would see a certain look come into his father's eyes, as though the man were dumb and were striving to speak.

And the first breaking of the superficial surface of reserve was caused by nothing more dramatic than a beard. My lord's self-respect seemed intimately married to bodily cleanliness and perfection in dress. Silks and brocades and perfumes were beyond him; perhaps he would not have asked for them even if they had been at hand. But it was with a gleam of his old wit that he desired most humbly to be barbered, and to be deprived of the hair that had grown at Thorn.

John Gore accepted the incident without a smile, brought a razor with him next day, and dutifully shaved my lord's upper lip and chin. He had done his barbering in silence, with the air of a man who had no care beyond the dexterity of his fingers, when my lord laid a hand on his son's shoulder.

"You would like to cut my throat, John. Cut it."

They looked at each other squarely in the eyes. Stephen Gore was the first to glance away.

"Nor should I blame you, my son."

And that was all that passed between them over the shaving of my lord's chin.

John Gore told Barbara of the change in Stephen Gore, and she listened with a faint smile hovering about her mouth, as though her intuition gave her some vision of the future.

"Be gentle with him, John," she said. "I have heard it said that pottery is brittle when it first comes from the furnace."

"Then you think the clay has been recast, child?"

"Why should it not be so!"

And he could only marvel at the change in her.

So the month went, and my lord's "grand air" began to flutter out feebly like a faded butterfly on a sunny day in spring. Yet there was a certain humility about him that made John Gore reflect, for his father was very patient now, strangely so for one who had sworn at lackeys. Often the son would

catch a troubled shadow darkening the father's face. He would drop his eyes when they met John Gore's, yet he watched his son almost hungrily when the son's back was turned.

It was a day early in February, and John Gore sat on Simon Pinniger's three-legged stool before the fire, and cleaned his pistols that grew foul quickly in the damp winter air. His father had been asleep, and the son believed him still sleeping as he polished the barrels and scoured the powder-pans.

He heard a slight movement behind him, and, turning sharply, found my lord awake and watching him with thoughtful eyes. Both men colored slightly. John Gore turned again, and went on with his work.

Then he heard his father speak.

"John, how long have I been here?"

The son considered.

"Three months—or so," he answered.

My lord sighed.

"This leg of mine is mending."

The son said nothing.

"I am wondering whether it is worth the mending. A man must die some day; though it is better that he should die like a man, not like a dog."

There was a minute's silence. John Gore could hear his father's breathing, but he went on doggedly with the cleaning of his pistols.

"John."

My lord spoke softly, almost pleadingly.

"Yes."

"Will you answer me a few questions?"

"Ask them."

Again there was a short pause.

"Have you any news from Westminster?"

"What news?"

"The Catholics, my friends—the rest."

John Gore laid one pistol down and took up the other.

"Coleman is dead," he said, curtly.

"Coleman! How?"

"The scaffold."

He heard his father mutter indistinctly, and the words sounded like the words of a Latin prayer.

"And the rest?"

"Some with Coleman, some in the Tower and the jails, some scattered. London has been calling for blood."

My lord lay very still. Then he turned slightly, and his eyes were on his son.

"And in Pall Mall?"

"My Lady Purcell?"

"Yes."

"She died three months ago."

There was another and a longer pause.

"John." And he spoke with effort.

"Yes."

"Why did you save me from dying?"

The son frowned at the fire.

"I do not know," he said, at last.

"John, you were always honest. Yet—God help me—with the irony of the truth."

Stephen Gore asked no more questions, but lay staring at the beams above him, his mouth twitching, his eyes glazed with a film of thought. He seemed to forget the presence of his son. The great dim world of the past, and the vast "beyond" that holds the past world in its shadows, engrossed the life in him, and he made no sound.

As for John Gore, his heart was full of a conflict of strong emotions. Nor was his mouth so straight and stern when he turned and glanced at his father over his shoulder. Yet what he beheld moved him more deeply than any words my lord had spoken. For Stephen Gore's eyes were wet and blurred, and there was the glisten of tears upon his face.

John Gore rose suddenly from before the fire, and, taking his pistols with him, went out without a word. He was half angry and half ashamed, for though pity had welled up like blood into his mouth, a rough and scolding bitterness pointed to the meaner motives of mankind, and the leer of a possible hypocrisy hardened his heart.

He rode home toward Furze Farm, meeting a strong west wind that made the sky move fast and the ash boughs clash in the thickets. And in the woods north of the farm Barbara met him, where a number of old hollies threw up a wall of dense, green gloom.

He dismounted, and kissed her with some of the brusqueness of a man whose eyes seem too shallow, and whose heart is too near his lips. She let the strangeness in him pass, and they walked on side by side, the horse following at their heels. John Gore looked at the grass road before him, Barbara at the sky. And for nearly half a furlong they walked on thus in silence.

"John, you two have spoken."

He glanced at her sharply, as though wondering how she knew.

"Yes."

"What did he say to you?"

"Questions. He asked questions."

"About—"

"His friends; about your mother."

"What did you tell him, John?"

"I told him the truth."

"Yes; and then—"

"What could I say to the man? Curse him, he wept!"

She paused a moment, taking her lover's arm, and holding him back a little as though about to speak. The impulse changed, however, and she walked on again with a light of infinite wisdom in her eyes. For a man's nature is a proud and contrary thing. She felt what was passing in John Gore's heart, and she was too tender and too prudent to drag it roughly into the light of day.

XLVIII

My lord took his first walk in the kitchen of Thorn leaning upon John Gore's shoulder, the son's arm about the father's body. Any one who had seen the pair would have judged them to have been the best of friends, for the son steadied the father's steps with the grave, patient air of one whose care was almost a devotion. And the father, who had the look of a man who had aged very rapidly, what with the white in his hair and the deep lines upon his face, seemed to lean upon the son with a sense of confidence and trust. He was wearing a new suit of plain black cloth, with a white scarf about his throat. Some of his little gestures and tricks of expression came to him as in the old days, save that they were less emphatic and less characteristic of the aggressive self.

At the third turn Stephen Gore looked at the window that was lit by the March sunlight, and a sudden wistfulness swept into his eyes, as though he were touched by pathetic memories. He paused, leaning his weight upon his son, for he was feeble and easily out of breath after those weeks upon his back.

"I should like to go into the open air, John, and sit in the sun."

John Gore looked at him doubtfully.

"You are safer here," he said.

My lord gave a shake of the head.

"Are you cautious for my sake, my son? John—John, you do not understand me yet."

There seemed a new atmosphere of sympathy enveloping them, for John Gore answered his father very gently.

"It shall be as you wish."

"Then put your arm under my shoulders, John—so. What a strong fellow you are! I can just toddle like a dot of two."

They went out into the court-yard, Stephen Gore's right leg dragging stiffly. He would walk with a limp for the rest of his life, since the limb that had been broken had been shortened by three inches in the mending. The son carried Simon Pinniger's three-legged stool in his left hand. They crossed the court-yard very slowly, and passed through a doorway into the wilderness of the garden. The green of the spring was thrusting through a thousand buds; there was the thrill of growth in the air, and the birds were singing.

Close on the sunny side of a ragged box-tree that was half netted in brambles a clump of Lent-lilies stood in bloom, swinging their golden heads over the weeds and grass. There seemed the beauty of symbolism about these flowers. The sunlight appeared to centre upon them, and to burnish their golden heads with the warmth of the March day.

My lord's glance settled on the flowers. He paused before them with a sudden curious smile.

"Set the stool here, John."

And he sat down there, with the clump of daffodils at his feet.

John Gore left him there awhile, and strolled on along the rank walks where primroses glimmered from lush green glooms, and gilliflowers were beginning to scent the air from the crumbling tops of the old brick walls. The softness and the glamour of spring seemed everywhere. There was no wind, hardly a cloud—nothing but the warm shimmer of the sunlight.

Father and son had come closer to each other those last days, not through any sentimental outburst of the emotions, but because the father had become once more a man, and a man whom it was even possible to respect. "Mea culpa," he had said, and the dignity of a simple acceptance of guilt had given him a new impressiveness. It had been difficult, at first, for John Gore to accept his father's humility as a thing born of the heart and the spirit. There was ever the sneer of possible "play-acting" penitence, the tawdry sentimental epilogue spoken with a hypocritical leer and a thought of the nearest brothel. John Gore had distrusted his father, and had watched keenly for the old self to betray itself. Yet he had still continued to behold a quiet, patient, and sorrowful old man who seemed grateful for small services, and who looked at him with watchful and troubled eyes. John Gore distrusted any religious display in such a man as my lord. And yet he came to understand by degrees all that was passing in his father's heart.

He returned presently to where the elder man was seated, and found him in an attitude of saddened thought. Stephen Gore looked up as his son joined him, and then turned his head away so that his eyes were on the tower of Thorn. The place itself must of necessity force the full meaning of the past upon him. The stones spoke; the very silence of the place had a message of its own. For my lord still believed Anne Purcell's child to be dead, and that thought had survived to haunt him above all others.

"John."

"Yes."

"I have something to say to you as between man and man."

The son stood back, and leaned against the trunk of an apple-tree.

"You have given me the chance, John, to judge myself, and to discover the truth with my own eyes. Let us have no parson's talk—no snivelling. As a man of the world I fought for myself, and

pushed others out of the path. I blundered immortally over my selfishness, John, and they ought to hang me for a fool."

He still looked toward the tower, and John Gore guessed whither his thoughts tended.

"That was the damndest thing the self in me ever rushed on, my son. And yet I tried to alter it at the last—perhaps for my own sake, perhaps for the mother's. She was dying then—I have told you that; perhaps that was why I repented. The heart of a man is a strange, elusive, treacherous thing, even to its owner, John. Sometimes we can hardly decide why we do the things we do."

He sat in silence awhile, with his head bowed down.

"You must have hated me, my son; if you had spat upon me, I should hardly have questioned it. Words are not life: I cannot give you back that which I destroyed. And there is where bitterness grips the heart in a man when he sees what manner of ruin he has made. What are regrets, despair, protestations? Air—mere air in the brain! When once a man has fallen into the slough, John, his struggles seem only to carry him deeper. He may even drag others below the surface or splash foul mud onto innocent faces. But the awe and the bitterness are in the knowledge, John, of our own utter, miserable impotence. Things cannot be wiped out. They last and endure against us till the crack of doom."

He stared at the grass and knitted his hands together.

"I had thought of giving myself up, my son, and telling the whole truth. But that—that cannot help the dead. And somehow I have come to shudder at the thought of throwing shame into the grave of the one woman who really loved me. And, John, I shall suffer more by living than by dying. Fools do not always realize that in this world. They tie a man to a rope, and think that they are even with him for his sins. They would often get the greater vengeance on him if they only let him live."

He paused, staring straight before him, his shoulders bent.

"Weeks ago, John, I remember, as in a dream, that I lived in a mad horror of death. That has passed, I know not quite how. But I leave the judgment in your hands, my son. Do with me what you please."

He seemed to grow very weary of a sudden, for his strength was but the strength of a sick man, and the grim truths of life seemed heavy on him. His son went to him, and, putting an arm about his father's body, helped him to his feet, and led him back to the bed in the kitchen.

"I am not your judge, father," he said, very gently; "there is another one who should judge, and from whom forgiveness may have come."

He was thinking of Barbara, but my lord thought that he spoke of God.

The meadows about Furze Farm were full of the bleating of lambs those days, and the youngsters skipped and butted one another, galloping to and fro on their ridiculous legs, while the stupid old dames baaed, each to its own child. There had been one sick lamb that Christopher Jennifer had brought home in his arms, and the little beast had been laid upon hay in a basket beside the fire. There were also two cade-lambs in a pen in the orchard, and Barbara, who had many hours to herself now that John Gore rode almost daily to Thorn, had asked Mrs. Winnie to let her have the tending of the two motherless ones, also the feeding of the early chicks and the gathering of the eggs. The whole life at the farm was fresh and quaint to her, and brisk life it was those spring days—a cackling, bleating, lowing life, with the thrushes singing in the beech-trees and the blackbirds in the hedgerows. The bloom on the apple and pear trees in the orchard would soon be pink and white, and there were daffodils nodding their heads at Furze Farm as well as in the wilderness of Thorn.

The evening after Stephen Gore's confession at Thorn, John Gore took his love away over the uplands where the furze was all a glitter of gold, with the green slopes of the hills and the brown ploughlands making a foreground to the distant sea. They desired to be alone that evening, to feel the spirit of spring in them, and to watch the sun go down and the twilight creep into the valleys. Their happiness was the greater because others were not forgotten in the romance of their two selves. Moreover, the glamour of the morrow had the delight of a plot in it. Mrs. Winnie alone was suffered to taste the spice in the secret, though the duty fell to her of sending out for clean rushes, taking down the rosemary and bay from the beams in the pantry, and gathering flowers to spread upon the coverlet of the bed.

She smiled to herself very pleasantly when John Gore and the "little lady" rode out early next morning as though for nothing more solemn than a morning's canter. She knew that the gentleman had smoked a pipe in the parson's parlor more than a month ago, and Mrs. Winnie was quite wise as to what was in the wind. There was to be no stir made, and Chris Jennifer's wife rather approved of being the solitary holder of such a secret. Her attitude was quite motherly. She spent the morning sweeping Barbara's room, and strewing rushes and flowers about it, and putting posies of bay and rosemary upon the pillows.

The pair were back at Furze Farm by dinner-time, looking mild and innocent, even hungry, as though nothing serious had befallen. They walked into the kitchen just as Mr. Jennifer was settling himself to carve the meat. John Gore glanced at Mrs. Winnie, who had run forward to kiss and embrace her "little lady." That occurred behind Mr. Jennifer's back, and son William had too brisk an appetite to trouble about the emotions of his elders.

"Shall I give you a dump o' fat, sir?"

And so they sat down to dinner.

They were half through with it when Mrs. Winnie accepted a nod from John Gore and pushed back her chair, and picking up a wedding-favor from under a mug on the dresser, she went to her man and held it under his nose.

Mr. Jennifer stared at the gilded sprigs and the ribbons very gravely.

"I dunno as I be a widower yet," he said, as his slow brain took in the nature of the thing, "nor be you a widow, Winnie."

"Oh, you thick-head, Chris!"

Mr. Jennifer looked at her, and then, with a sudden gleam of the eyes, at John Gore and the lady.

"Be that so, my dear?"

"Surely," said Mrs. Winnie, in a whisper.

Then Mr. Jennifer laid a hand to his mug, rose slowly and solemnly, and stared hard at the bride and bridegroom.

"Ut be a pleasure—"

He paused and reconsidered the beginning.

"Ut be a pleasure—"

John Gore and Barbara looked up at him smilingly, and their eyes seemed to drive the whole art of oratory out of Mr. Jennifer's head. He took refuge in his mug, brandished it toward them, and set it down empty, with emphasis. Then he looked at his wife with an affectionate grin.

"I be powerful pleased, my dear. Seven years ago—"

"Eight," interposed the wife, with a shocked glance at son William.

"Eight be ut, then—I dared ut like a man, and I'd dare ut again, please God."

"Lor', Christopher!"

"William, keep t' gravy off thy breeches. Mr. Gore, sir, you'll be for pardoning me, but t' lady's face be a good bargain. T' Bible says something of vines and fig leaves and olive branches—I dunno as I quite knows what; but I wish ye all of ut, sir, you—and the lady."

So Barbara lay in her lover's arms that night, and they heard the birds break out with their songs at dawn.

XLIX

The sun was up, the birds making the air quiver, the life of the world awake with the faint fragrance of a spring morning. Barbara, lying upon her lover's arm, looked with shadowy eyes at the casement that caught the light of the glowing east. And with the first coming of consciousness she had remembered the refugee at Thorn and the part that they had set themselves to play that day. The "self" in them was to be thrust aside on that first morning of their life together.

Barbara, combing her hair at the little glass by the window, could hear her man walking to and fro in the garden; for he had risen first, and taken the bar down from the house door before the Jennifers were stirring. And though he whistled the tune of a love-song, she seemed to feel a spirit of melancholy and foreboding stealing up through the spring morning. Nor was her own consciousness without a sense of shadowiness and vague unrest. Bridal dawns are not always the happiest dawns, yet it was not the love in Barbara that had suffered pain. The destiny that she was to fulfil that day brought back a fog of recollections that chilled the air a little and weakened the sunlight. This was the aftermath, the second reaping and gathering of memories.

The joy of the night had been sweet, intimate, and wrapped in the darkness, and perhaps her heart was not ready for the daylight—and realities. It was a sensitive and sacred hour with her, and almost she could have desired to spend that day alone. There was so much to realize, so much to feel, so much to foreshadow. She was no longer herself; the sacrament had its mysteries; her maidenliness felt a little shy of the world at first.

She heard John Gore walking below her window, and a sudden rush of tenderness seized on her. For the moment she felt lonely, even afraid; for he to whom she had given everything alone could give everything in return. The sense of surrender was quick in her. She would be utterly alone in the world, save for this one man. Love was life. And the wistfulness made her yearn over him as though one day the world might take him from her.

"John!"

He turned and looked up at the window.

"Halloo, little wife!"

She leaned forward with her comb caught in a tress of her hair, knowing not what to say to him now that she had called him.

"What a heavy dew there has been!"

"Yes; the grass is gray in the meadows."

"Is Mrs. Winnie up yet?"

"No; we are the larks this morning."

She was silent a moment, looking away toward the distant hills. Her voice had a tremor when she spoke again.

"John!"

"Yes!"

"Come to me; I want you."

And he went up, to find her weeping.

Man, being a creature of tougher fibre, cannot always comprehend a woman's moods. They may seem inexplicable to him, because her sensitiveness can be as fine as gossamer, and hardly visible against the coarser background of reality. Even as a man cannot always gauge the strange, shrinking prides of a shy child, so he may blunder against the delicate and sacred things of a woman's soul, unless love, spiritual love, gives him that intuition that sees beyond the carnal clay.

"Why, Barbe—weeping!"

He looked at her, not a little troubled, searching his own heart guiltily, yet having no consciousness of having wounded her in any way. The tears of a woman whom he loves have always a personal issue for a man. They may pique him if he is vain, challenge him if he be honest.

"Oh, it is nothing, John!"

He did the only thing a man could do, and that was to take her face between his two hands and kiss her.

"Little wife, no secrets from me. Let us begin life so; we shall never regret it."

She closed her eyes, and, putting her hands upon his shoulders, hung her head a little.

"It was foolish of me, dear. I have been so happy, and sometimes when one has been very happy

—"
"The tears come, little wife."

"I have never been very happy till now, John. And just now it came into my heart so suddenly—"

She faltered, and he stood looking down at her as he held her in his arms.

"Barbara—wife, you felt lonely."

She darted up a look at him as though surprised that he should know.

"How do I know, child? Because I had something of the same feeling myself. What a pair of fond fools, eh! No, it is something deeper and more sacred than that."

"Yes, John, I know. But do you think—"

"I think a great many things, Barbe."

"Yes; but that I shall make you happy, that I can fill your life for you?"

He took her unloosed hair, and put it back from off her forehead. Perhaps he was learning the familiar truth that no being can be more fiercely conscientious and self-critical than a good woman newly married. Fevers of doubt and of introspection rise in her. The surrender is so final, so utter, and the future seems so precious.

"Barbe, we have been married not quite a day. Yes—yes—I know. It is the sweet, brave heart in you that is blind to its own worth. Little wife, look in my eyes and see if you see any shadows there."

She looked and smiled.

"No, John."

"Then never look for them, dear heart. One's imagination may create curses. Always speak out; never think in. If I ever hurt you—yet God forbid—tell me so; that can be mended."

She felt for his hands and held them.

"I will try always not to think of myself, John."

"Then you will be a very foolish woman, dear, and I shall have to do the thinking for you."

"And you will take me to Thorn to-day?"

He looked at her gravely.

"You wish that?"

"I wish it."

It was still early when John Gore brought the horses to the gate after breakfast and lifted Barbara into her saddle. She wore a plain black riding-habit that morning, a black beaver with a black plume curled round the brim, and a collar of white lace about her throat. The life at Furze Farm had tinted her skin with a brown, pearly haze. She was never a girl for much color, but her lips were red and generous, and her figure more rich in womanliness than of yore.

The shy, introspective mood of the early morning had passed. Hill and valley bathed in sunlight, the freshness of the woods, the movement, the sympathy between heart and heart, brought back that happier courage that is the true boast of health. For it is the brave, clear-eyed woman who holds the love of a man in this world. Melancholy and helplessness may please the lover; they do not often hold the husband. Man needs a mate who can spread her wings with him, whose eyes look trustfully, who has no trick of selfish tears. And John Gore, riding beside his wife that morning, felt glad and strong and sure because of her, for generosity counts with a man almost before all other virtues. Let a woman be pure and generous, and she will never lack the reverence of men.

When they came to the valley of thorns that morning John Gore drew rein in the beech thicket that he knew so well. He desired to bring Barbara into Thorn without my lord suspecting it.

"I will go down first," he said; "when I am ready I will come into the court and wave my cloak. Then, little wife, you will follow."

And it was agreed between them as he said.

My lord was not in the kitchen that morning, and John Gore, seeing that the stool was gone, guessed that his father was in the garden. Going out into the court he waved his cloak as a sign to Barbara, and passing on into the garden he found Stephen Gore sitting in the sunlight with his sword across his knees. He looked younger by years than he had looked for many weeks. His eyes had an alertness new to them, and he rose up to meet his son with the air of an aristocrat and a man.

"Good-morning to you, John; I am making the most of the sunlight."

The son looked questioningly at the father's sword. My lord's manner had something final, something stately in its tranquillity.

"I had a visitor yesterday, my son; I was glad that you were absent."

"A visitor? Who?"

"One of those gentlemen, John, who walk through the world with a ladle full of hot sulphur. He came to spy and to discover. I entertained him. I assure you that he was mightily exalted."

John Gore looked grave.

"An informer?"

"Call the creature what you will, my son, he has scented the fox and run him to earth. He seemed astonished at my urbanity, and sat with a hand upon his pistol. 'Good sir,' said I, 'I am tired of the country, and yearn for the city and that noble place where so many good gentlemen are entertained. Do me the honor of waiting on me to-morrow with a few fiery Protestant friends; let us fix the hour at noon. I assure you that I shall not run,' and I believe the fellow believed me. I shall be taken to-day, John; I am waiting for them quietly here. What does it matter! They cannot frighten me; I am beyond that now."

He spoke simply yet pungently, a quiet pride giving him something of grandeur and impressiveness. John Gore was listening for the sound of Barbara's coming. A clatter of hoofs from the court-yard rose on the morning air. My lord heard it and smiled, and then held out a hand to his son.

"Hear them, John! I did not expect the rogues so early. Clear, my lad; I don't want you caught in

the tangle. Get behind some of yonder bushes."

John Gore looked hard at his father.

"It is not your friends yet," he said; "wait here; this is my affair."

The sunlight shone on Barbara's face as she met her husband in the court-yard. He said but one word—"Come"—and led her by the hand into the garden. A tangle of shrubs hid the place where Stephen Gore waited. And thus John Gore and Barbara came upon my lord quite suddenly, and stood before him almost like a pair of runaways returning for a father's pardon.

My lord looked at Barbara and went white to the lips. His arms hung limply. He stooped, and seemed to shrink into himself, his eyes remaining fixed on her as though unable to look away. For the moment the old, frightened, fawning expression came back into his eyes. Then he gave a sudden, inarticulate cry, flung out his hands, and stood groping almost like one struck blind.

"John, you have deceived me!"

He would probably have fallen had not the son sprung to him and put an arm about his body.

"John, you have deceived me! My God, are you against me, even at the last!"

"No, no; it is not that."

He glanced at Barbara, for Stephen Gore seemed in a kind of agony. He trembled greatly, leaned heavily upon his son, almost clinging to him as though stricken with the dread that he had been tricked and condemned even at the last by the one man whose love was the one thing left to him.

Barbara answered her husband's glance; her lips were quivering. This strong man's anguish went to her heart.

"John, tell him—"

"It is forgiveness."

"A blotting out of the past."

At the sound of her voice Stephen Gore recovered his courage and his self-control. He stood back from his son, putting John Gore's arm aside, as though he had strength enough to stand alone. He looked at Barbara sadly, yet with thankfulness—the look of a man whose grosser prides were dead.

"You are alive, child; thank God for that! The truth of this was hid from me."

She would have spoken, but he held up his hands as though to beg her patience.

"You know everything? Does she know the whole truth, John?"

The son nodded and turned his face away. My lord spoke on.

"Child, I did you and yours a great wrong. I cannot justify myself; out of my own mouth I am judged. These are the words of a man who expects to die. Yet be it said, child, without pride of heart, that I would have gladly ended the thing I called my life that I might wipe out all the past."

There was silence between the three for several seconds. Then Barbara looked at John Gore and he at her.

"We have buried the past," she said, turning to my lord.

Stephen Gore did not move.

"John and I are man and wife. We have put the past away from us. It is better for us—and for the dead."

My lord raised his eyes slowly till they rested on Barbara's face. He saw nothing there but a mist of tenderness and tears.

"Child, you say this to me?"

She held out her hands generously.

"Out of my heart I say it."

My lord bowed himself and took her hands, and when he had kissed them he put them reverently away from him, and stood up bravely, yet with a twitching face. John Gore had come to stand beside his wife. And the three looked at each other and were silent.

Then my lord spoke.

"Children, go—and God bless you."

They looked at him questioningly, but he did not falter.

"John, my son, you understand. They will come for me soon; I am ready; I shall no longer be ashamed. Go. I would not have you near the fringe of the slough into which these good Protestants will throw me. You have your lives to live. It is my desire that no shadow of mine should ever darken them again."

Barbara looked at her husband, for she did not understand the meaning of what was said. My lord smiled at her and pointed toward the distance. The authority seemed his that day.

"John will tell you the truth. It is for your sakes that I demand this."

Both husband and wife faltered, but Stephen Gore's eyes were clear and unflinching.

"John, if this should be the end of me, what I have is yours, unless the rogues sequester it. Now go, my son, and be happy. It is my last wish, and you will grant it me."

And so they left him, sadly, unwillingly, feeling like traitors leaving a friend to death. For the man had seemed lovable, even great, at that last moment, and yet they had felt that it would have been graceless to question his last desire.

Stephen Gore watched them go, following them to the court-yard, and standing above the moat as they rode slowly away toward the woods. Under the beech-trees they turned and looked back at Thorn, and saw him standing there, and waved him a farewell.

"What will it mean?"

Barbara's eyes asked her love that as he took her bridle and drew away into the woods.

"They will take him to-day," he said; "yesterday he was discovered. Other heads have fallen; so may his."

She was silent awhile, and then looked at John Gore wistfully.

"And we are leaving him!"

"Wife, it was his wish, his prayer, his penance. I—a man—would not grudge it him. Can you not understand?"

"Yes, John, I can understand."

And they rode back to Furze Farm sadly, knowing that it would be wiser for them to leave the place and seek some other refuge till they saw how the times promised.

Before noon my lord was taken in Thorn as a Catholic and a conspirator against the state. He met them calmly, with the fine carriage of the man of the world, courteous and debonair, ready even with an epigram and a smile. His face seemed strangely tranquil as he rode with his escort out of the gate of Thorn.

“May the sins of the fathers rest not upon the children.”

That was the prayer that his heart uttered.

THE END

Transcriber’s Notes:

Spelling and hyphenation have been left as in the original. Punctuation and minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAD BARBARA ***

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