THE ADMIRAL'S DAUGHTER

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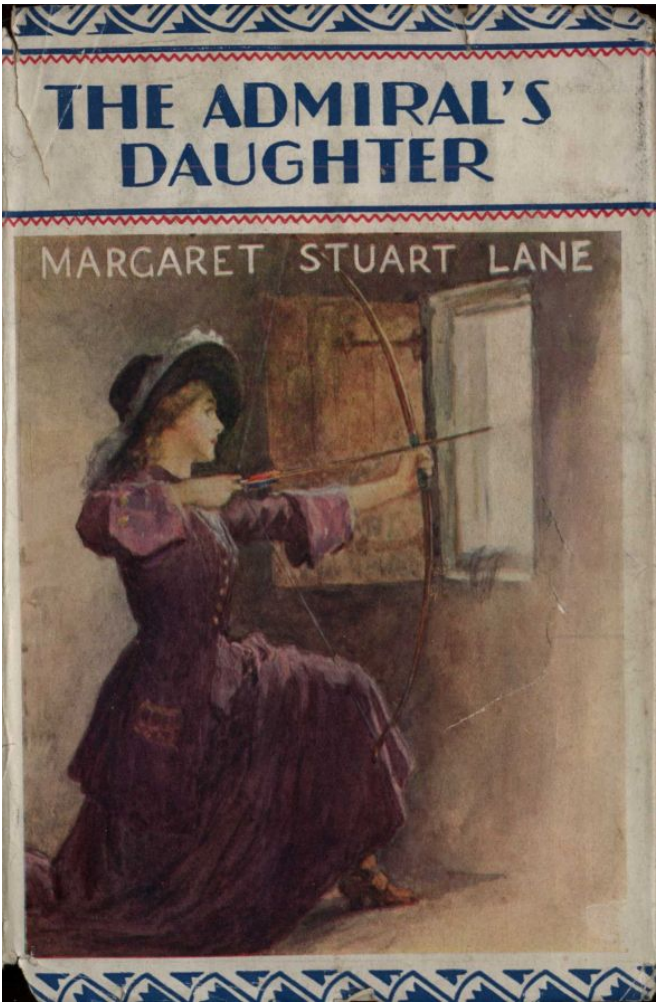

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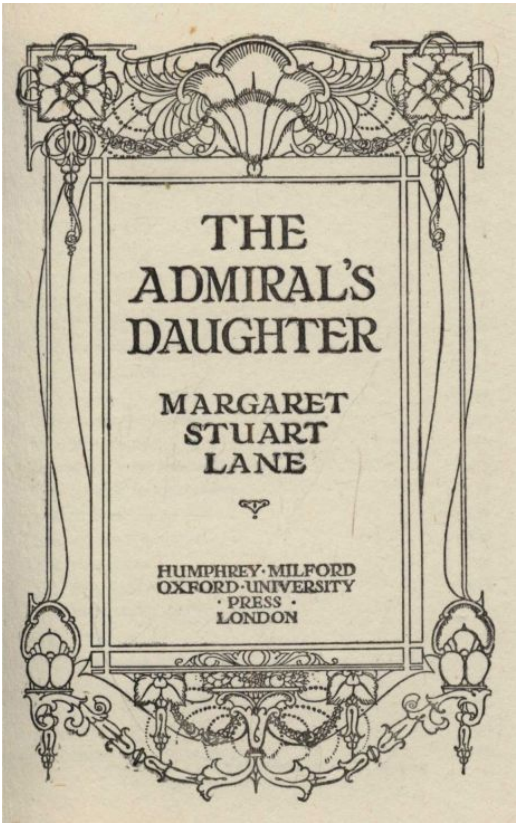
THE
ADMIRAL'S
DAUGHTER
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Title page

MARGARET STUART LANE

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CHAP.

CHAPTER I

THE *FAIR RETURN*

Spring had come to the West Country, a joyous spring laden with soft airs and odours of distant flowering lands, and filling the hearts of men with a restless delight. It seemed impossible not to be happy, with a blue sky flecked by little clouds running down to meet a blue sea, the hedgerows gleaming with blackthorn, and the pink tips of the beeches shining in the sun. Children were out in

the copses, picking primroses; farmers counted their lambs in the pasture, and down in the harbour sailor boys watched the rising tide and were all impatience to be aboard.

On the highest point of a headland to the west of the village of Garth a youth was sitting, staring out on the Channel. A jutting ledge of rock, with a tall boulder at its back, formed a natural chair of stone, and from it the green sward dipped steeply to the cliff. The boy's long, loosely set limbs, showing thin under the wrinkles of his knee breeches, sprawled restlessly across the rocky seat; the heels of his riding boots tore at the grass. In his fixed, seaward gaze there was nothing of the expectancy and hope that marked the faces of the youths in the harbour below. His eyes, that could be so merry, with gold lights dancing in the brown, were sad and dark under the black lashes, and his mouth, losing its shape of laughter, was set in hard lines. The world might be full of glamour, but 'twas not for him; fortune and the hour were all awry; he was out of tune with the spring. And when from the cobbled streets below rose the sound of sailors singing, mingled with the noises which to a practised ear betokened tide and time, the boy's black head dropped, and with a smothered word he set his knees together and drew his hands across his ears.

Sitting there he was unaware of the approach of light footsteps along a narrow path that wound over the headland, and only when a hand tapped his shoulder did he raise his head.

'Marion!' he said, springing to his feet, a smile banishing his dark looks; 'where have you been all this time?'

The brown eyes, now all alight, met a pair of steady grey ones whose owner dropped him a mock curtsey, then stood looking at him from head to foot and back again.

'You are a most uncomfortable person to know, Roger,' she said. 'I cannot keep the same impression of you two months together. You are inches taller than when I saw you last; your shoulders bid fair to burst your jacket seams; your eyebrows are several degrees blacker. I wish you would determine what length you are going to be, and abide by it.'

The boy looked ruefully down at the long limbs, all unaware (as the girl knew) how generously nature had dealt out her gifts to him, so that his great size was carried with an easy grace.

'You'll have to bear with it, I fear,' he said, with a shyness that always overcame him when considering his length and girth. 'I suppose it comes of having tall forbears. Sit down and talk to me. What is in that basket?'

'Bake-meats for your funeral, I judged, coming along. Ah! This is good.'

The girl settled on the stone seat, folding her hands in her lap, and turned her face to the sea. She did not at once begin to speak, and her companion,

knowing her ways, sat silent. He took the occasion to steal one or two sidelong looks at the profile offered him, and in doing so was assailed (not for the first time) by the disquieting thought that his little playmate was altering fast. The chin was still a shade long, the nose rather short, the mouth still drooped at the corners, the freckles still over-ran the colourless skin: all the peculiarities which Roger had not failed to bring to the owner's notice, whenever an opportunity offered itself during the last ten years, were without doubt unchanged. According to Marion, Roger's progress towards manhood was measurable in square feet. Her own advancing womanhood was much less tangible a growth. Stealthily eyeing the averted face, Roger found himself at a loss to define the change, and not being given to habits of analysis, he left the mystery unsolved.

For a while the girl watched the sea-gulls flashing in the sunlight; then turned to her companion.

'This is good,' she repeated. 'For the first time for six weeks I feel free. All this age I have been in attendance on Aunt Keziah. She left us yesterday, you know, and before she went she must needs turn the house topsy-turvy. Curnow has been at her wits' end. My aunt had the guest-chamber hangings down, and discovered a flaw in the gold stitch; and nothing must serve but that Elise and I should sit with our needles—and—in all this lovely weather—and go over the whole pattern. And then, after that—oh la! I won't talk about it. That is where I've been. And you?'

'Lambs,' said the young man shortly. 'Calves, pigs, chickens. Twenty acres ploughed.' The unhappy expression came into his face.

The girl's grey eyes rested on him a moment. 'Still the same?' she asked, her voice soft.

Roger looked at her and looked away again to the sea, making no reply. His companion waited, sitting motionless. Twenty times in his growing manhood he had tried to shut the door on his sorrows, and twenty times it had opened at the sound of those gentle tones.

'I do not know how long I can go on bearing it,' he said, after a time. 'Last night I spoke to my mother again, and she wept and begged me to wait another little while ... gave me once more, as if I should forget—or as if it could make any difference—the story of my father's drowning. For that matter, what sailor would wish to die abed? But women can never understand that.' Roger poked the grass with his holly stick and went on, not seeing the look of mingled pity and amusement that ran across his hearer's face. 'Do you know that down yonder in the harbour is the *Fair Return*, put in from Plymouth, outward bound for—oh—the other end of the world. They are picking up Jack Poole here. *Jack Poole.* And here am I, my father's son, who had sailed to the Indies and back before he was my age; and I am—a prosperous young farmer. Bah! Did you see her, the *Fair*

Return?'

'I did.'

'I cannot bear to see her set sail, and I cannot bear not to. That is why I am up here. In another hour the tide will turn and she will go. I cannot bear to look at the sea, even, and I cannot bear not to. All my life slipping away from me. Pigs, calves, lambs. Twenty acres ploughed. And yonder'—the boy's eyes sought the west—'uncharted seas to cross, lands to explore, fortunes to find; the great, great world. No one knows how big the world is. And I shall never know because my mother weeps and bids me wait—wait. Do you know what the sea is like when it calls?'

The girl's face was turned away.

'Really, Roger,' she said lightly, after a moment's pause. 'How old are you? I should know, for there are but twelve months between us. Eighteen and a half, are you? And you say your life is slipping away. You are truly laughable. You might be an old man of thirty. Patience, Roger!' she went on, her voice deepening a little. 'What guarantee have you from fate that what has happened must continue so to happen—that life must needs go on for ever as it is now? Patience for another little while! Who knows what fortune, what great fortune, is awaiting you? What adventure, what discoveries, what honours? And how worth while the little waiting will have been! A ship seven times fairer than the *Fair Return*—nay, seven ships. Seven uncharted seas to cross—nay, seven worlds to sail round!' She laughed a brave little laugh, and the youth turned his eyes from the sea and his discontent.... 'I should like to shake you! Now come along with me to old Mother Poole's. I have a dozen of eggs and one of Curnow's spiced cakes for her in this basket, to comfort her somewhat for the departure of that rascal of a son.'

Roger sprang to his feet and drew a long breath. 'And if I have seven ships, they shall all be called Marion. You always put heart in me, little Mawfy. You are wiser than I.'

The girl made a grimace. 'I feel as old as Aunt Keziah this minute, but don't make me also feel I should wear cassock and bands, sir.'

Turning inland, the two walked slowly across the hill.

'So Mistress Penrock has gone away,' said Roger. 'I'm very glad. I am mortally afraid of your Aunt Keziah, although I only saw her once, when she was walking with the Admiral. Where is she going to stay now?'

'At Bath, where she says she will hear a little of the world, and not be dependent on a news sheet. How we live in this monstrously dull hole she cannot conceive. She said so her last night at supper.'

'And your father?'

'My father laughs at her. He loves to hear her talk. So does Elise, although

she and my aunt are sworn enemies'—Marion smiled—'But Aunt Keziah has unsettled Elise a little, I think. Elise has a great hankering after gaiety. Do you know, Roger, my father has written asking my Aunt Constance to visit us from London. I have never seen her, but like you with my Aunt Keziah, I am in terror of her already. Aunt Keziah says (rather scornfully, I think, to hide her envy) that Aunt Constance is one of the greatest ladies at Court.'

'Why did the Admiral ask her then?' innocently inquired Roger. 'Garth is not the place for a Court beauty.'

'My father loves to be entertained. Apart from that, he thinks I am growing up entirely lacking in the airs and graces that do become a young lady,' said Marion demurely. 'And if my aunt will not come here, perhaps I may go to her.'

'What! You go to London—you?'

'I, sir, I. Why not?'

Roger stood still and looked down at the mocking face, the black bars of his eyebrows drawn together.

'I think the Admiral must be going mad! London! Pshaw! The Court!—airs, graces, forsooth! Intrigues and ferments. Discontent with the simple life you are so contented with now. Why cannot the Admiral let well alone?'

Marion gave one of her father's sudden chuckles.

'You won't be here to see the result of my father's folly, you know. You'll be out on the seven seas adventuring. What can the happenings down here count for a sailor? Now, if you cannot hold that basket carefully, give it to me.'

'I say the Admiral is mad,' said the young man again, kicking at the stones in his path. 'What would the world be were one ten times a sailor, without places like Garth and Marions living in them? 'Tis for men to go abroad, and maids to stay at home—or, if one of you must go, let Elise go, who has a craving for society, and to become an elegant lady.'

'Yes, but, Roger, I am my father's daughter, and Elise is but his ward. It is only fair that I should go first and Elise later. But all this is idle talk. It may never happen at all. Look! is not that beautiful?'

The path had wound round the head of a copse that curled like a snake in and out of the folds of the hills. For some time their eyes had been on the trees and bushes of the glades, the primroses starring their path. Suddenly, bearing round the edge of the wood, they were come in view of the village and open harbour again, the cottages at the waterside nestling in the soft haze, and beyond the twin headlands of the water mouth, the sapphire bar of the sea. The young man looked once, but his eyes were caught by the lines of the *Fair Return*, and with a pang he turned his face inland again.

'Yes!' he said constrainedly. 'It is beautiful.' His keen gaze swept the valley. 'Ah—look there—horsemen coming down the Bodmin Road. What can be

wanting in Garth?'

'Mother Poole will tell us,' said Marion. 'She knows everything.'

The fisherwife's cottage lay about a mile up the valley, and the two, bearing down to it on narrow paths, lost for a time the sight of the high road.

'See! There are the horsemen still!' exclaimed Marion when the prospect widened again. 'They have turned into the lane. They are making for Mother Poole's cottage. Oh Roger'—Marion gripped his arm—'surely, surely 'tis nothing about Jack and that terrible rising. I thought it was forgotten long ago.'

'The spies of Jeffreys never forget,' replied Roger quietly. 'And Jack broke out of gaol, you remember. He is still in the eyes of the law a prisoner. Brave lad, Jack! But if 'tis he they're after, with luck they'll miss their man. He should be aboard by now, and Jeffreys will need a long arm to catch Poole on the *Fair Return* once past the mouth. I think I'll just run down and see what they're about.'

'Roger'—Marion's hand tightened—'you cannot, you cannot. There are six horsemen yonder, all armed. A word from you and they'll take you as well.'

'I cannot let Jack be caught like a rat in a trap,' said Roger. 'Let go my arm, Mawfy.'

At that moment the cottage door opened and a man in sailor's garb came down the path. An old woman, her apron at her eyes, stood in the doorway looking after him. Not till he reached the gate—perhaps because the sadness of his mother's farewell dimmed his eyes—did he become aware of the horsemen in the path. He gave one glance round, a step backward, and then stood still. It was too late. In three minutes the sorry little act was played out. A couple of the horsemen swung from their saddles. Another covered the sailor with his carbine. The old woman, running to her son's side, was roughly thrust away.

'No, Roger, no,' came Marion's whisper on the slope above, almost in earshot of the group in the lane. 'No.' Both her hands, white at the knuckles, gripped his sleeve, the boy dragging away from her. At that moment the leader of the soldiers caught sight of the two above. The young man's attitude and desire were clear to his eyes. A few low words passed between the men. One set his horse at the slope and was recalled; some urgency bade the group go on their way: one of the swift decisions that serve to toss a straw into the balance of fate. They turned their horses, the sailor running at the stirrup of his captor.

But the leader looked again, a searching look, at the motionless youth on the slope. And as he cantered off, Marion dropped the arm she held and stared after him, shivering slightly.

'I shall know him if I see him again, anyhow,' said Roger, smiling. 'Come,

Mawfy, there's old Mother Poole sorely in need of comfort now.'

CHAPTER II
GARTH HOUSE

The little fishing village of Garth had two chief points of pride: its harbour and the family of Penrock. And it was not the way of the villagers to hide their light under a bushel. They wore their honours with a flourish and imposed them on the public eye. Let a fishing vessel manned by Devon men (the natural and first-hand enemies of the Cornish) be driven before a sudden gale to take shelter in Garth harbour, and her crew by so much as a glance doubt the superiority of that harbour, then those unhappy sailors would find that the rocks without the river mouth had been a kinder refuge. And no one knew better than the fishing folk of Garth how the fortunes of the village had for generations been linked with those of the grey, gabled house nestling in its combe a mile up the valley.

They might rail at the 'Admur'l' as they liked; it was an affectionate raillery. That lean, wooden-legged figure stumping about the terrace at Garth House was their hearts' lord. Like the king, he could do no wrong. Whether his eyes twinkled with merriment or took on that round, unwinking stare which was a sign of anger, it was all one to the villagers. They could as ill have spared sun and wind as the Admiral, were he cross or hearty. In fact, if a week went by without a sight of him 'down along,' they grew uneasy; and when his rosy face, with its overhanging brows and huge nose, looking like that of a benevolent eagle, peered in at their casements, and a deep voice—as of the sea heard through a fog—boomed out a greeting, all would be well again. His clumping tread heard on the cobblestones would bring the children from the farther cottages with their fingers tugging their forelocks, and crying, "Ere be the Admur'l, Mother. Marnin', Admur'l'; and down on the quay, 'Will 'ee be telling us now, Admur'l, what so be's wrong with they ropes? Un don't knot like as they belong to do.'

Had the Admiral by some miracle been able to change the flagstones of his terrace for the decks of a ship, all Garth would have flocked to his standard. But the Admiral's fighting days were over. He had seen his last shot fired in an engagement with the Dutch, twenty years earlier, and few Garth seamen had cared to enlist in another's service. Fishing was now the villagers' daily employment, fighting roving French Channel pirates their recreation. And if sometimes their

little craft ran up the river with cargoes of a more mysterious nature than the harvest of the sea, the wise Admiral was sure to know nothing about it.

For that matter, in these days he had ample for his employment. There were the affairs of the parish over which, with Parson Stowe at his elbow as chancellor, he cast an imperial eye. He was a county magistrate, and since the Restoration that had been no easy office. There were the lands and farming of Garth to supervise. Moreover, since the death of my lady, now ten years ago, he had been father, mother, and tutor to his little daughter Marion.

The Admiral had always been a headstrong, self-willed man, hard to move except (as his wife knew) by love, or (as his servants knew) by laughter. And when my lady died—leaving him harder stricken by the blow than folk knew—he would consider no plans but his own for the upbringing of his little daughter. The two were constantly together; the child, with her solemn white little face which could suddenly break into heartening laughter—a trick inherited from her father—running backwards and forwards from the length of his hand as they walked about the garden or watched the men busy in the fields; the child sitting at a high chair by her father's place at table, struggling with the food he piled on her plate at dinner, or at supper eating her bread and milk from the silver bowl that bore her mother's name. Every night the Admiral stumped upstairs to kiss her face on the pillow and draw the curtains close, his 'good-night' booming on the stairs after he had closed the door with something of the thunder of the tides on the headlands below.

The first few months after my lady's death passed thus. Then the relatives of the Admiral begged to be allowed—as they thought—to come to the rescue. First the Admiral's two sisters, then various cousins, offered to come to Garth and mother the motherless maid for him. The Admiral made short work of it, answering each with a blank refusal. The refusal sufficed for all except one: Mistress Keziah Penrock, a maiden lady living at Exeter in a great rambling house that had been built by an eccentric maternal grandfather in the shadow of old Rougemont Castle. A correspondence lasting for some months ran between the pair, the lady holding up the prospect of 'civilisation' in the Cathedral town in contrast with the savage state of a remote Cornish village. In the end, Mistress Keziah, losing her temper, wrote a letter which the wise Admiral left unanswered, knowing that in no way would the last word be said quite so effectively as in silence. Meantime half a year had run on and little Marion was still untended.

The parson, hearing rumour of this from Mrs. Curnow, the housekeeper, ventured to come up and argue the point with his patron over a game of piquet. But the Admiral listened only to the first few words.

'Let her be brought up well or ill,' he said, laying down his cards and fixing the parson with an unwinking, parrot-like stare, 'she bides here alone with me.

The matter is settled. The housekeeper can teach her her needle. There's Mistress Trevannion yonder who, I'll wager, will know when she wants a new petticoat. You and I will see to her books.'

And that, Mr. Stowe found, was the end of the argument; but the Admiral, roused (though he would not have confessed it) to the sense of his child's needs, bestirred himself.

The carrier brought down from a book-stall at the sign of the *Three Bibles* on London Bridge, a box of school books, French and Latin. On these volumes, which the small pupil turned over in unfeigned dislike, the parson nodded approval. 'Must I learn all these?' asked Marion, her mouth down at the corners. 'I had far rather play with you, Father.'

'And my daughter be brought up as unlearned as a kitchen-wench?' retorted the Admiral.

The child pondered. 'Did my mother know all these books?' she asked.

'She did,' said the Admiral, his great voice breaking. 'She was wiser than your father.'

Here the parson bethought himself. 'But the English reading, sir,' he said. 'There's nothing here but foreign tongues.'

His patron pointed to the two volumes that constituted his own library: Hakluyt's Voyages and Plutarch's Lives. 'And there is the Bible and Master Shakespeare's works in her mother's room above,' he said. 'If she thrives not on these she thrives not at all.'

The lessons began, and brought with them a new and secret joy for the Admiral. He had never been much of a school man, and his knowledge of Latin and French grammar was slight. True, he spoke the French language with ease, and failed not to hector the parson on the subject of accent; but he soon found that in grammar he must needs be a pupil instead of tutor, as he had originally stated to Mr. Stowe. The Admiral and Marion, sitting side by side, conned their declensions together, the seaman's double bass and the child's pipe blended. In this duet the slender clear notes were so often drowned that the parson plucked up courage to remonstrate.

'Sir,' he said, 'if you will not be silent, how can I hear the child construe?'

The Admiral regarding him, his face growing purple with merriment, left the table to splutter at his ease on the terrace. Certainly, whatever the result might be for Marion, schooling was good for her father, seeing that, in the pages of his grammar, and under the parson's solemn eye, he found again the laughter he had lost.

Other matters went apace. With the help of the housekeeper and Mistress Trevannion of the Manor House, the little girl learned not only to hem her sheets, but to make those numerous 'stitches' in embroidery that were her teacher's de-

light. Concerning this branch of her industry, it being beyond his ken, the Admiral was disposed to be critical. Secretly proud as he was of the little maid's skill, he became nevertheless uneasy about the hours she must needs bend over her silks. To the housekeeper's argument that all young ladies spent their time thus he paid no heed save to 'Pish!' and 'Pshaw.' And one day when Mistress Trevannion, thinking to win his approval, counted on her fingers the stitches Marion had already learned—cross-stitch, tent-stitch, long and short stitch, crewel and feather-stitch, tent-on-the-finger, tent-on-the-frame, gold-stitch, fern-stitch, satin-stitch, and rosemary stitch—the Admiral cried for mercy and vowed his brain was reeling.

'Enough,' he said, striking with his stick on the stone flags of the hall. 'Let be. There are hangings and quilts and cushions in the house to last my grandsons. And the child has already wrought me three night-caps in such a device I dare not sleep in them for fear of dreams. Let be. She may stitch, if stitch she must, at that satin sheet you have just set in her frame. 'Twill last her, on and off, a lifetime. But she shall do it when she pleases.'

Mrs. Trevannion was aghast at this heresy, but the Admiral had his way. The work-stand holding Marion's 'wrought sheet'—a crimson quilt embroidered with a pattern of flowers—was placed by the great chimney in the hall, and the young lady took up her silks and laid them down as she willed. Much more to her taste were her rides with Zacchary the groom and Roger Trevannion, who from childhood days had been her constant playfellow; the long mornings she and Roger spent with their bows and arrows, shooting at targets set by the Admiral; her days in Jack Poole's boat on the river, the fishing expeditions in Bob Tregarthen's cutter; her afternoons spent in the garden on a pretence of reading with her father. Once a week a tutor rode out from Bodmin to teach her dancing and music. Next to the archery practice, in which sport she was becoming unusually skilled, these lessons were Marion's special delight, and were shared by Roger until he went to school at Blundell's in Tiverton.

With Roger and her father, and kind Mistress Trevannion in the background, Marion's life had been a happy one. Roger's going was a sore blow, and would have saddened the autumn for her, had not fate put up a finger to turn her thoughts in another direction.

Coming up from the village one morning, she found the house in a commotion, the great travelling coach with its four horses out in the courtyard, and Zacchary ready, as outrider, with the chestnut mare.

'Here a be!' called one of the stable boys to some one within, 'here be Mistress Marion.'

Forthwith Marion was hastily summoned to her father's room, where Peter, his man, was dressing him in his best clothes. A travelling cloak and a couple of

pistols lay on the bed.

'Father!' cried Marion, 'where are you going?'

Then the Admiral put Peter to the door, saying he would do very well now, and took the maid upon his knee, pressing a kiss upon her troubled face.

'It means this, sweetheart,' he said. 'I'm going to London. Yes, to London, to bring some one back. A playmate for you, little one.'

He stroked her waving hair as he spoke, and kissed her again, the child, as was her way, taking it very quietly, but opening her grey eyes wide.

'You remember what I told you about poor de Delauret?'

Marion nodded. More than once her father had related the incident of his friendship for the French gentleman whom he had met on an expedition to the Indies. They had begun as enemies and crossed swords; they had ended by being sworn friends. De Delauret had nursed the Admiral through a vile fever; the Englishman later on had saved his friend from death at the hand of a rascal, who was for having his purse and jewelled rapier. During the years of the Admiral's fighting life the two had kept up a constant intercourse. Once the Admiral had gone to visit de Delauret in his home in Brittany, and found the Frenchman in sore trouble. His wife had just died and left him with an infant daughter, and he himself was ailing.

'What shall I do,' says he, 'about the little one, should I die? My Elise may be a great heiress through her mother's house. She will be sought after, taken to Court. And, saving the King's Majesty, you know what the Court of Louis is.'

The Admiral took the sick man's hand in his great one.

'You're not going to die,' says he. 'But, if you do, s'death, man! I'll take your child, and my wife shall bring her up at Garth.'

So the compact was settled. M. de Delauret did not die. But he was never again strong enough to travel, the Admiral later on was invalided; so the two lost sight of each other, and the great friendship was expressed only in occasional letters.

'And now poor de Delauret's gone,' said the Admiral, 'and wrote me a letter before he died, reminding me of my promise. Three months the letter has been in coming. Elise and her woman are in London. I must hasten and fetch her at once. And I must see my lawyer in London so that he can arrange the poor child's affairs with de Delauret's attorney in Paris. That is the story, little one. Kiss me and let me go.'

Presently with a great bustle the Admiral was gone, Marion watching the coach from the terrace and waving her handkerchief as the horses took the corner by the church. Then she flung herself on the grass and burst into tears.

'I shall hate her,' she said. 'I hate her now.'

But when the Admiral came back, a fortnight later, with the sallow,

frightened-looking little girl who was a year younger than Marion, she was so much interested that she forgot all about the hating. Only when there was another girl in the house did Marion realise how lonely it had been before. Elise's gowns and cloaks, too, her boxes full of finery, woke in Marion an instinct that had been sleeping. Nothing would serve but the tailor must be ordered from Plymouth to make Marion some new gowns. Marion's halting French and Elise's lisped English joined to make a commotion in the house, just as Elise's maid, Victoire, conspired with Mrs. Curnow the housekeeper to make the servants' quarters unusually lively. The two children, adaptable as only the very young are, soon learned each other's ways and became great friends.

'One thing is certain,' mused the Admiral, who, in truth, was the one to be pitied, as he dragged his wooden leg in solitude about the garden, 'times are changed. Whether for good or ill we shall see.'

After a while, the Admiral concluded that 'good or ill' was beside the mark. The results of the coming of his ward could not be so easily assessed. The French girl brought a certain quality into the house which was for Marion's improvement: racial touches, the stories of her own land and coast, a new string of interests about which Marion's thoughts began to twine themselves. On the other hand, there were points in Elise's character that made the Admiral uneasy for his daughter's sake. The French girl seemed to be lacking in the sense of honour which, fully developed in Marion, was her father's pride. She was not above petty deceptions; there ran a strain of secrecy through her doings which her guardian, appearing not to notice, thoroughly condemned. 'Any one would think she had something to hide,' he mused.

Had the Admiral been aware of the stories growing in the village and the gossip in the servants' hall when Victoire was absent, he would have been more uneasy still. But nothing came to his ears.

The household, if not greatly liking the French girl, tolerated her. But there was one person in whom she inspired a profound distrust, and that was Roger Trevannion. Roger took the innovation with bad grace when he came home for his first holidays and found the Admiral's ward installed at Garth, and was scarce better minded on the second (when he brought his school friend, Dick Hooper, with him), thereby making himself the object of much raillery from Marion. Dick Hooper, a fair-faced, fair-haired youth, was the son of the Squire of St. Brennion. Marion found the company of the two boys agreeably diverting after the quieter life she had been leading with Elise. Her old headlong rides were resumed in their company, Elise on these occasions absenting herself, to the undisguised relief of two of the party. Bows and arrows came out once more, and Roger forgave Marion for beating him by a yard because Hooper was watching; and Roger's pride in Marion was unbounded.

As time went on, the Admiral could deceive himself no longer. He was disappointed in the daughter of his friend. Many times he considered whether it would not be wise to separate the two girls for a time, sending one or the other on a round of visits among his kinsfolk. Then he saw how untouched Marion was, how proof her nature was against any contact, what a pleasant intercourse seemed to obtain between the two, and he put the matter from him.

So months drifted into years. Marion grew up a tall, supple girl, but without the promise of her mother's perfect beauty. 'Her'll never be so lovely as my lady,' said the village. 'Wait,' said the mistress of the Manor. 'Hair gold to russet. Her mother's poise of head and her mother's neck and throat. A skin like curds. Her father's grey eyes and the Penrock look. Wait.'

Not until the girl was nearly seventeen did the Admiral suddenly wake up to realise that his 'little maid' was dangerously near womanhood. Also, he could not hide from himself the fact that Elise, now the heiress of a considerable estate in France (governed by Delauret's attorney) could not for ever stay hidden in a Cornish village. Hazy ideas of the future began to float about his mind, of his duty to these two young ladies in his care. But with Marion's seventeenth birthday came the landing of Monmouth at Lyme. The Admiral ceased to be a father and became a loyalist magistrate.

With the spring of the following year, however, Mistress Keziah Penrock came down with her coach and servants from Bath, and before she left, did more than find holes in the guest chamber hangings. Time, and the lady's curiosity about her niece, had healed the breach between brother and sister. Thus, for the first time for twelve years, Mistress Keziah visited the home of her childhood. In Marion she scarcely recognised the little one she had seen before; but during her stay the shrewd eyes had glimpses of depths of resolution and hardihood under the girl's gentle demeanour that made the old woman grave. 'She'll go her own way,' she mused. 'And whether 'tis a bid for sorrow or happiness 'twill be just the same. Her mother's given her that sweetness, but she's a Penrock.'

One night when 'the child,' as the Admiral persisted in calling his daughter, was abed, Mistress Keziah hazarded to her brother a plan she had conceived concerning her niece's future. A slight disappointment had preceded the making of this plan. She had hoped Marion would be affectionately inclined towards her and consent to coming to Exeter awhile. But the lady, not realising in time that Marion was no longer a child—indeed being the age when most girls in that period were either married or embroidering their wedding clothes—had weighed a little too heavily on her authority. She had said, 'Do this, my child,' where it had been wiser to say 'Will you, my dear?' She was keen-sighted enough to see that the girl would not come to her for her pleasure, and being sincerely attached to her, decided to try other means of wresting her from that beleaguered garrison

which she was pleased to consider Garth had become. Deciding the moment was good, she opened fire on the Admiral.

'Let Marion go up to Constance a spell, or get Constance to come here. A beautiful girl like that should not be married off-hand to a country squire.'

'Married!' said the Admiral, aghast. 'Who's talking of marriage, pray? Not the child herself?'

'Marion has never even thought of it,' said the lady quietly. 'That is the way you have brought her up.'

'All the better,' replied the Admiral with a look of content. Then the heavy brows drew down at an unaccustomed idea. 'Beautiful? Marion beautiful? Nonsense!'

'It were just as well Marion did not hear you say so, or the men fishing in the Channel for that matter,' icily remarked the lady.

The thought was new to the Admiral, who had long ago settled his mind to the fact that however adorable his child might be, beauty was not her lot.

'Her chin is a trifle long,' mused the lady, 'her nose a trifle short. But somehow each makes the other right. 'Tis a straight little nose. She has no colouring, it is true, and her hair is rather spoiled, bleached in parts, through exposure to the sun. But she has the Penrock eyes and air.' The lady drew herself up. She had been a noted beauty in her youth.

The Admiral pish'd and pshaw'd at regular intervals during his sister's recital. 'Why, even Elise says——' he began gravely, watching her.

'Elise!' cries Mistress Keziah, fanning herself with great energy. 'I pray you, brother, do not mention that young person to me just now. I have more to say about her anon. And now, sir,' rising and dropping a state curtsey, 'I will bid you good night.'

And so the old lady swept off to her room.

Between Mistress Keziah and Elise there had been war from the beginning, and only Marion's tact had saved an open breach before her aunt's visit came to an end. The Admiral, watching the sparring of his sister and his ward, and noting how shrewdly the young girl delivered her blows, had been greatly entertained and amused. But the night before she left, Mistress Keziah was closeted a long time with her brother, and when she sought her own chamber the man's chuckles had ceased.

For a long time he sat smoking over the dying logs. Then as he rose and knocked out his pipe, he looked at the portrait of his wife, hanging above the mantelshelf.

'If thou hadst not gone, sweetheart,' he said, the grim old face sorrowful,

'all this had been changed long ago.'

CHAPTER III
A LETTER FROM KENSINGTON

When Marion told, at supper, the story of Jack Poole's arrest, the Admiral had no pity whatever to show. If there was one failing about which he was merciless, it was a sympathy with the rebel cause. The truth might be, as Marion guessed, that his heart was sore for Poole's folly in joining Monmouth's standard, for Jack and Bob Tregarthen had more nearly touched the inner circle of the life at Garth than any other of the villagers; but he gave no sign of it.

'Poole has made his bed, and he must lie on it,' he said, slicing at the collared head. 'And all the more pity for his mother.'

'And Charity Borlase,' softly put in Marion. 'Poor girl!'

'He not only made his bed,' remarked Elise, 'but he turned it when he escaped from Bodmin gaol. 'Tis bad enough to make a bed, but to turn it is sheer folly. Defying fate, I say.'

The lack of sympathy in the girl's tone nettled Marion. Indeed, the words were more than unsympathetic; behind them seemed to lie a touch of hardness, of calculated malice, as if on the whole Elise was pleased at the fisher-lad's detention.

Marion's grey eyes looked hard at her across the table. Something had lately seemed to emerge like a cloud that blurred her old regard for Elise, an instinct, hitherto sleeping, rising to respond to her aunt's criticism of her. And Marion was quite unaware that the sharp-eyed French girl was conscious of a subtle change in the attitude of her friend.

More than once Elise had heartily wished Mistress Penrock had never darkened the doors of her guardian's house. She had had overmuch of Aunt Keziah, more than Marion knew. Elise was genuinely fond of Marion. She had never felt more attached to her than at the present moment, in the relief of the elder lady's departure; but the demon lurking in her heart nevertheless singled out Marion as a point of attack; and Elise knew better than any one else just where to strike. Here was a chance of paying back on the niece the snubs she had received from the aunt.

In the short silence that fell after Elise's remarks, Marion had a sudden

vision of the look her aunt would have cast on the speaker. How nearly her own expression resembled that of the old lady at the time Marion did not know, but Elise saw it and her mouth tightened. The Admiral, with his sister's warnings fresh in his mind, glanced at his ward sitting there in her elaborate gown that contrasted so much with Marion's. (For though Marion had taken a keen interest in her gowns since the French girl's arrival, she had a naturally simple and rather austere taste.) The Admiral considered the girl afresh. It was not that Elise's skin was unpleasantly sallow, or her features too sharp; but there was something in the expression of the face that made it seem so. As Mistress Keziah had said to her brother when he spoke of the 'poor girl's' looks, 'Tut, tut, brother, where are those sharp eyes of yours? 'Tis not her face. Her face is well enough for a Frenchwoman. All Frenchwomen are yellow. What's wrong with Elise's face is Elise.'

Though neither knew it, the same thought was passing through the mind of father and daughter.

'It was a very great pity that Jack did not get aboard the *Fair Return* sooner,' Marion went quietly on. 'She's bound for Virginia, I think, and Jack would have been well out of the way.'

'So you are on his side, as well as Roger?'

Marion started and looked again, harder than ever, at Elise. The French girl's face was set, and a malicious gleam shot from her eyes. The Admiral gave a glance over his shoulder, but the servant was gone to the buttery for more ale.

'I said not Roger was on his side,' said Marion, in her usual even tones.

Elise, angrier than ever in the face of Marion's calm, threw all discretion to the winds.

'But he would have tried to save him had you not stopped him.'

Here the Admiral turned his eagle look full on Elise. 'Not a word before the servants,' he said sternly.

The man came in as he spoke, and filling his master's tankard took his place behind his chair. A dark flush mounted to Elise's face, but she said no more. Presently Peter placed the pudding and custards and went out.

'Was there any one else with you when you saw Poole's arrest?' suddenly asked the Admiral of his ward. He had been thinking a little while Marion, in her tranquil way, showing no sign of uneasiness, had gone on talking of ordinary affairs.

Elise, taken off her guard by an unexpected question, stammered slightly. 'I, sir? I never said...' Then faced by her guardian's penetrating eye. 'No, sir.'

The Admiral 'humphed' and turned to the pudding. Marion was silent. Then after a pause, in ominously quiet tones he spoke again. 'Tell us once more exactly what passed, Marion.'

The colour came and went in Marion's face as she obeyed. 'It was not that Roger was on anybody's side, sir,' she said at the finish. 'But Roger always had a great kindness for Jack, as I truly have, as we all have, and he was thinking of the boy, not the party.'

'Of course, of course,' came the Admiral's deep voice in hearty assent. 'Roger Trevannion cares neither for Rebel nor Loyalist, Catholic nor Protestant. All he cares for is to be a sailor.'

Her father's words at once dispelled Marion's lurking fears concerning his attitude to Roger, and her face relaxed a little. Then looking up at Elise she saw a peculiar expression in her eyes, and a dim sense of foreboding assailed her.

There was silence for a few minutes. The man at the head of the table was wearing a look his fellows on the bench knew well. His eyes grew round and hard, as if he had borrowed blue granite marbles for the occasion. Marion, fearing a storm, cast about for some excuse to leave the table. While she was pondering, her father spoke.

'What I cannot understand, Elise,' he said, obviously trying to soften his voice, 'is how your father's daughter comes to have such ways. He was never crooked. He could not be. You know full well, as well as I, the truth of what I have just said concerning the direction of Roger's interests. You are shrewd enough.'

The ugly colour flushed the girl's sallow face again, but she said no word.

The Admiral, staunch loyalist as he was known to be, lowered his voice again, glancing at the closed doors. 'From what we have seen here of the results of that miserable rising, you also know as well as I that such words as you spoke of Roger, overheard by the domestics, breathed abroad and strengthened, as is the way of idle tales, are enough to send the lad to the gallows. Were you one of Jeffreys' agents, well and good. Were you not of the family, well and good. All's fair in war, folk say. But, out of idle malice to give away the life of one's own people—Roger Trevannion is almost as my own son—s'death, girl!' the Admiral's fist smote the table, and his voice slipped its leash, 'how comes a de Delauret to act thus?'

Marion sat aghast, trembling.

'Father,' she implored, distressed and embarrassed at the outburst. Never before had she heard the Admiral speak thus to his ward. But before her father could say anything more, Elise rose from the table, tears in her eyes.

'I am sorry to have offended you, sir,' she said. 'And if my presence is irksome——'

The man stirred uneasily in his chair. He could never abide the sight of women's tears.

'Tut, tut—there's no call for weeping. Sit down. We'll say no more about it. Let us have some more of that pudding, Marion.'

Elise wiped her eyes on her lace handkerchief and pulled awkwardly at its border.

'A little more conserve, Elise,' said Marion gently. '"Tis your favourite, you know.'

The awkward moment passed. The Admiral poured out a little wine for the ladies, and calling 'The King!' drained his own glass.

Presently Marion rose, and the two girls, leaving the Admiral to finish his bottle, went into the hall, which served as a general sitting-room. The little drawing-room above had never been used since my lady's death. According to the wishes of the Admiral that apartment had never been invaded by 'the children.' It remained exactly as in the last days of its mistress, with the little card box and the sugar-plum box on the small table by the high-backed chair, and the work frame with its needle, now sadly rusted, where the fair fingers of the lady of Garth had left it. The servants used lovingly to say that their master went to pray there; and certainly he had been seen to come out with a suspiciously dim look in his honest sailor's eyes.

The evening was soft and warm, full of spring airs, and the doors and casements of the hall were set wide. Without a word Elise settled herself in one of the broad mullioned window seats and took up the embroidery of a petticoat she had in hand. Her mouth was tightly set, her eyes over bright. Marion, her thoughts all criss-cross in her head, like Elise's fancy stitches, sat down at the spinet. She found a relief in drawing out the tinkling airs, and oddly to her as she sat came a dim memory of her mother in a rose-coloured gown sitting on that same stool, playing, when her little daughter, her 'sweet baby,' was taken in to kiss her good night. A wave of loneliness surged over her, and finding her fingers, turned her tunes into sad ones. For the first time she realised that her aunt's presence, while appearing in the nature of a trial, had been a support whose need she had only just begun to realise. She suddenly felt very young, very inexperienced, very forlorn. There was an indefinable change coming over the house, as shapeless as the first wisps that fore-ran the grey sea fogs of the coast. The sad tinkling airs went on and presently drew the Admiral from his bottle.

'Mawfy, Mawfy,' says he, pulling aside the curtain that hung over the dining-room door, 'if you go on much longer I'll be calling to be measured for my shroud.'

Marion smiled and turned into a livelier key but before she had played many bars a door opened to admit Peter bearing a salver.

'A letter, sir,' he said. 'Zacchary found un waiting down to the coaching house to Lostwithiel, sir.'

The Admiral gave a glance at the superscription, then broke the seals.

'Our fair Constance, if I mistake not. Let us see what she writes.'

In a few minutes he laid the letter down with a broad smile.

'None of the Penrocks can write,' he observed, 'and Connie was ever the worst. Her brother has somewhat amended himself since he became his daughter's fellow pupil, but Constance has not had that advantage. Still, the letter has the great virtue of brevity. Read it, Mawfy.'

'Deere brother,' wrote the lady, 'the cumming of your letter was a grate occation of rejoysing for me, I nott having scene your writing this menny years. I am greaved to deny your wish to vissit Garth, but I doe dessire that my littel neace Marion should comme and stay at my house for a space. It will give me grate joy and somme to her I doupt not. I will promisse shee is dressed,—Your trewly loving sister,

CONSTANCE FAIRFAX.'

KENSINGTON, *this 29th of March.*
For my deere brother, thes.

'Oh,' said Elise, as Marion laid down the letter. 'How delightful for you, Marion! London! Balls, the play, the gardens, music. Even, I suppose,' she wistfully added, 'the Court.'

Elise seemed certainly to have recovered from her chagrin, and Marion's heart warmed to her for the unselfishness of her words. The Admiral, standing before the chimney, his favourite place both summer and winter, looked curiously at the French girl and then at his daughter.

'Well, Mawfy, now I suppose you be all of a bustle to forsake your old father and this deadly dull place?'

Marion instantly came and clasped her hands round her father's arm. True to her character, she had made no great sign of the delight the letter had given her.

'Do you want me to go or not, Father?'

'What I do mightily like,' chuckled the Admiral, 'is what Constance says about your dress. Doubtless we are half-clothed savages, here at Garth. Yes, my dear, I think you should go. Go and learn to drop a grand curtsey and hold a fan with a languid air and take on that look of boredom your Aunt Keziah has to such perfection. Never again cheat Zacchary of his saddling to ride Molly barebacked; never again come flying across the garden to leap at your father's neck.'

'Father!' An arm stole up towards the said neck. 'I won't ever leave you if

you talk so. All the same, I think perhaps I ought to learn some of these things.'

'But certainly she should go!' cried Elise from her window seat. 'Such an excellent opportunity of becoming a lady.'

'Faith! I never thought of that,' drily put in the Admiral. Elise bit her lip.

At that moment the door opened and Victoire, the French girl's one-time nurse and present maid, came with the glass of milk she considered it the nightly duty of her charge to take.

'Only think, Victoire,' cried Elise, 'here is an invitation from the Lady Constance for Mistress Marion to go to Court!'

'To Kensington,' laughed Marion. 'How your thoughts do run on Courts, Elise!'

Victoire's black eyes snapped at the speaker. She was a dark-skinned, vivacious woman, bearing the look of the French peasant without the heavy features that mark that class. Her devotion to her *enfant* was of an absorbing nature, and came nearer that of confidante than waiting-woman. Marion she treated with a servile deference that was far from the honest humility of the Cornish serving folk.

If Marion had probed her thoughts she would have known that she thoroughly disliked Victoire. But Marion had accepted Elise for her friend in her childhood's days, and (until her aunt had somewhat unsettled her mind) had remained loyal in spite of the drawbacks of the French girl's temperament and character, and for her sake had tolerated Victoire. Frankly, Elise had puzzled her, but Victoire had puzzled her a hundred times more. She refused to discuss her with her own thoughts. And of course Victoire, being a shrewd woman, was aware of the feeling that lay behind Marion's manner towards her. As a result, she became increasingly servile, constantly trying to remind Marion that this person in her household was the poorest of French servants, and that Marion was mistress and heiress of a great house and name.

'But, Madame, how truly excellent!' she cried. 'Madame will certainly go?'

'Yes, I think I shall go,' said Marion quietly.

As the Admiral's curious glance shot towards Elise, he caught a look that passed between his ward and her maid. As the latter left the room the Admiral stepped out on to the terrace.

'How delightful for you, Marion,' said Elise again, as the old man's stumping tread sounded on the stones.

Marion was staring absently out of the window. After Elise's words had died away she became aware of them echoing in her brain, all blurred and mixed up with the magic sound: London. Waking from her day-dream Marion spoke, her fingers on a straying branch that climbed up the woodwork of the casement. 'It is now a long time since you yourself were in London. You have never said

much about it. Did you see any of the gay sights while you were waiting for my father to come and fetch you?'

The Admiral's tread sounded coming nearer. There was no reply from the girl in the other window seat. Marion was aware of a slight movement, and then a peculiar stillness, as if her companion was forcibly restraining further motion. Marion glanced over her shoulder and then swung round. On Elise's face was a strange hunted look which gave way to a sorrowfulness that sat strangely on her girlish features. Startled and puzzled, Marion was groping for the right word to say, when the Admiral's figure darkened the window. At the same moment Elise dropped her scissors; and when she was settled in her seat again her face wore its usual expression. The thought crossed Marion's mind that the look had been caused by a sudden homesickness and memory of distant days—France; of her dying father, perhaps. Again her heart softened to the girl.

'What did we do?' said Elise, biting her thread. 'Oh, we did not do much.'

'Come, Marion,' called the Admiral, 'are you so wrapped up in your dreams you have forgotten me already?'

Marion slipped out. It was the nightly habit of the two to wander in the garden after supper. She found her father revolving plans for her immediate departure, and, her thoughts leaping forward to meet the future, the consideration of Elise's affairs left her mind.

For close on an hour the two paced to and fro, and then, finding that Elise had retired, Marion went to her own room. Her sad mood of the earlier part of the evening had disappeared, her apprehensions flown. A bright vista shone before her wherein no mist of doubt was suffered to live. She found the housekeeper, who had combined her own duties with those of waiting-woman, standing by the dressing-table, ready to brush her hair.

'Curnow,' she said as she closed the door, 'you will never guess what has happened. Just try.'

Meanwhile down in the garden the Admiral was solemnly stumping the length of the terrace. The light went softly out of the sky and gleamed on the face of the Channel far below. The scent of the furze, in full bloom, came up from the headland, and over the trees behind the house a slip of a new moon showed.

The serenity of the evening was lost on the old sailor. He was musing on two problems, puffing at his pipe.

What had Elise been doing alone down at Polrennan, on the other side of the water, to-day? That was the only spot whence Poole's cottage, hidden by the winding valley from the sight of Garth, could be seen. And why were she and Victoire so anxious to get rid of Marion?

The night had fully come, and the house was in darkness before the Admiral

turned indoors.

CHAPTER IV
ROGER TREVANNION

There is something of peculiar brightness in the dawn of the day following an evening of good news. Old folk and young alike confess to the drowsy joy of that hour, and when the person in question is a girl of seventeen, who has never even crossed the county border, and is now bound for London and moreover lives in an age when to travel thither from Cornwall is as great an adventure as a journey to the East Indies would be some half dozen generations later, then truly there is an unearthly radiance in that first morrow's dawn.

Marion turned lazily on her pillow, dimly aware that something unusual had happened. For a few seconds she lay inert, then heaved a great sigh of content. She remembered. She threw her arms out on the coverlet and smiled. Springing out of bed, she drew back the window curtains and opened the lattice.

A short time later a figure in a white cotton gown, with blue ribbons in her hair, stole lightly downstairs.

It was Marion's loved duty to make the toast for her father's morning tankard. A confused sound of voices came from the kitchen as she crossed the hall, and ceased suddenly as she opened the kitchen door. Two of the serving girls and a milking maid were there; it was easy for Marion to see from their faces that she had been the subject of their chatter.

'Marnin', Mistress Marion!' came in chorus. The girls stood and stared in a stupid sort of way, their great rosy hands wedged on their hips, sleeves and petticoats tucked up for work.

'Us 'as just heard, Mistress Marion, as you be a-gooin' away to London,' said one of them, after a pause. They stared afresh.

'Us ain't niver zeen afore a lady as wor a-gooin' to London, Mistress,' respectfully remarked the milking maid.

A ripple of laughter ran over Marion's face as she stood, her back to the girls, cutting a piece of bread at the trencher. Evidently she was to be a nine days' wonder. For that matter, she had the promise of being a nine days' wonder to herself. 'Is it I?' ran her thoughts. 'Is it really I?' And if the domestics stared now, what would they do when she came back with new gowns and laces, and

her hair dressed in a new way; and, she hoped, that indefinable something in her manner that had made them gape at Mistress Keziah, and peep out of doorways at her, their fingers on their lips?

Until her going was decided on, she did not know how much her aunt's talk had awakened a desire to see the world of men and women. Now she was going to see it, as Elise had said—plays, music, the Court. She smiled as she trimmed her piece of bread. Then the voice of one of the wenches roused her to a forgotten sense of duty.

'A bain't niver——'

'Zora,' said Marion, swinging round, 'it is past five o'clock. I can hear Spotty now calling to be milked. You must remember that the cows don't know I'm going to London.'

'Ees fay, so un do sure, Mistress Marion. A told Spotty meself. First thing a did, Mistress. I says to she, I says: "Do ee know Mistress Marion be a-goin' to London?" And her kind of said: "'Er bain't, now, sure!" her did. I allus tells Spotty. A told un when Simon Jibber come a-court——'

'Zora, go at once to your work! Millie and Sue, if you haven't anything to do, I must inquire of Mrs. Curnow of your duties.'

There were no hearers left for the end of Marion's sentence, and it was fortunate for them, for with her last words in came the housekeeper from the dairy, carrying a great bowl of clotted cream.

Her father's toast made, her own breakfast of bread and milk partaken of, Marion set herself to the little duties of the day. Elise, she learned from the housekeeper, was in the throes of one of her periodic headaches, concerning which, it must be confessed, our fair Marion was rather unsympathetic. The young mistress of Garth had never known what it was to be ailing. For all her delicate cheeks, she was as healthy and robust as Zora herself. She got slightly impatient about Elise's migraine, and when the sufferer emerged from her retirement, full of the petulance that generally succeeded her attacks, Marion, in her mental poise of perfect health, did not find it easy to make allowances. Indeed, the only quarrels that rose between them, the only swift, straight-out blows Marion had ever been known to give, seemed to be reserved for these occasions.

Marion went dutifully to her friend's room, and talked with her a few minutes, feeling as usual her impatience arise at Elise's martyr-like tones. Presently, saying she must confer with the housekeeper about the dinner, she went below again.

Dinner was at twelve o'clock, as was the custom of the day, and supper came at five or six. At nine o'clock the household was abed, for it was considered a shameful thing not to be up with the sun. These two meals being the sole fare for the day, were of a generous order, and Marion thought it nothing unusual

when the housekeeper told off on her fingers the items for dinner: a dish of prawns, a marrow-bone pie (and the good things that went into that pie!), a pair of fat fowls, a fore-quarter of lamb, and a sirloin of beef; a spiced pudding with brandy sauce, a gooseberry pie, and some little tarts made with conserve, that Victoire had introduced to the household.

Having satisfied herself that the cooking was in a satisfactory way, Marion went into the still-room, to see to the straining of her gooseberry wine. About ten o'clock she mounted to her own chamber and shut the door. A serious business was now afoot. The early joy of the morning had subsided to an under-current of secret pleasure, but even that bade fair to be destroyed when she turned out the contents of her clothes chest. Her going had been settled by the Admiral for Thursday. To-day was Tuesday. There was no time even for Victoire's skilful fingers—and Victoire was better than most sempstresses or tailors—to make her another gown. Marion turned over the laces that had been her mother's, the ribbons that were her sole ornament. Her best embroidered bodice she looked at with a dissatisfied air, and then sought her father, who was casting up accounts at his desk.

'Father,' she said somewhat ruefully, 'I had no idea what a great many things I haven't got. I don't know what Aunt Constance will think of such a niece.'

The Admiral considered his daughter at length. "Tis certainly a problem, but I should not mind laying long odds Aunt Constance will find her niece fair to middling. For the rest, her father is taking her, and he has a purse heavy enow to stand a new gown, I trow. Now take your hat and come across to the far pasture with me. I hear Sukey's got a fine calf.'

Dinner time passed, and still Elise did not leave her chamber. Marion went again to her door, and finding she was asleep sought her own room. She seated herself at her chamber window, a piece of lace and a mending needle in her hand.

It had been an eventful week, a week unequalled in her simple life; it had opened with the bustle of her Aunt Keziah's departure; a prodigious bustle that, for the lady had elected to travel in state, with six horses to her coach, a couple of out-riders and her page on the step. Marion and Zacchary had ridden on either side the chariot as far as Lostwithiel, and Marion felt she would always have an affectionate memory of the fine old head thrust from the coach as she had turned her chestnut homeward. Coming back, the house had seemed for the first time somewhat lacking. Wearisome as her demands on her niece's liberty had been, the old lady had nevertheless brought an added interest to the girl's quiet life, and, as she had intended, successfully sown the seeds of unrest.

The next day Marion had met Roger on the headland, and later saved him from the folly of championing Jack Poole. Then had come the letter, the dazzling,

bewildering prospect of her aunt's house in far-away London opening inviting doors to her. How Roger had scoffed at the idea! Marion smiled and sighed in the same breath. She felt great uneasiness at the thought of leaving Roger, so headstrong and foolish, to act as he chose, to mix himself up with all the rebel factions of the county if the fancy pleased him.

She stitched away at her lace, a look of unusual gravity on her face. Her thoughts had now wandered to Elise; and in spite of the kindly feelings Elise's later behaviour had evoked in her, she could not dispel the sense of foreboding her words at supper had aroused. Nor could she quite forgive her. Roger had been the playmate and sole companion of her childhood for many years before Elise came to Garth. The bond of the boy-and-girl intimacy was of a far stronger nature than the tie of friendship between herself and Elise. In fact, if Roger had not gone away to school and left her sorrowing and lonely, it is probable that the friendship between herself and the French girl would never have ripened at all.

Memories of her childhood days with Roger came up from the early years; the thought of his unswerving loyalty, when she had done things he did not like and he had taken the blame himself; of the boats they had builded together and sailed on the duck-pond; of the hours he had sat by her in the window seat, when she was learning her stitches, and talked and told her stories—always of the sea; of the battles they had had concerning the riding of the colts—'You see, Mawfy,'—she could see him now, a clumsy, thick-set figure of a boy, his sturdy legs planted apart—'you haven't got a brother except me, and your father's no good at riding now, poor old man, so I've got to look after you. And I shan't let you ride Starlight till I've tried him better. If he's going to throw somebody—and he looks like it—I'd rather he threw me than you. I know just how to fall on a place where it doesn't hurt. And you don't. It's no good saying you do, or anything of that sort. I just shan't let you ride Starlight.'

Then, when she had argued and sulked: 'You look much nicer when you're smiling, Mawfy. You've got such a funny face.'

'My hair lies down, any way!' was her unfailing retort on personal questions, 'and I don't look like a heathen black-a-moor.'

Marion laid down her needle, with tears not far from the smile in her eyes as she remembered. In Roger's black thatch of hair there had always been a lock somewhere about the crown stiff as a broom handle, which defied all efforts at persuasion on the fond mother's part. One day Marion had taken a piece of dough from Curnow's kneading-pan, and plastered it in a thick cake over the unruly patch. The dough had hardened and refused to be removed, and Roger had gone about many days wearing this tonsure. In the end (the day being Saturday, and the question of church arising) Marion had worked at the stiff cake and brought it off, plentifully set with hairs, at the sight of which her own tears had dropped.

'Never mind, Mawfy,' Roger had said, between his yells, 'I don't really mind. And perhaps you'll be pretty some day. But I don't care if all my hair stands up. I knew a sailor who wore all his hair standing up. Harder than mine.'

'Oh, Roger, Roger!' said Marion softly, her needle suspended as she stared out over the garden. 'What a dear child you were!'

Then, uncomfortable fact, Roger had grown up. Each time he had come back from Blundell's he had been different: rougher, noisier, not knowing what to do with his strength that was coming on him, given to saying and doing awkward things; with a loudly voiced scorn for girls (in Elise's presence) that disappeared when the two were together; for Marion was Marion, and, like his mother (and no other) set apart in his boyish thoughts.

And all through his growing youth, toughening every year just as an ivy stem toughens and becomes a tree trunk, ran that one desire to be a sailor. Thwarted, it had merely bent another way, and grown stouter for the opposition. That the thwarting was not good for the boy, Marion knew instinctively, as her father knew from experience, and failed not to say so to Mrs. Trevannion. 'You're wrong, Ma'am,' he had said, striking the stones of the Manor porch with his stick. 'Roger's got a sailor's blood, and he'll go to sea. If you won't let him go, he'll run away.'

'No,' said the lady quietly, 'he won't do that. He has promised.'

The old Salt Eagle glared under his pent-house brows. 'Women are queer folk. To make a lad promise that, and continually bid him to wait, knowing all the time you have not the slightest intention of ever letting him go! You will have only yourself to thank if he flings himself hot-headed, in desperation, into some political bother. We live in sorry times, and the country's seething underneath like one of yonder Dartmoor bogs beneath its cap of green slime. And a boy who is discontented is easily drawn into trouble. And now I'll bid you good day, Ma'am.'

And so the old sailor had stumped off, with sorrow in his heart under his rage. He had never had a son, but had fate been kinder to him, he would have been proud of a boy like Roger Trevannion.

Her father's fears were Marion's also, and in the light of experience had been amply justified. That 'miserable rising,' as the Admiral described the Monmouth Rebellion, had stirred the green smooth surface of the bog of unrest, and the black depths still bubbled. The Lord Chief-Justice Jeffreys had come out to the West to hold his 'Bloody Assize,' the punishment meted out by Kirke's Lambs after the battle of Sedgemoor not being deemed sufficient. Jeffreys, doing his work of extermination of the rebels, with one ear listening to the desires of his own foul heart, and the other bent on distant Whitehall, whence James II. smiled approval and murmured encouragement, saw to it that his work was well done.

His spies were everywhere, from the White Horse of the Danes in the Mendips to the fishing coves of Land's End. And the net he cast in this way was of the finest mesh. Cornwall was mainly Protestant, and it was more on the grounds of dislike for a monarch who insisted on the observance of the Catholic religion, than allegiance to the youth who led the Protestant rebellion against him, that some of their numbers flocked to Monmouth's standard. The Westerners had had ample cause to rue the day before ever Judge Jeffreys set out on his tour of death. The rebellion had failed, their young lads dying with it in the marshes of Sedgemoor; and Monmouth, their hero and hope, had fled for a coward, and earned the reward of his deeds. And now their lusty cries of: 'God bless the Protestant Duke!' had given way to the silence of unreasoning fear. The country folk had not time to dry their eyes for their sons who would never return, before they were opened wide in horror at this new danger for those who were left. The danger menaced (and touched) high and low alike. Men talking in taverns or at the cross roads on the events of the rising, talking, as they thought, with friends, were haled up the next day and hanged, for the love they bore to Monmouth. It was not necessary even, in some cases, that they should speak the word that showed they were against the Catholic king; a look sufficed; they hanged just the same. Here and there a man who was suspected was found rich enough to pay the Lord Chief-Justice the price of his life. But not many were so fortuned; and before the assize in the West was over, men had learned to distrust their lifelong friends, and to be afraid, going home at night, of their own shadows; and women stilled their crying children with the merest whisper of Jeffreys' name.

Jeffreys had returned to London with his triumphant tale of some hundreds hanged, and many more sold as slaves to the Plantations, and for such loyal service to the Crown had been made the Lord High Chancellor of England.

It had been mainly owing to the Admiral's influence and well-known loyalist views that Garth had escaped suspicion; escaped, that is to say, with the exception of Jack Poole, who, working in a shipwright's yard at Lyme when Monmouth landed, and with plenty of enthusiasm to spare for any cause, such as smuggling or rioting, that ran against authority, joined the lads of Lyme, was taken (not in action) by the loyalists, clapped into jail at Bodmin, and now, in Bodmin again, was awaiting his trial.

Roger had taken no part at all in the rebellion, but his sense of loyalty to his friends would always outride his discretion, as Marion had proved. And she might not always be there to stay his folly.

She sighed, and was laying her work aside, when a quick step sounded on the terrace, and there was a ringing hail.

'Marion, are you there? Curnow said she thought you were above.'

Marion looked out at her casement. Roger was standing just below looking

out at the moment on the shrubbery where two of the stable dogs were trespassing. The youth was, as usual, hatless, and the black head was in reach of Marion's fingers as she leaned out. Roger was aware of a sudden tug near the crown of his head.

'Aie! Aie!' he said, swinging round. 'I thought you'd forgotten that. It still stands up—always will.' The brown eyes looked up affectionately. 'Do you remember that dough cake?'

'I had just been thinking of it, and how I cried when the hair came out. It certainly looks queer, Roger. Let us hope you will begin to grow bald just there first.'

'Most probably I shall grow bald all round it, and leave it upstanding. Never mind. I say, Mawfy, I've——'

'Don't speak so loudly,' said Marion in sudden contrition. 'I had forgotten, Elise has a headache.'

Roger made a slight grimace. 'Put on your habit, and come for a ride,' he said softly. "Tis my last chance. I hear you are going Thursday. And to-morrow I must go down country about some sheep.'

'Good,' said Marion. 'I will only be five minutes. Will you ask Zacchary to saddle the grey?'

As they rode out of the courtyard and turned their horses towards the downs, Marion gave one of her sudden chuckles. 'Do you remember Starlight,' she said, 'and the fights we used to have about my riding him?'

'I remember. He was a vicious brute. I was always glad I bullied you on that score. What has made you remember Starlight?'

'I had a thinking fit this afternoon,' said Marion, 'and all sorts of things came back to me. Things we did when we were children.'

'Ay,' said Roger. 'Do you remember——' And the two went off together on a journey of reminiscences that lasted them, with breathless intervals when the ground tempted a gallop, for close on an hour. The memory of that ride lived long with Marion; in talking of their childhood they had become children again.

On a windy ridge some dozen miles from the house they paused to breathe their horses. Marion looked across the land, all touched with tender green, to the distant Channel.

'I wish Aunt Constance had asked me to visit her at any time but the spring,' she said suddenly. 'And I can't conceive how I shall endure many weeks without the smell of the sea.'

It was the first mention of her approaching journey. The merry, boyish look went out of Roger's face. 'I hate the idea of your going,' he said moodily. 'Who is going to look after you in London, and see that you don't ride Starlight?' A smile came and went, but there was a lingering sadness in his eyes.

'There won't be any chance of riding, I suppose,' said Marion.

'And I hate London, too,' added the young countryman. 'All the troubles in England are brewed first of all in Whitehall.' He looked hard at his companion for a moment, and then back to the distant sea. 'How long are you going to stay?' he asked abruptly.

'I don't know,' said Marion lightly. 'A long time—years perhaps.'

Roger's brows drew together. 'And you have never seen your Aunt Constance. What is Sir John Fairfax like? Who is going to look after you?' he said again.

'I don't know—Roger!' Marion turned in her saddle to face him. 'The point is much more: who is going to look after *you*!'

Roger smiled. 'I do need leading strings and a pinafore, of course.'

Marion's glance ran affectionately over the young giant. 'But really, you know, Roger, I have been rather unhappy about you since the other day at Poole's cottage. If it hadn't been for me, you'd have been in Bodmin gaol now.'

'As well there as anywhere,' replied the youth, his gaze out to sea.

'The nearest road to a vessel of your own lies not through Bodmin gaol. See, Roger, will you promise me to—to be careful?'

The brown eyes looked steadily into the grey ones.

'Careful of what?'

'Why—not to get mixed up in some foolish affair for which you really care nothing.'

Roger roused himself with a laugh. 'I think you have got from the Admiral that trick of turning the tables. Here I was just going to ask you the same thing.'

'*I'm* not likely to bestir myself about political affairs, sir.'

'I hope not. But seriously, Mawfy, I do not like the whole affair—your going, I mean. Your father cannot stay long with you, and then you will be with strangers. Will you promise to let me know if you should be in any need?'

Marion smiled indulgently, then sobered, and looked broodingly across the land again. 'Oh Roger!' she cried impulsively, not thinking at all of herself, only conscious of the little boy grown big at her side. 'I could wish it were all over, and I were back again. I'm afraid for you. Something is going to happen. For days I've had a foreboding. I always know when a storm is coming, and in the same way I know now——'

She pulled herself up. It was not her way to talk at random of her innermost feelings.

'Nonsense, nonsense!' said Roger briskly. 'Nothing ever happens unless you let it. You had a foreboding when I went to Blundell's. And what happened? Nothing! Oh yes—Elise came.'

They looked at each other in silence. Then Roger smiled. 'Come, Mawfy,

'tis my last half hour.'

He gathered his reins. 'I'll race you to the first pasture.'

CHAPTER V
'MY LITTLE NIECE'

Great festivities were afoot in the house of Lady Fairfax in Kensington. The rooms glittered in the light of hundreds of candles set in sconces on the wall; torches were blazing in their iron sockets at the outer door; beyond the garden was a boisterous confusion of coaches and chairs, the chairmen wrangling with the footmen and pages for a place by the gate; and linkboys, their lights aloft, dodged to and fro, casting gibes on their betters and showing an ability born of long practice in evading their blows.

From time to time the doors opened, and footmen bawled for my lady's or my lord's coach. A certain decorum, at these moments, marked the behaviour of those without the gates. Room was made for the vehicle in question, page boys and footmen ran to their posts, my lord or my lady left the house, entered the coach and drove off. And behind them, like water in the wake of a ship, the noisy groups closed in again.

To be bidden to one of the gatherings of Lady Fairfax was a coveted honour. Just how Lady Fairfax came to be the rallying point of a certain section of the Court society, no one knew. She was envied, feted, flattered, caressed. She walked into the Queen's drawing-room as if it had been her own chamber; she would leave the side of the most exalted personage in order to speak to a humble acquaintance, and there would be no change in her manner. She scolded and smiled as she pleased, and, such was the gift of the gods to her, with impunity. Like the Admiral her brother, she made her own course in the world, and next to a good friend she liked best an honest enemy. For the others, whose smile hid a snarl, she had nothing but disdain.

Concerning Sir John Fairfax, a good deal of whispering ran to and fro, mainly from Whitehall and St. James's to Kensington. Exactly what post he held no one knew; that he was party to the secret diplomacy of the Court every one suspected. He was an old sailor, and in the course of his voyages had contrived to gather a vast information about the ports and defences of alien coasts. Moreover, in various parts of the world he had friends whose loyalty was unquestioned.

A great many people were curious as to the nature of the long conversations, without which few days passed, between Sir John Fairfax and my Lord Churchill; but the matter of their parleys was revealed to no one, least of all to Sir John's wife. He was a smallish, grey, wizened man, with a singularly sweet smile; he had a gentle voice and an unfailing courtesy; his wife adored him, principally because he was the one person in the world whom she could neither hector nor coax into doing something he did not wish to do.

Lady Fairfax went from group to group in her rooms, a gracious figure in her gown of black velvet stitched with silver, a scarf of Malines lace across her shoulders, her grey hair dressed high. No one had ever succeeded in defining her charm; she was one of those middle-aged women who made young girls discontented with their youth, and beautiful women dubious of the power of their beauty.

As Lady Fairfax entered one of the card rooms, and looked from group to group, a couple of young gallants sprang from a window seat where they had been in close converse. Seeing them, their hostess beckoned with her fan, and withdrew.

'What means this?' demanded my lady as the two, with deep bows, stood before her. 'Why are you leaving beauty unattended? Do not the feet of the dancers call you? Fie on you, my lord! And you, sir! Your father had known better.'

'It is but for Lady Fairfax to command,' replied the nobleman with another bow and an air of mock resignation.

'But my father, madam,' retorted the other, who was, as a shrewd eye would see, a favourite with his hostess, 'had doubtless greater attractions offered him.'

'Doubtless, doubtless!' smiled the lady. 'There is, however, a story I may tell you some day. Well now, young man, will you find my husband for me? Stay—what is that noise below?'

Some commotion was arising in the hall, and Lady Fairfax, being then at the head of the stairs, went slowly down, her beautiful hand catching the folds of her dress, the young men at her side.

'Say that again, thou girt fool!' a voice with a strong West Country accent was shouting, 'and thou'lt rue the day.'

There was the sound of a lusty smack, and a footman, with his hand to his cheek, bellowed for his ally within. The West Country voice rang out again, and there was the crack of a whip.

'Be this the house of Lady Constance Fairfax or no? And if 'tis, where's her to?'

The speaker, hatless, muddy, his neck-cloth torn, stared about; his knotted fist and weapon menaced the servants who had hastily approached. A few guests

had strolled into the hall, and were looking curiously on. The men accompanying my lady on the stair became aware of a start, and an exclamation. Lady Fairfax dropped her robe and ran down.

'Zacchary,' she said, the group gathering round the countryman falling away at her approach, 'surely 'tis thou, Zacchary!'

The old groom's distressed face changed at the sound of the voice he had not heard for twenty years. He dropped on one knee, and groped for the lady's hand. Then rising, a look of devotion in his eyes, he surveyed her from head to foot.

'I don't allow, Mistress Constance,' he said, scratching his head, 'that you'm changed. But you'm mighty different all the same. But'—his tone altered—"tis the young mistress, my lady. Her's without in the coach yonder, and Peter on the step, and they sons of Belial in the road bean't for letting the coach go by.'

'What! My little niece!' Lady Fairfax turned hastily to the young man at her side. 'I pray you, Master Beckenham, see to this matter without; and you, my lord, if you would look in the rooms above for my husband——'

She needed not to finish her sentence. Master Beckenham followed Zacchary out into the square.

A coach had drawn across the road, a little distance from the entrance. The equipage belonged to my Lord Fetterleigh, who was playing cards within, and the coachman was making it quite clear that until he chose he would not move his coach, his lord taking precedence of the gentlemen whose vehicles were before the gates. As for that outlandish travelling waggon beyond there (his cheek was still smarting from the valiant Peter's whip), it could wait until it was chopped up for—— The harangue was cut short. 'Move thy horses, thou vile wretch!' thundered a voice. 'I will acquaint thy lord of this.'

The light of the torches fell on the face of the newcomer. The coachman, with a qualm, gathered up his reins, and Master Beckenham in his elegant buckled shoes and smart attire slipped in between the hedge and the rear of the coach, and followed Zacchary down the road.

To the accompaniment of Zacchary's heartfelt remarks (sounding to the Londoner like the whinny of a horse) on the vileness of Kensington compared with Cornwall, Beckenham made his way to the country coach. He felt a certain curiosity to see the 'little niece.' A few nights ago, visiting Lady Fairfax's box between the acts, he had heard her telling how she had bidden her brother's little maid to come and stay with her a spell, that she might teach her how to set her toes when she grew taller. Lady Fairfax had never seen the child, because of the disagreement between her brother and herself about her upbringing. Here the curtain had risen, and my lady's complacent recital was stopped. Duly reporting this matter to Madam his mother (one of Lady Fairfax's honest enemies), Mr.

Beckenham had been greatly diverted. For that lady and a bosom friend, counting the years on their fingers, with side glances for the unconscious victim in the box, had estimated the age of the 'little niece' as already somewhere in the shadows of the late twenties. Saying nothing, Mr. Beckenham had bided his time, and it pleased him to have an opportunity of satisfying himself on the point.

The loiterers in the road had formed a sturdy group round the vehicle he sought. The coachman on the box, not liking to leave his post, was circling his whip over the heads of the nearest, and adding comments when Peter, body-guarding on the step, failed for breath. The link boys roared with delight. Such amusement did not often come their way. And even the watch, with his lantern and staff, had stopped in his chant of 'Ten o'clock, and a fine windy night,' to listen to the voices whose tones made him at once contemptuous and envious.

Mr. Beckenham doubled his elbows, and calling: 'Make way there! Make way!' in a voice of unmistakable authority, soon succeeded in reaching the door of the coach, Zacchary lumbering at his heels. Honest Peter, in the act of drawing the back of his hand across his overworked mouth, noted his approach, and his eyes brightened.

"Ere be Zacchary and a gentleman, Mistress Marion. 'Ere a be.'

'Lead the horses to the gate,' commanded the young gentleman. 'Hand me your whip, my man.'

With alacrity Peter tendered his weapon, and Mr. Beckenham, thus armed, took up the position of page on the step of the Penrock coach. The loiterers fled before the hissing lash.

At the gate, Mr. Beckenham opened the coach door with a low bow, and offered his hand to the fair occupant. The light of the flambeaux fell on the two faces confronting each other. Marion's hat had fallen off, her gleaming hair fell in disorder about her face. Nervously she looked at the young man as she took his proffered assistance, and murmured a word of thanks. 'Terrified out of her wits,' summed up the youth. 'How on earth comes she to be travelling without an escort?' And a strong indignation against some unknown person seized him.

Meanwhile Lady Fairfax, standing within the doorway, had been peering from time to time out into the night. She was again explaining to the group of guests in the hall that her little niece was coming from Cornwall to visit her. Her brother was doubtless with her in the coach, and had sent Zacchary to the door. Her brother was, unhappily, lame. And Zacchary, poor man, only being accustomed to see one horse at a time, was a little flustered.

Behind the speaker stood a small grey-haired man, whose smile broadened into a chuckle as his wife's 'little niece' hove in sight.

When Marion stepped into the house, Lady Fairfax for once in her life was speechless. About a figure almost as tall as her own a riding cloak was roughly

gathered. The collar fell away from the throat, and the folds of the garment were held by a slim hand to the shoulder. At the scene in the hall, Marion shrank back a second, then stood still.

'My little niece! Is it possible!'

Marion allowed herself to be embraced and drawn into the house. She was vaguely aware of a gentleman with a kind smile, who patted her and called her 'my dear'; of glittering jewels and gay dresses in the background; of the throb of music in the rooms above; of the silent figure of Mr. Beckenham standing at her elbow. Then she looked again at the face before her, and the anger and dismay she had felt at the manner of her arrival melted. In her aunt's eyes she saw her father's. Her face relaxed, and she smiled.

'Did you not expect me then, Aunt Constance?'

'What a voice!' murmured a woman at the back of the hall.

Lady Fairfax gathered the slight form in her arms. 'My little maid!' she crooned. 'My little maid!' Then, holding her at arm's length: 'But—I am speechless! How came you to travel so? But stay. First some food, and you shall tell me.'

She led the girl into a little room off the hall, and while Sir John went himself for wine and cake she took off the cloak and shoes, and held the fair face between her hands. 'My little maid!' she said again. 'I had forgotten you must have grown. Tell me, sweet, one word. Is your father ill? Why is he not here?'

'He is not hurt,' said Marion. 'He——'

'Drink this, my dear,' said a kind voice, and Marion, looking up, saw her uncle at her side. A feeling of warmth and comfort stole over her. 'And I thought I had fallen among thieves,' she faltered.

Meanwhile the men and women who had witnessed the arrival of the 'little niece' were talking about her in the rooms above. As the conversation drifted on to the girl's family, a gentleman strolled up to the group. Underneath the languid pose of the courtier of the day, a shrewd eye would have seen the hardened soldier. 'Did I hear you say Penrock?' he drawled.

'The same. She's the daughter of Admiral Penrock—the old Salt Eagle of the fifties.'

The questioner disappeared and passed downstairs, and with the privilege of old friendship lifted the tapestry curtain and walked into the little room. Sir John and Lady Fairfax sat on either side their guest before the fire. The girl was eating as she talked.

'Come in, Sampson!' called his host, 'and speak to our little niece here. Marion, my dear, here is an old soldier who fought alongside your father before you were born.'

Marion, whose back was towards the newcomer, laid down her spiced cake

and turned in her seat, prepared to see a burly, weather-worn figure. Instead, she was aware of a slight, pale-faced man, dressed with an elegance she had never before encountered, making a low bow. For a second she was startled, then gravely held out her fingers.

'I could not wait one other minute,' said the guest, his languid air falling away somewhat, 'before I had done myself the honour of paying my respects to the daughter of the bravest, loyalest gentleman it has ever been my fortune to know.'

The tears dimmed Marion's eyes, and she could not find a word to say, but she smiled up suddenly into the gaunt face; and the man standing there, who had seen two generations of beauty go by, felt a stirring in his dry old heart.

Here my lady broke in. 'Tut, tut, Colonel! I will not have my niece weep, even at your praise. But for yonder stupid rising still brewing trouble, we should have had my brother with us. Marion has just told us the story. Go on eating your cake, my dear. Take a chair, Colonel. So. Just as the coach was leaving Bagshot, who should come up but the King's Commissioner with a couple of officers behind him, riding hard for the west with urgent duty for my brother, who is magistrate in his parts. My niece, here, knows nothing of the mission but that it was of such urgency, with the Lord Chancellor's will behind it, that the Admiral must needs take another coach and ride back to Cornwall. The two officers escorted my niece here the rest of the way till noon to-day, when there was but the fields of Kensington to cross, and they were doubtless thinking of their dinner at St. James's. The coachman then lost his way, the dolt! and found himself in Chelsey. 'Tis only by good fortune my niece arrived in safety. But'—the lady pressed another kiss on the girl's cheek—'here she is! And she's going to stay a long, long time. Perhaps for years.'

Marion was aware of a vague echo, a vision of a youth on horseback on a windy ridge that smelt of the sea: all of it somewhere in another world and another life she had lived in the long ago. She sighed. For a few minutes the talk went on, the girl paying no heed. Then Lady Fairfax, gathering her lace shawl, rose and dropped a curtsey to Mr. Sampson.

'And now for bed,' said she. 'I will see you all anon.'

CHAPTER VI
A LADY-IN-WAITING

It is said that the unexpected generally happens, and the truth of this was borne home to Marion during her first week in Kensington. She had looked (not without a thrill of delight and fear blended) for an immediate plunge into the excitements of the capital. Instead, she found herself, partly by accident and partly by design, passing from hour to hour and day to day in a state of almost complete seclusion. The accident that led to this state of affairs was due to Lady Fairfax's being a favourite attendant of Her Majesty; Her Majesty elected to find herself ailing on the Wednesday—the day after Marion's arrival—and Lady Fairfax's presence seemed to be the one factor that made the Royal indisposition bearable. Aunt Constance could only spare rime for an embrace and a half-hour's gossip with her niece before her coach was announced to carry her to court. She came home late in the day with the news that change of air was prescribed by the royal physician, and on Friday the Queen's household must move to Hampton Court; and should that atmosphere not prove beneficial, they might go yet further, to Tunbridge or Bath. Lady Fairfax had risked the displeasure of her august mistress and prayed for leave of absence, only to learn that the arrivals of 'little nieces' from our duchy of Cornwall do not find a place in the calendar of events at Court. When our health is improved (it was hinted) we may perhaps find it agreeable to dispense somewhat with our lady-in-waiting. Until then—as Lady Fairfax allowed herself to say, the unfortunate aunt must 'grin and bide.'

So much for the 'accident' that led to Marion's seclusion. The 'design' was due to the cherished plans her aunt had formed—vaguely before her arrival, very actively on the night of her coming—for her niece's success. Lady Fairfax was delighted with her young guest. She was proud of this addition to her family treasures; a veritable jewel, she fondly said. But the jewel must be well set before being displayed to the public eye. To the inquirers visiting the house in Kensington or seeing her abroad, Lady Fairfax smilingly said that her niece had had a trying journey, and must have her beauty sleep—several days' beauty sleep, in fact (during which time it was decreed that my lady's tailor and sempstress should be hard driven). No word of this was hinted to Marion. She accepted the fact of her aunt's duties at Court as an ordinary event, and spent her time wandering about the great house and garden; noting the grandeur of the entertaining rooms, the numerous liveried servants, and the ordered stateliness of everyday life. Her windows looked out on Kensington Square, where she had glimpses of carriages coming and going, of chairmen setting down their burden at the gates, of men and women of such dress and deportment that Marion thought they must surely be the princes and princesses out of some fairy tale.

Kind Sir John Fairfax was concerned for the young lady under his roof. She seemed to him to be moping.

'Everything is for the best, on the whole,' declared his wife. 'I am truly

grieved to leave her so much, but that would not be a loss if you would bear her company a little oftener. You forget the change this life is to the child. What is Garth? A wigwam in a forest. She must needs find her feet before she can run. And run she shall not till she be dressed. Romaine is altering a gown for everyday usage,' the lady went on, 'and then as soon as Her Majesty's *malaise* allows her to free me, we will have a few visitors some quiet night that I may see how she dances. Young Beckenham will not be sorry of the chance, and Sampson, I'll be bound, for all his languid airs, will be glad to make a leg again in a minuet. Then,' Lady Fairfax smiled demurely, 'in another week or two a ball in the honour of the coming of my niece to Kensington. And if you don't like the fuss and the pother of the ball coming on, dear lad, why, get you to Whitehall and talk secrets with my Lord Churchill.'

'You are riding this hobby of her gowns to death!' grumbled Sir John. 'It is bad for the girl. She'll think that nothing matters but fal-lals. And she is too much alone. Can't Her Majesty spare you an hour this evening to take her to a play? Need she be dressed for her first play?'

The lady neatly dropped a kiss on the end of her husband's nose. 'That's for that!' she smiled. 'You have given me an idea. Not to-night, but Monday (Her Majesty has promised me Monday) our little niece shall go to the play. She shall wear her white muslin frock and a rose in her hair; and not a woman in the theatre but will be sick at the thought of the pots on her dressing-table.'

Sir John looked at his wife in despair, then laughed outright.

'Upon my word, Connie,' said he, 'you'd have made a fine general. You lose no chances. You make every hummock into a bed for a culverin. I give it up!'

'But even you,' serenely concluded his companion, 'will agree that she cannot walk into Her Majesty's drawing-room in a muslin frock.'

To do Lady Fairfax justice, she had no intention of burdening Marion with fal-lals, for although in those days women wore most elaborate robes, it was not considered necessary to have a new one for each ball, play, or party they attended. Moreover fashion was a sleepy, slow-moving dame, only rising to bestir herself once in a decade—and not, as is her present habit, setting a new step every year, and making her followers miserable if they fall behind in the march. A ball dress was a veritable 'creation,' made with infinite pains and pride, every stitch carefully put in, the embroideries a triumph of patience and skill (and eyesight), as indeed was all the needlework of those leisurely days, before machine-made imitations undermined its value. Dresses were worn by their owners year after year, and very often a valued gown was personally bequeathed to the next generation.

Lady Fairfax had carefully hidden the slight disdain she had felt for Marion's belongings when her French sempstress, to whom she had sent an urgent

call, came early on the second day after Marion's arrival. Indeed Marion's eyes had watched her aunt narrowly, and the kind-hearted woman had guessed her nervous shrinking when Madame Romaine lifted from her trunk the simple garment made by the Plymouth tailor.

'But, dear heart,' Lady Fairfax had allowed herself to remark, 'where is your mother's lilac embroidered gown? Did not your father give it to you?'

'He never thinks of dress,' faltered Marion, feeling that she and her father were being found blameworthy, 'and—I don't think he could bear to see even me wearing my mother's bodices.'

Lady Fairfax's eyes softened, and a memory came to her of the fair lady of Garth in that one winter when she flitted across the stage of London before she 'buried herself' in the west.

The Frenchwoman meanwhile was sniffing in the recesses of Marion's trunk. 'I have not smelt so great a sweetness, Mademoiselle, since I was a small little one—so—playing in the garden of my uncle in Avignon, a thousand years ago!'

'All my mother's things still smell sweet,' said Marion to her aunt. 'She made her own waters, and grew lavender and roses and all sorts of flowers specially for them. I cannot make them near so well. Mistress Trevannion says my mother was very beautiful, too. But Father will never talk of her, except,' added Marion disconsolately, 'to say I do not in the least resemble her.'

The eyes of mistress and sempstress met over the golden brown head. Marion at the moment was busying herself with another small trunk, and took from it a japanned box.

'I had almost forgotten this, Aunt Constance,' she said. 'Father gave it to me in the greatest hurry, just when Curnow was fastening the boxes. If I had not known his ways, I should have thought he had been angry. But it was just that he did not want me to ask any questions.'

She opened the box with a little gold key. Inside was a length of heavy embroidered silk, worked in cream and gold, on a cream ground, with a straying touch of blue and green. Pinned to the end of the length was a slip of paper.

'Your mother was working this for you, and talking of when you would be grown, just before she died,' ran the words. 'Wear it, my child.' Nothing more.

'That was a very sweet lady,' emphatically said the Frenchwoman as she examined the length, the other two standing silent a space.

'It is most beautiful,' said Lady Fairfax. Then she glanced at the script again, and in spite of Marion's solemn look she chuckled a little.

'"Wear it!" says my lord. "Wear it!" How? Pinned on the front of your bodice? I'll warrant my brother is firmly of the idea he has given you a gown. But there's something else in this trunk—another box——'

Marion fumbled with the lid, and presently disclosed a casket with a velvet lining. Curled in the folds of the velvet lay a necklace of turquoise and pearl.

Marion stood speechless.

'I shall never dare wear that!' she said at length.

Lady Fairfax, with a pleased smile, was turning the necklace about in the light.

'Your mother's too, I remember it. This settles the matter,' she added to the sempstress. 'Mademoiselle's gown shall be cream and gold, with a *soupçon* of the blue of these turquoises. Let it be designed'—she went off into a string of technicalities. 'You will get Master Bingon at once, my good Romaine, and the two of you set to work. I give you seven days and nights for a month's employment. Can you, and will you?'

Madame Romaine glanced at Marion's face. 'Solely for *les beaux yeux* of Mademoiselle,' she briefly replied. 'I cannot, but I will.'

'Good. And bid the little Simone come here for a spell. She can have the small chamber next to Mademoiselle, and stitch at her flounces and petticoats, and perhaps persuade Mademoiselle to wear her new stays.'

Marion laughed. 'I give up the battle from this moment, Aunt Constance. I will even wear the sort of stays you wish. But not,' she added firmly, 'as hard and tight as yours.'

Lady Fairfax complacently surveyed her own beautiful figure in the long mirror on the wall.

'La, la, Mademoiselle,' put in the Frenchwoman, 'il faut souffrir pour être belle.'

'Not that kind of suffering, Madame Romaine!' said Marion, with a touch of her father's dryness that made her aunt smile. 'Mademoiselle de Delauret wears hard stays, and she suffers greatly sometimes, but I have never seen any marked improvement in her looks. But who is this Simone who is coming to mount guard over me?'

Here the door opened and a page boy entered. He spoke to his mistress, who drew him out of earshot of the others.

'Master Beckenham again, my lady. Master Beckenham's compliments, and may he have the pleasure of waiting on your ladyship and inquiring after the health of Mistress Penrock?'

'Did I not tell you what to say should this happen?

'I said it, my lady, and Master——'

'Go and say it again.'

The page boy made a deep obeisance and withdrew.

Lady Fairfax, smiling at her own thoughts, rejoined her niece and the sempstress. Meanwhile Madame Romaine, whose delight at finding a receptive audi-

ence was great, was telling a story about some one called Simone, a protégée of hers whose services in her own house Lady Fairfax had just requested. Simone, it appeared, had been found many years ago on a doorstep in the city—in Crutched Friars—by the Frenchwoman on her way home from a client's house. The sempstress had been minded to pass by—there are always plenty of crying children in the gutters—but she had heard the child babbling in her own tongue. And the kind-hearted woman, whose country was her dear love, picked up the little one, and solely for the sake of *la belle France*, carried her home.

The child, emaciated, almost starved to death, had fallen into a fever and a severe illness from which she had barely escaped with her life, and not altogether, Madame Romaine sometimes feared, with her reason. She had babbled of strange things sometimes, but the memory of her childhood seemed to have fallen off, with all the hair from her head, during her illness. 'She is one of my most valued needlewomen,' declared the sempstress, 'which is why, I suppose, my lady demands her presence here, just as if she were but a chair to sit upon, and no good whatever to me!'

'You have others,' placidly said Lady Fairfax, busy with her powdering box at her dressing-table. 'And I have a certain liking for the little Simone. But of course, if you prefer it—I wish not to drive you hardly—send Alice Hepworthy—but spare us her history. Seven days and nights you have. 'Tis not wise to waste an hour talking of people who do not matter in the least. Marion, my dear,' Lady Fairfax swung round, 'take warning by Romaine, and if ever you find yourself chattering, think of her. She cares not what her subject may be, so long as her tongue may wag. You are an insufferable bore, my good Romaine, with your Simones and your gutters. Begone, you rogue, and let me see your progress soon.'

With a smile and a curtsey the Frenchwoman departed. She counted it one of her greatest privileges to be rated by Lady Fairfax.

Madame Romaine's little French needlewoman took up her abode in a small chamber that opened off Marion's, and when that young lady was not engaged with her aunt or uncle, or the stray visitors she was allowed to see before she was presented to London society, she found Simone Leblanc very pleasant company.

Simone, like Elise, had that instinct for dress which is the birthright of all Frenchwomen and the envy of their Anglo-Saxon sisters. Did Marion require a ribbon in her sunny hair, Simone knew by an unfailing instinct just where the knot should fall, found without a second's hesitation the one spot to place a rose. And when Marion, seeing herself stumble in these paths so easily tripped by the little French feet, was minded to voice her discontent with herself, Simone would reply with her rare smile: 'No, no! Mademoiselle deceives herself. Mademoiselle has great qualities. As for a little nothing like a bow or an ornament, Mademoi-

selle will surely see that it is one's *métier*, the placing of bows and ornaments.'

Marion liked the quiet, grave girl who sat so industriously hemming the flounces for her petticoats and otherwise filling the gaps her over-tried employer left neglected in the programme of Mademoiselle's dresses. Sometimes Marion would take a needle and help her, and they talked of London, Simone offering crumbs for Marion's hungering curiosity of the ways of this new world. Always when she entered the little chamber she would see the small brown head bent over a lapful of silk and muslins, the dainty hand stitching away, the face, with its look of settled gravity and absorption combined, turning at her entrance.

'If she were not so serious,' mused Marion on one or two occasions, 'that little Simone would be a beautiful girl.'

But beautiful or not, Simone wrought exactly the change Lady Fairfax had desired. Marion unconsciously studied the little sempstress's way of wearing her own simply made gowns: a new spectacle this, for Elise's dresses had never been simple. And the grave rebuke in the dark eyes when Marion, on seating herself, adjusted a skirt in an unbecoming way had the effect of subduing the young lady at once.

'I don't know what is the matter with me,' confessed Marion to her aunt. 'Simone makes me feel too large, too clumsy. I haven't got big feet'—she complacently surveyed her projected slipper—'but when Simone walks across a room I think I have. I did not think there was anything the matter with my arms till I saw Simone's glance if I placed them so. Am I very countrified, Aunt Constance?'

'My little lamb,' said that lady with a fond embrace, 'you are finding your feet. Never mind how big they are. They are very well.'

Simone had passed triumphantly the test of the shrewd, watching eyes of Lady Fairfax, who had long ago singled out the quiet girl as being the most deft of the Frenchwoman's assistants. And now, as she saw her coming and going about her niece's affairs, she decided that, considering her as a waiting woman, deftness was the least of her qualities. There was something in the ease of the girl's movements no matter in what company she found herself; something in the way she entered a thronged room on some errand, spoke to her young mistress and went out again; something in the restraint of her speech and the subtle charm of her low soft voice, that made Lady Fairfax congratulate herself again and again on the waiting woman she had found for her niece. And it was a matter of sincere regret in the entire household when Madame Romaine obdurate for once, insisted on her apprentice's return in order to help with the mass of work that was driving the sempstress into an untimely grave. As soon as the load was eased somewhat, Simone might be allowed to return; but in the meantime, excellent needlewomen were hard to find, while waiting women grew in every garden, so to speak. Thus Madame Romaine.

Simone's departure, Mrs. Martin, Lady Fairfax's woman was obliged to find time to divide her care between two mistresses, and visitors coming more and more to the house, Marion's empty hours were few.

True to her promise (being graciously allowed by Her Majesty) Lady Fairfax took her niece on the Monday night to see the play at the theatre near Blackfriars Bridge, Colonel Sampson being the only visitor in the box. When Marion had seated herself, and realised that the box was in full view of the body of the theatre filled with people of fashion, she shrank back in uttermost confusion. Her aunt, serenely surveying the house, nodding to acquaintances and smiling at the stiff backs of her honest enemies, was forgetful for the moment of her niece's predicament. But the gentleman at the rear of the box came to her rescue. Colonel Sampson, slipping round her chair, leisurely placed his elegantly garbed shoulder and elbow on the edge of the box, and leaning down to talk to her, sheltered her from the view of the gossiping folk in the body of the theatre. Marion vowed friendship for Colonel Sampson from that moment.

Then, when the curtain rose, and her companion returned to his own chair, Marion forgot the gay crowd, forgot past, present, and future. Leaning on the edge of the box, utterly unconscious of the fact that Lady Fairfax's 'little niece' in a white muslin dress and with a rose in her hair, was being fully as much regarded as the stage, she gave herself up to the pleasure of her first play. She did not know that her laugh rose here and there the first in the house; she was totally unaware of the horror in her face when the villain of the piece unmasked his villainy. When a duel came to be fought, and swords gleamed out, she half turned and grasped Sir John's sleeve, not daring to see the blades clash. And when the curtain fell, she needed the positive assurance of her uncle and Colonel Sampson (Lady Fairfax being at the door of the box, smilingly and inexorably keeping visitors without) that the men lying there on the stage were not really dead.

CHAPTER VII
SIMONE LEBLANC

Marion was silent in the carriage on her way home from the theatre, and absent-minded at supper. Her aunt presently thought it wise to switch off her thoughts into another channel.

'She will never sleep, that precious baby,' she said in an aside to Colonel Sampson, sitting at her right hand. 'She is living the acts all over again. I cannot blame her. I wept all night after my first play.'

Soon Marion's ears pricked at the sound of the word Garth; mentally she rubbed her eyes and sat up. Colonel Sampson was talking of her father—telling the sort of tales Marion had so often heard when her father and his old friends of the sea met at the friendly board, or when he had fallen back on the parson for audience. And as Mr. Sampson talked, it seemed to Marion that the bored gentleman of fashion completely disappeared and the stern, honest soldier came uppermost.

Marion listened with complacent pride to the hints the speaker gave of her father's bravery and lovable little deeds.

'He was ever prone to acts of generous folly,' the Admiral's sister put in at the end of one of the stories. 'And that reminds me, my dear,' turning to her niece, 'I haven't yet heard one hundredth part of your news from home——'

'You lead such a busy life, Aunt Constance,' put in Marion demurely, 'I don't see how you can ever think of little things like stories about Garth.'

'I lead a most unhappy life!' retorted the lady, 'and I hope when some one writes my memoirs he will be careful to add the fact that I bore my trials right sweetly. But I was going to say—give her some more of that jelly, John—I never had the right story of how your foolish father came to saddle himself with the little French girl.'

'Why,' said Marion, 'let me see now. Elise is the daughter of poor M. de Delauret, you know——'

Colonel Sampson leaned forward. 'Not the de Delauret who sailed in the *Triomphe Noir* to the East?'

'The same. I have heard my father talk of that very ship.'

'Strange, strange!' mused the old soldier, settling back in his chair. 'I never met the gentleman myself, but I was acquainted with Madame de Delauret in the old days, before she was married.'

Marion regarded the speaker with unfeigned interest. 'You knew Elise's mother! Do tell me about her, sir. I could never get Elise to talk about her.'

'But this is intolerable!' cried Lady Fairfax, tapping the table with her slim, jewelled fingers. 'Here I ask for a simple story, and you and my niece go off on a voyage of discovery together. John, my dear, shall we retire to my drawing-room for a dish of tea?'

'You see, Marion,' came her uncle's quiet voice from the head of the table, 'my lady there is accustomed to being (or thinking she is) the person of most importance, saving Her Majesty's presence, in any company.'

The country girl's eyes rested shyly on the lady's face. 'I'm sure no one has

a greater right,' said she.

'That is a very admirable sentiment,' said Lady Fairfax gravely. 'The prisoner is dismissed with a reprimand. Now you may begin your story, leaving out the *Triomphe Noir*.'

In her simple, straightforward way Marion then told what she knew of her father's relationship with the Frenchman and his adoption of the orphan.

'"Twas very noble of Tom to take on such a guardianship,' mused Lady Fairfax. 'But it was also very foolish. Only my brother would have been so blind.'

'How so, Aunt Constance?'

'Because, my dear, from what you say Elise is something of an heiress on her mother's side. Is not that so, Colonel?'

The gentleman assented. 'Madame de Delauret was the daughter of the Sieur d'Artois. Her father, it is true, gave his consent to her marriage with the "penniless Breton cadet," as they were pleased to describe de Delauret, but her family more or less discarded her. Now, however, through the demise of various other members of the family, Madame de Delauret's child must inherit the Artois estates.'

'I still don't see how Father was blind,' persisted Marion.

'Don't you, my dear child? It is this way. If Elise is her mother's heiress to that extent, she is a person of note, in a small way. She should be with the ladies of the d'Artois family. It is to be presumed their antagonism is now dead. *D'ailleurs*,' added the lady drily, 'if Elise is heiress 'twill be for her to pick and choose.'

'M. de Delauret's particular wish was to keep Elise away from French society,' replied Marion.

'But Elise cannot be hid all her life under my brother's greatcoats! She has, I am sure, had a right simple, honest, healthy upbringing. Now she should be brought out to take her place.'

'She ought to be a very charming young lady,' mused the Colonel. 'Of such a mother and such a father. I have ever heard the most noble stories of de Delauret.'

'Who is managing Elise's estates?' asked Sir John, looking up from his walnuts.

'I know very little about that, sir. My father's lawyer has dealings with M. de Delauret's lawyer in France and pays Elise her income, through Father, of course. But that brings to my mind—I had really forgotten—I seem to have forgotten such a lot about Garth since I came here,' penitently put in the young lady. 'The very day we came away Father had a letter from the French attorney, M. Lebrun. He is an old gentleman, it appears, and wishes to retire from his duties, and is shortly to leave everything in his son's hands. The young M. Lebrun I

know nothing about. Neither Elise nor Victoire has ever seen him. But I gathered from Elise's manner she will not be sorry to have dealings with the son,' continued Marion. 'The old gentleman appears to affect her with a particular dislike. Be that as it may, old M. Lebrun is on his way to England, to visit us before he relinquishes his affairs. Father said 'twas rather unwise of him, as his health is very poor—some disease he has—I forget its name—a learned name.'

'Well,' said Lady Fairfax, 'let us hope the learned name will not silence M. Lebrun before he has arranged for the young lady to be taken to Paris.'

'Father has been thinking of a change, I know. Aunt Keziah scolded him a little, I think. You wouldn't believe,' smiled Marion, 'how Aunt Keziah and Elise hated each other.'

'I presume she was otherwise a general favourite?' Lady Fairfax had noted the entire absence of any personal feeling in her niece's recital of the young French girl's affairs.

'Well——' Marion faltered.

'You are much attached to her, I suppose.'

'I was—yes, I am,' said Marion stoutly. "Twas just something she did that angered me.' She took refuge in a general attitude again. 'As for being a favourite—I think—'twas so—except for Roger. Roger could never abide her. Neither could Dick Hooper, his friend from Blundell's.'

'Roger?'

Marion raised her clear eyes to her aunt's face. 'Roger Trevannion, you know, at the Manor.'

There was a brief silence. Marion's brows were straightened a little. She seemed again to hear that sarcastic voice: 'So you are on his side, as well as Roger.' How distant it all appeared! She wondered what Roger was doing—was he allowing himself to get into any foolish scrapes?

Presently Lady Fairfax held up her finger to stop the conversation that had arisen between the gentlemen. 'Hark, d' ye hear?'

The windows were open, and the cry of the watch in the square was distinctly audible.

'Past ten o'clock, and a fine starlight night.'

'To your chamber at once,' she said to Marion. 'We will talk more of this little Elise later.'

As the days went on, Mrs. Martin found herself unable to cope with the double service that had been laid upon her. Moreover the approaching festivities planned in Marion's honour were casting shadows before.

'I think Martin is taking leave of her senses,' grumbled Lady Fairfax one

morning. 'She brought me my best sarcenet petticoat to wear while I showed Hopkins how to make a new sauce.'

'Likely enough she is overworked,' remarked Sir John.

'It comes of allowing a servant to lead an idle life,' declared the lady. 'If she has two ribbons to tie instead of one, her face becomes that of a long stone image.'

'Her face generally resembles a good-tempered gargoyle,' smiled Marion.

'"Tis a pity for a good-tempered gargoyle to become a long stone image,' remarked Sir John. 'Cannot you get that little Simone to return to us? Apart from the question of Martin, if your fear comes true, and Her Majesty goes to the wells at Tunbridge, Simone would be useful in your absence.'

'Hush!' cried his wife. 'A mightily kind fate has decreed that Her Majesty should continue to improve.'

'A mightily kind fate of that order,' drily put in Sir John, 'doubtless has its lap full of those famous powders of the court physician. Don't count on the kindness being lasting.'

'I always disliked Job's friends,' remarked Lady Fairfax. 'Very well, we will try to get Simone back. That is, if our baby does not object.'

'I like Simone,' said Marion heartily. 'It will be pleasant for me.'

The same day Lady Fairfax drove to the house of Madame Romaine, and not only silenced the Frenchwoman's protests with gold and fair words, but brought Simone back with her to Kensington. Simone did not attempt to hide the pleasure afforded her by the prospect of her new duties. A smile broke over her face when she was summoned to the visitor's presence, and learned her wishes. As Lady Fairfax noted the new expression of the grave features, and the light in the dark eyes, her firmly rooted belief that happiness is the greatest beautifier in the world threw out several new shoots. 'She shall go on being happy,' was her inward vow, 'Romaine or no Romaine.'

The sempstress herself saw the look on the girl's face. 'Mademoiselle Marion is the only one of her patrons whom Simone has consented to like,' she remarked, when the girl had left the room to find the necessary objects for her journey. 'She spends most of her time in her so nice little grey shell, that small snail of mine.'

'Tell me again where you found her,' said Lady Fairfax. 'Sir John was asking the other day.'

The two talked together till Simone reappeared with a modest parcel of her belongings.

Simone was more delighted to return to Kensington and the society of Marion than either Lady Fairfax or her mistress guessed. Ever since the first day when she had arrived to stitch Mademoiselle's flounces, a pleasure in Marion's society

had come on her as a surprise: a new sensation. Hitherto Simone had been an incurious, detached watcher of the friendships of others. Now she found herself suddenly flung on to the stage. It had been somewhat of an upheaval, this first attachment of hers.

Marion had no idea of the depth of affection the quiet French girl felt for her. Simone's was a proud and reticent nature, and moreover she had early learned in the school of sorrow the secret of self-restraint. Marion wondered sometimes at the unusual warmth of the dark eyes that would meet her own, and she certainly felt for Simone an ever-growing regard; but a social barrier lay between the two, and Simone was not the one to overstep it.

Meanwhile, as was only natural, the mental atmosphere of her new home was creating in Marion fresh impressions, altering her standards. Her thoughts began to fly out and abroad, instead of roosting peacefully at home. Both Colonel Sampson, who was a constant visitor at the house, and her uncle were studious, thoughtful men; her aunt was a very accomplished woman; and it was a severe check to whatever self-importance Marion had had as mistress of Garth to find that sometimes during the whole course of a meal no subject would be discussed on which she had any knowledge at all. And wherever she went in her aunt's company, new forces were at work.

A week or two after her arrival in Kensington, she had her first glimpse of the city of London. Lady Fairfax wished to visit a tailor in Eastcheap concerning a new riding cloak for her charge. The coach was announced immediately after dinner, and aunt and niece set out for the drive across the fields, by way of Knightsbridge, to the village of Charing.

Marion's delight was unbounded. She had already been taken to Westminster, standing mute at her first glimpse of the Abbey and Houses. Another day she and her aunt had visited Chelsey, and she had seen the river again with its strings of barges and wherries and passenger boats: more people on the waterway than trod the road. She had written a long letter to her father about it, saying that when he came to London the two could sail down the river, so that he might show her London Bridge, and find the shop whence her school books had come.

The coach made its way up the Strand through the Temple Gate into the city. The crowds jostling each other and shouting; the officers of the Guards swaggering by, ready for a brawl if a man so much as jerked their elbows in passing; the flunkeys making way for their lord's coach; the chairmen reviling each other; the glimpses of men and women of the world of fashion in the narrow footway; all this was Romance incarnate to the simple country girl. Then when they reached Ludgate Hill, and the coach stopped for my lady to make a trifling purchase, Marion, alighting after her, stood stock still in amazement. Each shop had its own pictorial sign suspended by creaking chains over the doorway. By

this device a populace for the most part incapable of reading was able to understand the nature of the trade pursued indoors. Marion, wishing to stand and read the riddle of these signs (of which the only remnant to this day exists in the barber's painted pole and the pawnbroker's three balls) was laughingly drawn onward by her aunt.

'My dear,' she said, 'you will have all the apprentices of the city rushing out upon you if you behave in this way.'

Indeed, the prentice boys, with their cry of 'What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack, Gentles? Buy, buy, buy!' were continually in and out of the doors of their shops, and one, spying from within Marion's face of wonderment, was only prevented from seizing an easy customer by the sight of Lady Fairfax's footman towering head and shoulders above the ladies.

From the shops on Ludgate Hill Marion's eyes turned upwards to the climbing walls and scaffolding of the new St. Paul's rising on the ashes of the old. And the country girl, whose love for the fields and lanes of Cornwall, the salt of the sea, and the song of birds in the dawn was one of the strongest forces in her life, began to understand more of that other love—the love of the English for the grey stone buildings of London. She had heard of sailors who had been bred in the sound of Bow Bells meeting with streaming eyes the spires of the city rising above the water when they sailed back after an outlandish voyage and anchored in London Pool. Already she felt that if she visited London again after a long lapse, she would claim it as her own. It was more than a city; something mysterious and eternal. The Great Fire had eaten its way into the very heart of its foundations, and here was St. Paul's rising again on the monstrous scar left by the flames.

In a dream she sat by her aunt's side, and rode down Eastcheap, past the little houses and shops, mostly standing gable-end on the street. It seemed quite fitting that the bells of Bow should be pealing then. In a dream she got out and stared at the new Royal Exchange, another great building fresh born of the Fire. She saw Sir Thomas Gresham's monument, and the huge grasshopper black with smoke which had come, a portent of the spirit of the founder of the Exchange, through all those days of devouring flames.

Then the houses of Lombard Street caught her eye, where Italy had joined hands with England, bringing gold and jewels for barter from a land at the height of her wealth to the barbarian island set about with fog.

Her aunt's voice sounded in her ear. 'This is the richest street in the land, Marion—all money lenders and goldsmiths and wealthy merchants.'

Marion sighed. 'I think London is very wonderful, Aunt Constance. May we not go to the Tower now?'

'Another time, my child, another time.'

As the days went by, several of these excursions took place, sometimes Colonel Sampson and sometimes Simone occupying the spare seat in the coach. Slowly Marion was drawn into the circle of her new life. She no longer felt, as in the first few days of her visit, that the present was a dream, a pageant passing her by; the present became very actively real, and her life on the Cornish hillside grew more and more remote.

CHAPTER VIII
HAUNTED COVE

For three days a thick sea fog had overhung the coast, and the village and harbour of Garth had been swathed from all sight in its grey folds.

It happened that on the afternoon of the third day Charity Borlase set out from her mother's cottage and made her way towards the harbour. Ever since her sweetheart Poole had been carried off to Bodmin gaol again, Charity had found her daily life very difficult to bear. There were plenty of other fisher lads minded to console her, their offers backed by her mother's patronage; but Charity was not a person who could easily change her affections. She kept as much as possible out of sight of the quay with its chaffing, gossiping groups. But there were times when indoor life seemed to be unbearable, and on those occasions she would take her restless unhappiness for company, and seeking the edge of the sea try to find the comfort there that was denied her in her home.

Although the mist was thick, Charity was seaman enough to know that it would soon be lifting, and taking her cloak she went quietly down towards the village. Then, acting on an idle fancy, she turned to her brother's boat that was moored close to the cottage, and began to row herself across the water to Polrennan, the little group of cottages that faced the more important village of Garth.

As she sculled the boat across, bearing upstream a little against the eddying tide, the fisher girl's eyes wandered up the estuary. In the mist she fancied she saw farther up the narrowing creek, on the Polrennanside, a slight figure wrapped in a hood and cloak, walking rapidly towards the river mouth. Standing in the stern, working her oar easily, Charity peered through the mist which was already rising and falling a little in the slight easterly breeze. Again came the glimpse of the shrouded figure, more easily seen this time, and the watcher

nodded grimly as she recognised the trotting gait. She made a swift calculation; realised that if she drove her boat in straight to the shore she would run into the arms, so to speak, of the lonely walker. Charity quietly slipped down to the thwart, took a second oar, and noiselessly rowed upstream. She preferred to land higher up and be at liberty to watch unseen. That so far she herself was unseen she was fairly confident. Only some one as far-sighted as a sailor and, moreover, bred to the half-lights of the sea mists, could have descried her little boat from the farther bank.

As Charity rowed on, her face wore a scornful expression that gave way to a firm intentness of purpose. Although more educated than many of her class, curiosity and superstition had a large place in her mind. But more than curiosity impelled Charity to the course she now took. No one could live in Garth and not know the stories that ran to and fro concerning 'Mademoiselle,' who was disliked partly for her nationality and partly for herself. Charity, loyal and devoted to the Admiral and to her beloved Mistress Marion, and a degree or two removed from her kind, was perhaps the only woman in the village who had refused to share the gossip of the quay. But since the hurried departure of Victoire, for whom the fisher girl had a kind of superstitious dislike, even Charity had thought a good deal of the inmates of the house over the brow of the hill.

Victoire herself had told Mrs. Borlase, who was occasionally pressed into service in times of domestic stress at Garth House, that her old mother in Brittany had been suddenly found very ailing (all this with Victoire's handkerchief to her eyes); and Victoire, seized with contrition on realising that she had not seen her parent for ten years or so, had obtained permission from that kindest of all gentlemen, Monsieur the Admiral, to seek the couch of the sufferer and comfort her declining hours.

'I should think,' said Charity, when her mother had told this sad story, "tis more likely than not the old lady have some gold under her bed.'

'Shame, Charity!' cried her mother (she was eating a piece of pie fresh from Victoire's hands). 'Do 'ee go and pray for a kinder heart.'

'How's her going across?' asked Charity.

'Why, there's her uncle yonder to Plymouth who sent her word, awaiting for un. A French sailor un be.'

'Queer they let un land,' mused Charity.

'And how so shouldn't un? And bearing a letter for the Admiral himself? A black heart you'm getting, my maid, and a black life you'll have. A'd have more pride nor letting yonder wastrel down to Bodmin lie in my thoughts, and honest men like——'

'Now, Mother,' said Charity, her eyes blazing, 'will 'ee be quiet now, Mother? No word of that will I hear.'

All this, and more, reverted to Charity's mind as she rowed up the stream, keeping her eye on the blurred figure every now and then revealed in the mist. At a little shingly beach she sprang ashore and moored her boat unseen.

If there was anything in the tales of the valley, Mademoiselle Elise would bear over the shoulder of the hill at the river mouth, out of sight, as she evidently thought, among the bushes, and drop into a gully a couple of miles to the east.

Just what she did in 'Haunted Cove' no one rightly knew, though folk failed not to hint. It was a foul spot, only fit for landing a boat in quiet weather. There were superstitious tales abroad concerning that creek, and although curious fishermen had watched a strange boat, in the fitful moonlight, make for the rocky mouth, and others had seen the French girl, or her woman, creep into the cove, nothing would tempt them into its wrack-strewn caverns. 'The devil had made his bed there,' they said, 'and 'twas best shunned.' As for Elise, only the love and duty they bore for the Admiral had kept them from denouncing her as a person not untouched by the dark powers. For those were days when anything the unlettered country folk failed to understand was put down to witchcraft or sorcery.

Charity set herself another course than that taken by the French girl, a hard road, only possible for strong limbs and a stout heart. She knew that with good fortune she would arrive at a furze-grown bank hard over the creek before Elise could have reached it from her own side.

Only when her journey was well afoot did Charity realise that she was acting against all the superstitions of Garth. But having set herself to it, she went on. Moreover, Charity could read and write; and it happened that her little Bible was in her pocket.

'I bean't afeared,' she said stoutly to herself, fingering the holy book. 'Once and for all I'll be knowing. For Mistress Marion's sake 'tis only right some one should be sure.'

Kind-hearted Jack had given her the little Bible, and talked of the day when they would stand together before the parson; and Charity, thus drawn to remembering happier days, became sorrowful again, and forgot for the moment the object of her walk.

She climbed the hill, and crossing a little copse of gnarled oaks, made for a gap in the hedge that gave on to the main riding track leading from the heights beyond down to Polrennan beach. She was scarcely through the gap before she heard the 'tlot-tlot' of a horse. The rider seemed to be making inland, climbing the slope from the waterside. Fearful of she knew not what, Charity shrank back into the hedge and would have regained the shelter of the wood; but it was too late. Horse and rider loomed up in the mist and a ringing voice hailed her.

'Charity! Is that you, Charity?'

'Why, Master Roger,' cried Charity, the colour flushing her face in the relief she felt. 'Good afternoon to you, sir.'

Any one else would have replied, in the custom of the village folk: 'Where be gooin'?' And for a moment Charity's heart was in her mouth. Then she remembered that to ask such direct questions was not the way of the quality.

'"Tis rising, I think,' said Roger, idly noting the girl's confusion, and setting it down in his chivalrous way to maidenly shyness. 'And time, too, after three days.'

'Wind's to the east, sir,' replied the girl. 'I thought to-day her'd rise.'

Having dealt with the weather, Roger turned to personal affairs. 'How are you getting on, Charity?' he asked kindly, keeping his horse at a walk.

Not since Marion's departure had any sympathy been meted out to the forlorn girl, and tears rose to her eyes. 'Why, sir,' she stammered, 'so well as may be.'

Noting her downcast look, Roger beat about in his mind for something to say. His dark eyes rested very gently on the bowed head, but no words came to his aid.

'Well,' he said abruptly, gathering his reins,' I must be off. I'm going across to Farmer Penrose, who declares he has got some straying cattle of mine. Good day to you, Charity.'

The girl dropped a curtsey in silence as the horse moved on. Then with a sudden movement Roger wheeled round.

'Keep a cheerful heart, if you can,' he said abruptly. 'There's still a great hope that the lad will be freed. The Admiral is using all his influence with the Governor yonder.' And without waiting for a reply Roger turned and broke into a canter. 'Poor little maid!' he mused. '"Tis hard fortune for her.'

He rode on, keeping to the track, and presently, as the way opened out on to the rough headland, he cast a longing eye towards the Channel. A golden light was breaking through the mist. Somewhere beyond that haze the afternoon was bright and sunny, the sea rocking the boats in her tranquil embrace. Roger never allowed a chance of riding by the sea to escape him; but after a minute's thought he decided to bear on in his present course and return by the edge of the cliffs when the mist would in all probability be cleared away. To ride round the head of 'Haunted Cove'—he smiled at the words—in a mist, was to endanger the safe-going of his horse and perhaps his own life. More than one rash horseman, riding by night close in over the cliffs, had fallen foul of the boulders and overgrown chasms of the gully mouth, and paid with his life the price of his folly.

Meanwhile Charity kept on her way. Somewhere round the shoulder of the hill the French girl was bearing towards her mysterious journey's end. Charity set herself to the stiff climb with all good will, and succeeded in reaching the

head of the creek, and completely hiding herself among the furze bushes that overgrew it, before the slight figure came round the corner of the headland.

Wrapped in her cloak Charity lay motionless on her rough couch. The shrubs, dense with moisture, freely besprinkled her, but she paid no heed. Presently the French girl came in sight. Charity smiled at her gait, so unlike the swinging tread of the country-born. When the tired-looking walker was for a few minutes hidden from sight behind an outstanding group of rocks that barred her view, Charity took the occasion to bend well over the dangerous declivity and look searchingly into the creek below. What she saw made her hastily reconsider her position.

She was too far away up there; she wanted to be able to hear as well as see, and, as she did not understand French, not until this moment had Charity thought hearing would have been of any avail. But that man sitting down there on a rock gazing out to sea was no Frenchman. Not a dozen miles away had he been born, and born with a crookedness of mind that had spoilt the lives of others as well as his own. He had betrayed his fellow smugglers to authority once too often, and been hounded from the parish, with a rope's end for a prize if ever he returned. Folk said he had gone to the Islands, and there continued his fast-and-loose game between the French and the English.

For all her sense of horror at the idea of Admiral Penrock's ward having dealings with such a person, Charity could but pay the man a tribute for his courage in seeking the cove. Then, working out the price his bravery must mean to the young lady now coming to the creek, Charity frowned and shook her head again. Much, much gold must have been offered that renegade to enter the neighbourhood of Garth; and why?

The man down there, watching alternately the headland path and the sea, now revealing shining lines in the mist, was unaware of the figure creeping from bush to bush down the cliff with the skill of one who had often had nothing but seagulls' eggs between herself and hunger. He rose as Elise stepped on to the shingly beach, and together the two passed to the mouth of the outer cavern. On a ledge just above that mouth crouched Charity Borlase. The sound of the voices rose clearly to her ears.

An hour passed. Elise, her face wearing the *migraine* look Marion would have understood, was pale and harassed as at last she rose and handed to the man a bag that jingled in his fingers. The last of their words as they stepped down to the beach just failed to reach the ears of Charity. She strained lower to catch the sound, and one branch of the bush she was holding snapped and fell.

The speakers looked up in a startled way, and Charity, forgetting for the moment her screen of bushes, feared she was undone. Holding her breath, she watched the eyes searching the cliff. To her relief, they went beyond her perch

and rested. The two down there stood rooted to the spot. Charity, in growing wonder, twisted herself noiselessly round and discovered, standing on the rocks at the top of the creek, riding-crop in hand, Roger Trevannion. Charity was as securely hidden from his sight as from that of the others. She waited in a frightened apprehension. But Roger said no word. With a grim sort of smile he lifted his hat to Mademoiselle Elise and strode away.

Charity peered down again. The man was looking at his companion with a sullen, craven air, not without a gleam of malicious triumph; here was an added danger which meant more gold. But the look of fury and hatred on the girl's face made honest Charity's heart grow chill. She heard the words: 'He shall pay for this!' followed by others beyond her ken.

Five minutes afterwards Elise turned homewards. Not until the sailor had launched his boat, and hugging the land closely, sailed out of sight, did Charity rise, stiff and cramped, and climb the headland again.

That night she sat up long in her little attic room, and to the tune of the snores of her mother and brothers she wrote the longest letter it had ever fallen to her lot to indite. The task was a burden compared with which the climbing of the cliffs had been a baby's play. The dawn crept into her windows as she finished it, and not thinking it worth while then to sleep, she stole downstairs, kindled the fire, set the kettle on the crook and crept out of the cottage. She was going to test the loyalty of old Peter up at Garth House, to post her letter to Mistress Marion herself, and swear on her little Bible that he would say a word to none.

CHAPTER IX
A MORNING VISIT

Peter made the required vow, not dreaming how soon he would be tested. For just as he had made up his mind to create an occasion for going to Lostwithiel, and, acting on his credit as an old servant, to take the journey on his own responsibility, who should walk into the stable-yard but Admiral Penrock.

'Was that little Charity I saw going down the lane. Peter?' inquired the master.

'Like as not, sir.'

The Admiral prodded the groom's shoulder with his staff.

'Fie on thee, Peter! Are these tricks learned in London? Thinkst thou canst

take Jack Poole's place?'

This idea never having occurred to grey-haired Peter, he was some time in apprehending it; then, with a sheepish grin, he accepted the visit of the fisher girl in the light his master chose to cast upon it. And not knowing that the end of Charity's letter was sticking out of his pocket, the old groom allowed himself to be poked by the Admiral again, and questioned adroitly as to the habits of the young lady. Not a syllable would Peter utter to break his word to pretty Charity, and in the end he rode off to Lostwithiel to seek a fresh bottle of lotion for the horses.

The Admiral stumped after him up the lane. He was intending to pay a morning visit to Roger Trevannion. The boundary wall between the two estates was crumbling in places, and the Admiral was minded to arrange with Roger to see to the matter on his behalf. The early sunlight lay slantingly across the tree-tops, and the old sailor, noting the freshness of the new green mantle that overspread the countryside, sighed to think that so fair a world could be so awry.

Ever since the day, now over a month old, when he had bidden Marion good-bye and driven back to the west, he had felt an irksomeness in his duties that was new to him. Had his office remained simply that of magistrate in his own parts, he would not have felt the burden. But the Lord Chief-Justice Jeffreys, in scouring the West Country, had learned that if there was one man in Cornwall whose loyalty to the Crown was to be relied upon, that man was Admiral Penrock of Garth. Consequently, when the spies of Jeffreys, still lurking in the county after their lord had returned to London, revealed one or two tracts in Cornwall which the hounds of the dreaded Judge had not thoroughly drawn, Jeffreys decided to make the Admiral master of that particular hunt. 'By fair means or foul,' ran his order, 'you will run the quarry to earth.' And the Admiral, who had a thorough dislike for meddling with affairs outside his own district, had been obliged to obey.

In various Cornish towns—Bodmin, Truro, St. Austell, Penzance—a number of soldiers were kept in readiness for his orders. His new duties carried him far and near. People who had never heard of him began to have reason for remembering his beetling brows, his thundering tones. The Admiral was in a fair way to become a dreaded person. In a magistrate 'twas all very well. But the old sailor carried a warm heart under his garb of authority, and there were times when that warm heart was chilled at the thought of the pain he had brought into many people's lives since Jeffreys had chosen to lay his commands upon him.

Another reason for disliking his new office had been the necessity for leaving Garth many days at a time without a master. He found himself in the position of a general who, while conducting wars abroad, neglects the enemy within his own frontiers.

Two facts, however, brought comfort to the Admiral: the absence of Marion during this time, and the recent departure of Victoire for her Breton home. Elise herself had never merited the complete distrust that underlay the old sailor's thoughts of Victoire. Since Keziah's uncomfortable revelations he had thought hard and watched shrewdly—when he was at liberty to watch. Had he possessed in his service a man of education and trustworthiness, untinged by the prejudice that coloured the judgment of the country folk, Garth would not have been left thus at the mercy of fortune. But no such man, Roger Trevannion excepted, had been within hail, and it was impossible without arousing suspicion to bring Roger from his own lands to act as overseer of the Penrock demesne. Consequently the Admiral had granted Victoire permission to cross the Channel without much troubling himself as to any hidden reason for her departure.

Victoire thus abroad, the old French attorney on his way to England, the Admiral experienced a sense of relief. He looked forward with the heartiest pleasure to the day when the attorney would arrive at Garth. Then he would consider his duty to his old friend accomplished. He had fathered Elise in her growing girlhood; she was now old enough to be given over to the care of her aunts. He had certainly done his utmost to train the girl to standards of thought which were native to the comrade of his fighting days. The fact that in some way Elise's nature had been warped to begin with, was beyond his control, and there he left the problem, vaguely attributing the crookedness to some strain on the mother's side. The Admiral had never seen Madame de Delauret. To contemplate the return of Marion, and the final departure of his ward and her maid from Garth, was to the Admiral something akin to watching in the darkness of the waning night for the daystar of the dawn. When he arrived at the Manor, Roger was in the farmyard at the back of the house, setting a dozen men to their day's work. He strode to meet his visitor with a look of pleased surprise.

'This is an honour, sir,' he said heartily, the golden lights showing in his brown eyes, 'and all the more for being paid so early. Will you come indoors for a tankard of ale? My mother will be pleased to see you in the house.'

'Nay,' said the Admiral, nodding to the farm men who were pulling their forelocks and chanting 'Marnin', Admur'l!' 'I have but just breakfasted. Those are fine horses yonder, Roger. You keep them well.'

The two moved out of earshot of the menservants.

'I saw Peter in the lane just now, but he said not you were coming,' remarked Roger.

The sailor's eyes twinkled. "Tis a simple soul, that Peter. Did he say aught to you of a letter to my daughter, writ by Charity Borlase, that was in his pocket and had emptied all the bottles of lotion in the stables?'

As he spoke, the Admiral was casting a critical eye over a young cart-horse,

the latest addition to the Manor stables, and he was unaware of Roger's slight start.

Roger had wondered more than once what could have been taking Charity up the hillside towards the headland that overlay Haunted Cove. In the revelation of the later afternoon he had remembered the chance encounter; Charity's embarrassment recurred to him.

At the sight he had had of Elise in close converse with the old traitor of Garth, Roger had experienced a momentary but severe shock. The idle talk of the village which, he knew very well, was more than half due to a deep-rooted hatred for foreigners, he had honestly tried to discount, putting away the versions that had reached his ears as gossiping women's tales. But he was too young, too human, not to be affected in his judgment by his personal attitude to Victoire and her young mistress. The only being to whom he had ever mentioned the matter had been Dick Hooper, his boyhood's friend. Young Dick had shrugged his shoulders. 'Wait a bit. Ill weeds grow for cutting. The girl's crooked, but the woman's wicked.' And so the subject had been passed by.

And now the distrust and dislike of close on ten years, and the memory of the persistent tales of the villagers, had suddenly made for Roger an inflammable track down which the spark of a strong suspicion raced. The burning revelation ran into words, right enough, clear as the flaming signs on the wall at Belshazzar's feast. 'Thou art tried in the balances and found wanting,' flickered the gleaming letters, as of old, and then died away. And Roger was left pondering as to the nature of the final word which must lie somewhere, at present unillumined. When and whence that final proof must appear, Roger could not guess; but he had read the riddle well enough to be profoundly uncomfortable as to its portent, and, more than all, as to its effects on the house of Garth.

A fatherless son, heir to an estate the control of which called for judgment and action, Roger had learned the weight of responsibility when most youths of his age and class had been conning Greek and Latin texts. And now his first thought had been as to his own share in the matter. What was his duty towards the Admiral and Marion? *Marion.* His heart had stirred at the passing thought of Marion, of her sweet wholesomeness, her contempt for double dealing, her outspoken truth. To think of her just then was like looking from a dark, secretly stirred pool to an open, sunswept stream.

What could have been Elise's business yonder? Could it be political? Something connected with denunciations of still hidden Monmouth men? Hardly so; rumours in the village had been years old before ever Monmouth landed at Lyme. And yet, these were days of distrust and treachery. Could some dark fate be hurling suspicion at the heads of the two people whom, next to his mother, he loved wholly?

Roger had ridden home in the company of unhappy thoughts, slowly resolving that he must trace the trouble to its source, and begin with the Admiral himself.

The chance mention of Charity, however, made Roger pause. Charity had been writing to Marion. Perhaps it would be well to see Charity first. His instinct was that whatever had been her business that afternoon, Charity was friend and not foe. On seeing the Admiral, his first thought had been to take advantage of his visit and unburden himself at once of the story. Now, in secret relief, he put the idea aside, determining first to learn what was Charity's part in the affair. So, while the Admiral was poking among his horses, Roger's thoughts ran; he turned gladly for the moment out of the shadow that had fallen across his path, not knowing that a small cloud, the size of a man's hand, lay on the far horizon.

Talking of farming matters, the two started on a leisurely survey of the Manor close, and presently came on the beech-topped hedge that was the northern boundary of the Garth lands. Leaning on the gate set in the hedge, they lingered some time. The conversation had fallen on the near prospect of a letter from Marion, on her life in Kensington; on the French attorney's visit, the contemplation of which, though neither knew the other's thought, brought to each a sense of comfort.

From the gate a little path ran down towards the house, making a diagonal course through the intervening pastures. The Admiral, about to light his second pipe, paused, tinder-box in hand, and stared across the fields. His face darkened.

'If I mistake not, yonder is one of Jeffreys' couriers. What fresh business is toward now? Could it not have waited my return to the house?'

'I thought your work in that direction was finished, sir.'

'So did I. So did I. You see what a price one pays, my lad, for being an honest man. I declare, I thought when my lord's last letter came, that I would go to sea again, that I did, stump and all, so as to be free of this scurvy business.'

'The man will hear you, sir,' ventured Roger.

'Let him! Let him! He's heartily welcome!' But none the less the old man struck his flint, and contented himself by roaring into the mouthpiece of his pipe.

Roger's eyes twinkled. In just such a way had the motherless bull-calf he had fed that morning growled with his head in the bucket, his mouth full. Roger stored up the incident to take a place in the pantomime rehearsal of her father's stray doings and sayings which Marion would be sure to demand on her return. The gold lights danced afresh in Roger's eyes as his little playmate rose before his mental vision.

The rider was now at speaking distance. He had the appearance of hard travelling, and as he came up, Roger's instant sympathy fell on the horse. When the messenger dismounted, saluted the Admiral, and proceeded to fumble for his

letter, explaining that he had been sent on from the house, Roger stepped to the animal's side. 'Poor brute!' was his thought as he stroked the steaming flank, and cast a critical eye on the girth, having a mind to undo it for a time and make the man rest at the Manor.

'You have ridden fast,' said the Admiral in surly tones. 'Why shorten the life of a good horse?'

'My lord's orders, sir,' said the man. 'He can never abide the idea of wasting an hour when there's work to be done.'

'Did your lord require an answer?'

'He did not, sir.'

'Will you not ride down to the house and rest yourself and your animal?'

'I thank you greatly, sir,' said the man, passing his hand across his face, seared with the sweat and dust of his journey, 'but I am to be in Taunton ere nightfall.'

'In Taunton, on this brute?' cried Roger.

'I shall change horses at Bodmin,' said the messenger. As he spoke, he took the bridle. 'Can I cross the fields here to the Bodmin road?'

'I'll show you the way,' said Roger, and walking a few yards with the man, he pointed out, through a break in the inner hedge, the Bodmin road lying in the valley.

'Does your master pay you?' asked Roger abruptly.

'Aye, sir, well enough.'

'"Tis a pity he can't pay the horse. A finer grey I never saw. It grieves me to see a brute wasted so. Here's a shilling. Promise you will give him a fair bucket of oats—or, if he sweats more, a bran mash and a warm belly cloth.'

The man's eyes softened. 'I promise. You're very good, sir.'

'Nay, nay. But it goes to my heart to see that horse wasted so. Good morning.'

Roger strode back to the gate where the Admiral was still standing. From the letter in his hand dangled the strings and seals of the Lord Chancellor. Roger paused and hung back a trifle, wondering were it best to leave him. Whatever might be the new business to hand, he could see the Admiral's wrath was gathering. His face purpled, the eyes growing round as a parrot's. For a second he appeared to be on the point of choking. Suddenly he dashed the letter to the ground, and swung round on Roger. Digging his staff into the turf, he spluttered in incomprehensible rage.

'I will not do it!' he roared. 'By the Lord Harry, I will not!'

Suddenly his fury fell away. He seated himself in the hedge and passed a hand over his face. 'Dick!' he said hoarsely. 'Poor lad!'

Roger stiffened. His eyebrows drew together, his mouth tightened. He

stared down at the letter.

'Dick? Did you say Dick?'

'Ay, Dick Hooper. 'Tis there. An order to arrange for the arrest of the person of Richard Merrion Hooper, in the Parish of St. Brennion.'

Roger stared down at the written sheet, his face paling under the sunburn.

'Impossible!' he jerked out. 'Dick's a loyalist like yourself.'

'Nothing is impossible in these days.'

'What has he done?'

'That I am not told. Mayhap he has looked in pity at the creaking bones of a wretch hanging at the cross roads for Monmouth's sake.'

Roger turned, and leaning on the gate, buried his head on his arm. The tlot, tlot of a horse on the road below rose in the stillness of the morning. 'I could wish the brute had foundered and thrown his rider into the ditch—that highwaymen had seized him and his cursed letter,' ran the Admiral's thoughts, as, unconscious of his companion, he stared down the quiet slope. Far below showed the north front of Garth, the chimneys cutting the shining bar of the sea into irregular shapes. Only one window was visible through the trees of the garden—the window of the Admiral's study which, in an upper storey, ran the width of one wing, looking out on one hand on the Channel, and on the other to the rising land of the pastures. In the middle of the room stood the old sailor's beloved telescope, through which Roger had many times studied the rig of passing vessels. It happened that as the Admiral was staring out to sea, small thin fingers were swinging the telescope round to the north, and very soon the two men were plain to the eyes of Mademoiselle Elise, who was supposed by the housekeeper to be still in her bed.

The Admiral turned and saw the black head bent over the gate. He sighed, and rising to his feet picked up the letter.

Roger roused himself. His thoughts had been far away, scenes of his boyhood passing before his closed eyes: Dick's deep-notched oaken bench at Blundell's, which had been next his own; their twin escapades and truancies, punishments and advancements; the holidays Dick had spent at the Manor.

'I thought Dick was at Oxford,' he stumbled at length. Then recollecting: 'Nay, he is reading with a tutor to enter Oriel at Michaelmas.'

'A thousand pities he had not gone.'

Again fell the silence; then Roger's rather husky tones: 'Must you do this thing, sir?'

'I must.'

'And will you?'

The old Salt Eagle looked sorrowfully into the brown eyes facing him. He made a step down the slope.

'Would to God,' he blazed out suddenly, 'that Jeffreys had chosen another man!' Then, sobering: 'But I must. I cannot forget, after all, that my duty is not to serve Jeffreys, but Jeffreys' king. I shall drive out after dinner to Liskeard to see the officer there. But fear not, Roger, I shall do my utmost to get him freed.'

Roger was silent. He knew too well how unavailing, in the main, were such efforts.

'Is his father living?'

Roger nodded.

'And his mother? I forget.'

'She died while Dick was at Blundell's.'

'Thank God for that!' said the Admiral in low tones.

'May you not just inquire into the matter and report?' came Roger's husky tones. 'I had rather any one had gone but Dick.'

'Jeffreys prefers to make his inquiries behind bolt and bar.'

'Look here, sir,' said Roger, his face as hard as his voice. 'I——' he stopped abruptly, then a minute later, with a brief 'Good morning,' he swung round, and before the Admiral could speak, was striding up the slope.

The old seaman leaned heavily on his staff as he stumbled down the hillside, jerking his wooden leg over the uneven ground. 'I could pray for an ague to seize me,' ran his thoughts, 'an asp to sting me, a draught to sicken my stomach. Anything to keep me from this hateful task. Poor Dick! And poor Roger! 'Twas a hard blow.'

Half way down the slope the Admiral stopped short, arrested by an uneasy thought. For the first time since Jeffreys had laid his commands upon him he had failed in his duty, betrayed his trust, spoken to another of business of sworn secrecy. Completely forgetful of his obligations, and overborne by the weight of personal association, he had talked like an idle woman.

Hot on the heels of the first consideration ran a second. He had spoken freely of the arrest to the greatest friend of the condemned man. Could it be possible Roger would——? He had better walk back to the Manor, to make the boy promise secrecy. What would Roger do? A gleam ran across the old face. He turned and scanned the pastures. Roger was nowhere to be seen. A look of uncertainty was in the man's eyes as he stood, idly digging into a young gorse bush with his staff. His thoughts ranged themselves in two lines: dual personalities facing each other. On the one hand was the loyal seaman who would at any time have risked the gallows for a friend's sake; on the other the stern, justice-loving magistrate.

'You don't know what he may do,' came the one voice, 'and any way, you'd do the same yourself.'

'Go up and order him in the King's name to keep the matter secret,' came

the reply. 'You can trust his given word.'

'Leave him alone,' retorted the first. "Tis not for you to dictate what a man may do for his friend.'

'Duty! Duty!' cried the other.

'And Dick's an honest lad; you know he is guiltless. 'Tis but a foul whisper. He deserves a timely warning.'

'A magistrate has no ties. Duty! Duty!'

And so the mimic battle raged behind the eagle brows. In the end, not without a smile of grim humour, the Admiral offered a truce. He would not interfere with Roger. In any case, the lad might never have considered taking any step, and time would be wasted on the errand. His magisterial self the old seaman soothed by a promise of utmost haste. Instead of ordering the coach for after dinner, he would drive out at once, and eat from a hamper on the carriage seat. Having thus silenced the mental combatants, the Admiral kept his bargain to the letter. In a few minutes he was back at the house, giving orders to a flurried housekeeper.

Peter being absent on Charity's affairs, the Admiral was obliged to see to his change of garb himself. But here Elise proved herself uncommonly thoughtful. Hearing from Mrs. Curnow that the master was bound to Liskeard on urgent business, and would not be home till the morrow, and was in an uneasy temper because his man was out on an errand and he must fasten his own cloak and see to his pistols himself, Elise proceeded to the Admiral's room to offer such services as might be at her command. She found the door of the room ajar, and knew from neighbouring sounds that the Admiral was in the study. In his haste the sailor had thrown the fateful letter on the bed, with his work-a-day coat; the sharp eyes of Mademoiselle caught the red of the seals. A minute later she was out of the room again, her light step making no sound. When the Admiral was safely back in his bedchamber, she returned along the passage, her high heels clicking hard on the boards.

'I wanted to help you, if I might, sir,' came her voice at the door, and pleased at such thoughtfulness, the Admiral bade her enter. By that time the letter was in his pocket again.

As soon as the coach had left the courtyard, Elise stepped out, and crossing the pastures made her way towards the Manor Farm. A workman on the south fields was busy ditching, and from him, by dint of casual remarks, Elise learned that Master Roger had taken the fastest horse and ridden away some two hours ago.

Elise waited to hear no more. There was a light of triumph in her eyes as she trotted back to Garth. Presently an under groom was ordered to saddle Molly. Mademoiselle was bored by the inaction of life so lonely at Garth, and she was

wishful to ride out to Bodmin and make a trifling purchase. She did not deem it necessary to add that it was her intention, while her escort was supping at the *King's Head*, to find means to send a few words to the Governor of Bodmin Gaol.

CHAPTER X
FOREBODING

It was the night of the ball in Kensington, and as if the heavens had conspired with Lady Fairfax to create a scene of loveliness, threatening clouds had passed with sunset to show a slip of a new moon and peeping stars. The dancing-rooms opened on to a long terrace at the south side of the house, and in the warm evening the windows were set wide. Just below the terrace lay my lady's rose bed, and near by a patch of mignonette and stock and heavy bushes of lavender joined their fragrance to the scent of the roses.

Lady Fairfax stepped out on to the terrace, seeking a minute's respite from her duties. The silver arc was just hovering above the trees, and Colonel Sampson, who had gone below for a lace scarf, emerged from the house in time to see his hostess gravely curtseying three times to the heavenly visitor. The rite performed, my lady received the shawl, and for a space the old friends walked along the terrace in silence. Through the open windows sounded low voices and laughter. The ball-room was thronged, and the two without could hear, close to the casement, the swish of brocaded robes on the shining oaken floor. From the raised gallery came the slow air of a minuet, the fiddlers' strains blending with the tones of the flute and the sweet tinkle of a harp.

The loiterers on the terrace had not taken many turns before Sir John Fairfax joined them.

'I may but stay a moment,' he said. 'The house should not be left thus.'

'The house is very well, dear lad,' said his wife serenely. 'My guests are never dull, for the reason that dull folk are never my guests. Are you playing cards below?'

'From what I see, no one has thought of anything save either dancing or watching the dance. But, my dear, I have news that will cause you some dismay.'

Lady Fairfax stopped in her walk. 'The Queen? I knew it!' she said grimly, as her husband nodded. 'Am I wanted this very hour?'

'To-morrow, to accompany Her Majesty to Tunbridge.'

Lady Fairfax walked on a pace or two, then stopped and looked upwards. 'Did I not curtsey humbly enough, fair maiden? Why such an ill reward?' She resumed her walk. 'La, la! 'tis an uncertain world. But I am mightily grateful to the powders for lasting so long as they did. I have been dreading this summons for a week past. Her Majesty has been looking vastly yellow again. But what am I to do with Marion?'

'Leave her with me?'

'Yes, Grandam, but what will you do with her?'

'Give her a few days' rest. She has had over much turmoil and excitement of late. She shall hem sheets and talk to Simone. I will see she takes the air. But I trust you may not be long away. My Lord Churchill is urging an expedition.'

'Secret, no doubt?'

'Ay, dear love—secret.'

'Should you be gone, I will take your place, Jack,' said Sampson. 'And I have not yet seen the little Simone, but from what I hear she is an excellent companion. Marion will not be lonesome.'

'I must go and see Martin a moment,' said Lady Fairfax, turning indoors. 'Pray excuse me, Colonel.'

The two men continued their walk.

'I wish the old Salt Eagle had been here to-night,' said Sampson, as his host paused outside one of the windows.

'But she was frightened out of her wits at first,' smiled the other. 'Her face was as white as yonder white roses in the bowl, when she stepped out for her first dance. Did you note it?'

'She is not nervous now. Look yonder!'

The two stood in the darkness without, watching. In the light of hundreds of candles beautiful women and richly clad men moved to and fro to the strains of the dance. Against the darkness of the panelled walls jewels flashed in a maze of colour, and behind the dancers, passing in and out of the doors, other figures filled in the brilliant pageant. All the youth and heyday of the Court were in Kensington this night. And stepping to and fro among them as she danced the minuet, Marion looked like a gold and white lily set amid tropical blooms. The spots of turquoise in her pearl necklace sought and found the blue-green touches in the embroideries of her dress. Trained along the wide cream skirt was a faint design of blue and gold. It was the only dress in the room so restrained in colour, and, surmounted by the white of bosom and neck, the warm paleness of the face and sudden glory of the hair, it drew from the eyes of both men and women an open or covert admiration.

The younger ladies became a trifle critical of their rich colours, their powder and rouge and patches—adornments which Marion had steadily refused; the

matrons who were looking on recorded another instance of the faultless taste of Lady Fairfax: she had tuned the girl's appearance to the key-note of her personality. The men, knowing nothing of these subtleties, watching her serious face as she danced, her unlikeness to the women of London society, her quaint girlish dignity, felt the pleasure that novelty gives, and revelled in the new sensation.

Without knowing it, the 'little niece' was indeed a revelation to the dancers who shared her company that night. Having been brought up by the Admiral as simply as if she had been a boy, she was singularly free from self-consciousness; and not only was she outspoken and honest in her speech, but a vein of humour, clear gold, ran through her thoughts continually. Thus, as the night wore on, the gentlemen leading Marion to and fro in the dance, or sitting by her side in the rooms below, or walking by her on the terrace flags, found that their whispers of adulation, their extravagant utterances, which were commonplaces in the social intercourse of the day, were wasted on the young lady they had thought to please. Their choicest seeds fell on stony ground. Marion had never learned to simper and look coy in the face of outrageous flattery. She would listen for a while, amazed at such arrant foolishness, the twinkle in her eyes hidden under the long dark lashes about which the speakers failed not to wax so eloquent. Then the admiring ones, taking breath for a still higher flight, would see the grave, downward drooping lips suddenly betray her thoughts, her face break into an open merriment that shook the wind from their eloquence and tore into shreds their mounting self-conceit.

But Marion could not be human and not know the joy and intoxication of success. At the beginning of the evening, when her aunt's guests had been presented to her, and received her cold little fingers, she had felt outcast and forlorn, something to be hidden from the sight of all that beauty and grandeur. Then when the truth was borne home that she herself, and not any one of the Court damsels she envied, was the central figure; that each man there seemed to be a visitor merely to do her homage, first and throughout, Marion's mood changed. She had always loved to dance; the admiration in the eyes opposite as she came and went in the minuet set her own eyes all the brighter, and threw a lightness and glow into her being. She was sipping the wine of youth from a goblet of gold, and only later did she realise how sweet that first draught had been.

Just after supper she ran up stairs to ask Simone to cut a shred from her silk petticoat which an unwary foot had caught on the stairs. Her room was empty. As she went to the dressing-table for a pair of scissors, a letter caught her eye.

It was addressed in a laborious, unfamiliar hand. Wonderingly Marion broke the seal, and unfolded the sheet, looking first at the signature at the close of the letter.

'Little Charity! Of all persons in the world to have writ me! Can Jack have escaped again?'

Somewhat dazed at the suddenness with which the thought of Garth had leapt from some dim spot of memory direct to the immediate moment, Marion sat down and began to read Charity's letter. The writing was ungainly, in parts half illegible, the words ill spelt. Marion re-read several sentences before she began to grasp their meaning. It was something about Elise. Then she saw Roger's name. A chill of fear, the colder because it was shapeless, seized her, throttling the warm happiness that pulsed in her veins. She turned back to read the sentence again. Roger—what was this about Roger?

As she bent over the letter in the light of her dressing-table sconces, Lady Fairfax passed the door and looked in.

'Marion! Why are you up here?'

'There's a letter here from Charity,' said Marion absently, reading on as she spoke, 'and——'

Lady Fairfax crossed the room, and laid her hand on the girl's arm. 'My darling, you cannot behave thus. Listen: there is the music of the galliard which Londoners are dancing to-night in honour of my country maid. Do you not hear yonder Cornish air? They are waiting on you before they can begin. Who is your partner?'

Lady Fairfax gently took the letter from the girl's cold fingers, and bending down, pressed a kiss on her cheek.

'Captain Beckenham is my partner, Aunt Constance.'

The tone of the voice caught the ear of the older woman. She looked at the face reflected in the looking-glass.

'Come, come! What is this letter?'

'Tis something about Elise and—I like it not. But I had rather finish it, Aunt Constance.'

A grave rebuke flashed in and out of the lady's eyes.

'Elise can wait. She has waited thus long. And there are days and days to read it in. But to-night—this is *your* ball, and your guests are waiting on your pleasure. Where is the smiling face I saw ten minutes ago?'

Marion got up, and taking the scissors cut the fragment from her petticoat. True to her character, she made no outward show of the unhappiness that had seized her. 'Where is Simone?'

'Helping Martin.'

'Why so, Aunt Constance?' With mechanical fingers, Marion tidied a tress of her bright hair.

'I will tell you later, my child. Run downstairs now; and remember this is your special dance. I am following, but I must attend to the older folk in the

card-room.'

Obediently Marion went downstairs. The ballroom, which had seemed all brightness and music a little time before, now appeared full of alien presences whose voices jarred upon her. She was scarcely aware of the low bow of her partner, of his extended hand; with an unaccustomed heaviness in her step she took her place at the head of the long line. Then glancing towards the musicians' gallery as the fiddlers struck up the country air, she saw the wrinkled face of old Zacchary behind the performers, his eyes, full of pride and tenderness, watching the 'little maid' who was his delight. A sudden vision of her father came upon her. She rallied. Her head rose a little. She threw a smile to Zacchary, and holding her fingers to her partner, went lightly down between the ranks, curtseying and turning and retracing her steps in the maze of the country dance. Once begun, the movement left her no time for thought. Only when Captain Beckenham led her to her seat and handed her her fan, did she realise how heavy lay her heart, what bitter drops had marred the wine and dulled the sparkling rim of the goblet. Presently Colonel Sampson strolled up.

'I should guess my lady has told you the news, Mistress Marion. 'Tis writ in your sober look.'

'What news?' cried the young gentleman, rising to his feet as the old soldier spoke.

'Why, here is Lady Fairfax summoned to attend Her Majesty to Tunbridge on the morrow.'

Marion remained silent as the two talked a little of the Royal invalid, content that her gravity, which in spite of her efforts was evidently noticeable, should be set down to that cause. The news of her aunt's departure seemed to lay another weight upon her spirits, but she realised that much as she loved her aunt, the heaviness of the thought that she must be thus parted from her was slight compared with that other unformed, unnamed burden that threatened her; she had not had time to learn the meaning of Charity's letter.

Captain Beckenham glanced down at the girl. Her fingers were playing with the handle of her fan; her mind seemed elsewhere.

'I could wish Her Majesty's illness had waited another day,' he said with a deep sigh. '"Tis a most unkind cloud to spread itself over the face of the sun, and leave the earth desolate and dark. And quite possibly I shall be bidden, either in Her Majesty's suite, or to follow.'

Marion looked up with one of her mocking smiles as the young guardsman, with a meaning look, and his hand flourishing, bowed low. But the older eyes watching saw that something was amiss. Mr. Sampson drew up a vacant chair, and rewarded beforehand by a look from Marion, succeeded in maintaining an easy conversation in which the girl's share was light.

Presently Lady Fairfax appeared in the ball-room, and immediately, it seemed, became the centre of a lively group. Marion, watching her aunt, felt suddenly ashamed. The one glance Lady Fairfax had bestowed upon her told more than spoken words. 'A hostess in a ball-room has no place for private feelings,' said those challenging eyes.

Marion mentally shook herself afresh; turned to a young man who was hovering near, and indicated with her fan an empty seat. The new-comer, more bronzed than his fellows, had just left his ship at Greenwich. Marion smiled on him, and threw out a few sea-going phrases; and the young sailor, who had coveted the honour of speaking to the daughter of the old Salt Eagle, was rewarded by hearing stories of him from the lady herself. The two passed out on to the terrace, and the music of the next dance went by unheeded.

Presently others came to claim her attention. Somehow the evening wore away, and such was Marion's will upon herself, that no one besides Colonel Sampson and Lady Fairfax had any suspicion that her heart belied her face. With her uncle and aunt she stood at the head of the staircase as the guests took their leave. Presently all were gone but Sampson.

'Stay and have a glass of wine, Colonel,' said Lady Fairfax. 'I vow I am hungry again.'

But Mr. Sampson, with a low bow, declined the invitation, and turning to Marion, asked for the pleasure of her company on a drive the following day.

'Excellent!' said Lady Fairfax. 'The fresh air will be very beneficial.'

Marion gravely thanked the gentleman, and bending over her hand he contrived to throw into his gesture and parting look just the amount of friendliness she could bear.

'Then we will have our wine and cake together in your room,' said Lady Fairfax, passing her arm round Marion's waist. 'You can read yonder letter and tell me all about it. You have done bravely this last hour.'

CHAPTER XI
AUNT AND NIECE

Marion lay in her bed, staring through the drawn curtains into the dark night. Her window was ajar, and sweet cool airs played fitfully in the room. It was past three o'clock; soon the summer dawn would break; cocks crowed faintly in the

farmyards that dotted the fields beyond Kensington village.

To and fro Marion turned, chafing at the hotness of her bed, trying to find a cool space for her body and a spot on the pillow that might tempt her throbbing head to lie still. The only ease she could gain was by turning a certain way, her eyes on the quiet vagueness of the sky. She kept telling herself there was no cause for this turmoil of mind; time after time she turned her thoughts back to the ball, thinking of the dances, of a certain melody that had pleased her so that she had sent to the fiddlers to play it again—of the men and women whose language and manners, still unfamiliar, fascinated her and gave her the pleasant feeling of being at home in a strange land. But behind their faces she saw that of Charity; running with the strains of the minuet was a phrase she could not forget—'i be afeered, Mistress Marion, mightilie afeered, and moste of al for Master Roger.'

'Who is this Charity?' Lady Fairfax had asked after she herself, at Marion's request, had read the sprawled sheet. On learning the story of the girl, and hearing of the hostile feeling of Garth for the Admiral's ward, the first instinct of Lady Fairfax had been to take the part of her own class against another that was uneducated, prejudiced, and superstitious to a degree.

'You can't get away from what is in your blood,' argued the lady. 'Those Cornish fisherfolk are the children of countless generations that have spent themselves in enmity with the French: a continual cross-channel warfare. They first hate the Devon men, because they are not Cornish, and then they hate the French because they are not English. To their way of thinking the only people who have any excuse to be alive, or have any hope to enter heaven, are English folk who have been born and bred in Cornwall.'

Marion smiled faintly. 'True enough, Aunt Constance. But you don't know Elise.'

'I don't know Elise, my dear. There you are right. But I do know that Elise, the daughter of Monsieur de Delauret and the granddaughter of the old Vicomte d'Artois, is bred and born a gentlewoman. You cannot turn your back on your own class and take the peasant view against them. And has not Elise been your companion and playfellow all these years? Leave for a moment this present problem—a difficult one, I grant you—and consider Elise in the light of a ten years' friendship. What have you against her?

'Nothing,' said Marion falteringly. 'That is, until Aunt Keziah came and made me somehow see Elise in a different way. And—besides——'

'The "besides,"' smiled Lady Fairfax, 'is generally the root of the whole matter.'

Marion's cream and gold lace dress had been taken off, and a light dressing-gown thrown about her, and Lady Fairfax, similarly disrobed, was tending the long russet hair.

With her brush swish swish through the shining tresses, Lady Fairfax waited. 'And besides?'

In as few words as possible Marion told the story of Jack Poole's arrest, and Elise's vindictive remarks at supper.

'What did your father say?'

'He was angry. I never saw him angry with her before. It was not only unkind of Elise, but 'twas a most dangerous thing to say, as Father explained. You don't know one hundredth part of the horror of that rising in the West, Aunt Constance. If one of the servants had heard her, and there had chanced to be a countryman, a tinker or a packman, in the kitchens—and of course you know passing folk are always welcomed by the servants—Roger might have been hanged on the strength of that.'

The lady was silent a moment. 'Well, well,' she resumed, 'Roger was not hanged. But, my dear love, for a girl coming to womanhood you are strangely blind. Have you not told me before that this youth Roger could not abide Elise?'

'No more he could. Well?'

'Is not that a reason for Elise's hating Roger? A woman can forgive a man almost everything except disliking her, and showing it.'

'Elise is only a girl.'

'A rose-bud is all the same a rose.'

Marion twined a stray wisp of hair round and round her fingers. 'Granted all that, Aunt Constance, why should Elise be continually going down to Haunted Cove, and to see such a horrible man?'

'Who says she is going continually?'

'Well—Charity says everybody says so.'

'Which means,' said Lady Fairfax tartly, 'that some one may have seen her twice. You don't know the Cornish as well as I do.'

'I will not hear another word against my people, Aunt Constance. You have naught but unkindness for them.' Marion tossed her hair free, and sprang to her feet.

'La, la!' said Lady Fairfax. 'Am I not "your own people?" And therefore theirs? Oh, my precious baby, what an infant you are!' The speaker suddenly caught the girl in her arms and drew her to a low seat. Marion's head fell on her shoulder, and her tears dropped.

'I am so unhappy, Aunt Constance.'

'But, my darling, I assure you there is nothing to be unhappy about.'

There was a silence for a few minutes. Then Marion slipped from her aunt's arms to the hearthrug, and laid her head against her knee. 'I am too big a baby to be nursed, dear Aunt Constance. I shall tire you.'

'I was not complaining,' said the childless woman, letting her arms fall.

'But why should she have gone even once down to Haunted Cove to meet that man?' Marion resumed after a while.

'There, my dear, is a question I cannot answer. But until you know more about it, is it not only fair to give Elise the benefit of the doubt? And as for the words she said: "He shall pay for this," why—the girl was furious, and let out the words in her spleen that she would otherwise have withheld. People spit out queer things when they are angry. Anger and madness are closely akin.'

'And another thing,' resumed Lady Fairfax, stroking the bright head. 'Your father is a shrewd man. He will not have forgotten that speech of Elise's. If he thinks in sober judgment there is anything against the maid, he will be watching her. Sooner or later these tales will reach him. If that little Charity had been worth her salt, she would have gone to him, and not writ that hysterical letter to you.'

'She would not dare, I am afraid, to seek my father.'

'Because he would pull her ears for a gossiping busy-body. And don't you see, my dear, how foolish it is to think that Roger and your father can come to some mishap through the malice of your father's ward? Leave the men to take care of themselves. I declare I shall hate that Roger if the thought of some passing danger for him spoils your visit here.'

'I have known Roger ever since I could walk,' said Marion softly. 'He was brother and sister and playfellow.'

'You can't wrap him in silk shawls and set him in a drawing-room. He will have to play his part; and you can't either prevent it or take one jot or tittle from it. How long has this letter been in coming?'

Marion took up the sheet. 'Close on two weeks. It must have been sadly delayed.'

'Then everything must still be well. Your father would have written and sent a special messenger, otherwise. And now, my darling, I insist on your going to bed. Come, I will play your nurse and undress you. 'Tis the last time—for some days.'

When her aunt had given her a good-night kiss and had left her, Marion had felt somewhat eased, but her brain, being thoroughly aroused, was not so lightly to be lulled to drowsiness. Instead of becoming sleepy, Marion became more wakeful. All the knowledge she had of the terrors of the Monmouth rising and the fearful aftermath of Jeffreys' revenge came to her mind. To and fro, between that subject—to which Elise's reported threat concerning Roger had led her—and the subject of Elise's own doings, Marion's thoughts went like a sentry on a beat. The watchman passing the square called one o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock; and still Marion's weary head tossed about in the seeming endlessness of a wakeful night. At length, as the dawn crept up over the trees of the gardens,

and the first bird twittered, Marion lay still, conscious of the blessed relief of approaching sleep.

At ten o'clock, when her aunt came quietly in, after Simone's report of Marion's continued slumber, the bright head still lay motionless in the nest of the pillow. Marion was sleeping the sleep of mental and physical exhaustion. Her aunt crept quietly out. 'I will not wake her,' she said. 'But the coach is ready. I must be gone.'

Simone crept back into the room and sat by the window, alternately watching the slumberer and the needlework in her lap. She had divined that something was amiss with her young lady, and was divided between the joy of having Marion to herself, to comfort if need be, and sorrow for her troubled state.

The sun was high in the heavens when Marion at last awoke. She lay awhile watching Simone, busy with her clothes and her ewer of water. The dread of the previous night did not recur. She was conscious of a distant uneasiness, but more inclined to rest on her aunt's judgment. But presently she discovered that much thought would be impossible that day. Perhaps she had slept too long; perhaps Nature was taking her revenge for the strain of mingled excitement and pleasure and anxious thought of the previous evening. The only severe headache she had ever known laid its grip upon her. As the day wore on, she was content to lie on a low couch by the window with Simone in silent readiness at her side.

At three o'clock Colonel Sampson came to the house, and learning that the young mistress was ailing: 'Is Mistress Marion too unwell to see me?' he asked. 'Pray tell her I am below.'

The servant ushered him into Lady Fairfax's little sitting-room, the identical spot where he had first seen the pale, travel-worn face of the young girl in whose company he had found such refreshment. Presently a light step sounded on the stair, and the curtain fell aside.

'Monsieur le Colonel,' said Simone, and dropped a low curtsey.

Sampson stared at the slim, graceful figure rising slowly from the perfect salutation, at the smooth little head and dainty face. Then recollecting himself, though blinking a little as at an apparition, he made his inquiries concerning the young mistress.

'Mademoiselle finds herself far from well,' came Simone's low even tones, 'and would take it as a favour if Monsieur le Colonel would release her from the promise of the drive. Mademoiselle has a severe migraine. To-morrow, perhaps, if Monsieur le Colonel is good enough, Mademoiselle will be pleased to take the air.'

'I shall be delighted, Mademoiselle,' said the Colonel, with a slight bow.

Simone crossed the room, and called the servant from the hall.

'Show Monsieur le Colonel out,' said Simone, dropping a curtsey as the

visitor passed her.

When the boy opened the hall door, Sampson turned. Simone was mounting the stairs. Again he blinked, and passed his hand across his eyes as if seeking to evoke some elusive thought that hid in a chamber of his mind.

By evening Marion's indisposition had passed. She supped with her uncle, finding a singular pleasure in the society of the quiet, studious man who laid all his concerns aside to talk to the 'little niece' on subjects which he knew interested her: of his own travels, and places over seas, and the chances of war abroad. The ball and the events of the previous evening, which had been faithfully detailed by his wife, he left out of the conversation. At the close of the meal, when Marion went to the sitting-room where Simone was awaiting her, Sir John explained that on the morrow he would be obliged to leave her for a few days. There was to be an inspection of the fleet, and he could not absent himself. Marion assured him that there was no cause for regret. Simone and Colonel Sampson would companion her; there would be callers, and if there were not, she would be glad of a little quiet.

The next day Sir John departed. Scarcely had he gone before Colonel Sampson's coach was at the door. Marion and Simone descending, found him talking to old Zacchary, who had come from the stables, and was admiring the horses. To Marion's great delight, Colonel Sampson dismissed his footman to the society of the kitchen for a spell, and bade Zacchary mount in his place. Marion knew that Zacchary was piling up a store of reminiscences which would make him famous in his generation when he returned to Garth.

Ranelagh was the destination that afternoon, and Sampson saw to it that the drive was a pleasant one. Sir John Fairfax had told him something of the subject of Charity's letter, and the two men talked of the impression they had had of Elise that first night when Marion told the story of her father's ward. In private they were not disposed to take as easy a view of the matter as my lady had entertained. Sampson, amazed at such behaviour on the part of a de Delauret, had thought a good deal about it; both men could appreciate better than Lady Fairfax the danger in which the Roger, whom they had never seen, stood; they knew better than she how the flame of the rising still flickered. But uppermost in Sampson's mind, as Marion talked or was silent, in the coach, was the thought of the young Elise d'Artois, whom he had followed as a moth follows a lantern, for the space of a delightful, foolish year. He could not reconcile his memory of her with the reported doings of her daughter.

Simone also came in for a good share of his regard. The Colonel was too trained a courtier to betray again his surprise and mystification on seeing the little waiting woman of whom he had heard so much. During the drive Simone was quiet, watching from the coach the passers by; but towards the end something in

the conversation struck her fancy. She suddenly turned and smiled at Sampson. A passing group caught Marion's eye at the moment, and she called Simone's attention thereto. Thus neither of the girls saw the man's start, and stare and nod, as if something in the chamber of his memory had peeped out and greeted him.

When the party arrived at Kensington, Colonel Sampson refused to accompany the ladies indoors. He escorted them to the hall door, then walked quickly back to his coach. A minute later his horses, at a canter, drew the vehicle out of the square.

In the hall a servant approached Marion.

'There is a man in the kitchen, mistress, a sailor man from Garth, wishful to see you. He is but anchored at the Swan in Chelsey this afternoon, and has walked across. 'Tis urgent business.'

Marion's eyes widened, as of old, as she looked at the servant. A sudden fear tore at her heart. 'Bring him into the sitting-room at once,' she said.

CHAPTER XII
CHARITY'S LETTER

Heavy footsteps sounded in the hall. There was a shuffling pause, and Bob Tregarthen stood in the doorway in his rough seaman's clothes, his cap in his awkward fingers. The blue eyes looked at Marion from under the tangled mane of fair hair in the way she remembered so well, as if she had been a spot on a distant sea. It seemed that as the sailor stood there, the village and harbour lay behind him, and the smell of salt crept into the room.

'This is a great pleasure, Bob,' said Marion, as he stumbled awkwardly forward. 'How is your mother?'

'Her's well and hearty,' said the sailor, his eyes in shyness wandering about the room. 'Leastways when I left her. You'm looking uncommon well, Mistress Marion.' The far-sighted look came back to rest on the lady.

'Sit down and tell me your news. Have you come from my father?'

There was no tremor in the clear voice as Marion calmly seated herself in the high-backed oaken chair that stood before the window. Instinctively she was keeping her face from the light.

'The Admiral ain't been down along for a fortnight past, Mistress. Folk say

a be mighty busy, travelling so, and now——'

Bob stopped short, and cautiously sat down on the edge of the chair. He cleared his throat and moved his feet awkwardly about. Presently his hand went towards his pocket. 'I don't know as there be any news, Mistress. Leastways, what there be, Charity's letter will be telling you. 'Tis some grand to see you again, Mistress.'

Marion watched the fumbling hands, her own fingers tightly interlocked.

'So Charity has writ me a letter,' came the even tones.

'Ay, ay. Her comes running down to the quay just as Bill Scraggs were getting the water kegs aboard, and her calls out to me to speak to me special, like, and asks me how many days afore we sights the port o' Lunnon. And I ses to her, I ses, "Strike me if I know," ses I. "I bain't thinking o' Lunnon at all this voyage. A be for Gravesend and sharp back to Plymouth; then at Plymouth us'll lie in the Cattwater, so if ee wants to see me afore the month be out," ses I, "ee must come to Plymouth. A bain't making for the Pool this time, but with fair wind serving and no Frenchies to tickle, us should make Gravesend in three days." Then her ses, quiet-like: "Wouldn't ee like to speak to Mistress Marion, Bob?" "Wouldn't a?" ses I. "Well," her ses, "here be a letter I've writ for Mistress Marion, and I'd take it kindly if you'd run up the river and call on her. I be some sore on her getting un, and I can trust ee better than the post boys," her ses. And the end of it was, her showed me your name writ down large, and Kensington Square, and her made me say un ower and ower. 'Tis a pretty maid, Charity,' added Bob, with a reminiscent smile. 'Folk do say——'

'Have you got the letter, Bob?'

'Ay, ay, Mistress. Here a be.'

Bob, whose hands had fallen idle as he talked, began fumbling in his pocket again, and at length brought out the creased missive. He got awkwardly to his feet.

'Here you be, Mistress. And your pardon, but a be in a mortal hurry to catch the tide, with Bill Scraggs waiting in the boat down along to Chelsey Reach. So good day to ee, Mistress, and I be some proud to have seen you, and the place where you'm to. You'm looking fine, Mistress—grown taller, I do declare. Bain't ee ever coming back to Garth?'

Marion's hold on her patience was fast weakening, but seeing there would be no peace to read the letter till the man was gone, she talked to him for a few minutes, marvelling at the easy tone of her own speech. 'Is all well at Garth?' she asked hesitatingly at the end.

'Ay, ay, Mistress—leastways——'

Divining that there was something Bob did not wish to say, Marion stepped to the bell rope. Then, feeling in the pocket of her gown, she pulled out her little

silk purse. 'You have been very kind,' she began. Bob stepped back.

'Don't ee now, Mistress—don't ee now!' he implored, his blue eyes resting with shy affection on her face. '"Tis a pleasure.'

'Good day, then, Bob,' said Marion, 'and thank you very much indeed. Take Master Tregarthen to the gate,' she added, as the servant entered the room. 'You have of course offered him food and drink?'

'Ay, ay, Mistress,' put in Bob. 'Mutton pie and mashed taties, and strawberry pudding—rare good 'twas. Good day to ee, Mistress, and God bless ee,' added the sailor, as he gave the girl a last look, and lumbered out.

Scarcely waiting for the door to close behind the sailor Marion seized the letter, with trembling fingers tore it open, and read it where she stood. As her eyes travelled down the crooked lines her face blanched. She caught at a chair and unsteadily seated herself. The letter finished, her hands fell on her lap. Not a sound escaped her lips. The minutes ticked by from her aunt's tall clock in a corner of the room.

Presently light footsteps sounded in the hall, and Simone lifted the curtain. Arrested by the stare of the wide grey eyes she stood still for a moment.

'Mademoiselle,' she cried, and coming to her side, sank on her knees and took the terribly still, cold hands in her own. 'What is it? You are ill!'

She sprang to her feet again, her hand towards the bell rope.

'Stay!' whispered Marion. 'I am not ill.'

Simone's eyes wandered to the letter, lying where Marion had laid it down.

'Give it to me,' said Marion. Once more, word by word, she deciphered the ill-written sheet; then, handing it to Simone: 'Read it,' she said, and buried her face in her hands. Simone took up the letter.

'DEERE MISTRESS—Doe nott, i pray you, take ofence that i doe writ you againe, having but writt you shortlie. Mv hearte be that sore i must write, tho i doe scarce knowe what i sett downe. The Post boy from Bodmin hath just visitted Garth where i had gone to speke with Peter, none knoweing.

'A sore troubble hath fallen on us, deere mistress, and i doe pray God you will returne soone, for if there be anny help tis from you. Master Roger hath been taken by the Taunton soljers for haveing toled Master Hooper him being in danger with Jeffreys men. Master Hooper hath fledde in safetie, somme say by boate from Porlock. And the post boy doe say deere Master Roger must stande in his sted and belike—But that be maine sure idle talke but i be that distrawte the post boy doe allsoe saye the talke is a furrin younge ladie who did see the governoure at Bodmin verrie secrettlie, and tolde him of Master Roger, and the governoure's man who did heere at the doore did talke haveing taken strong

waters or else hee would nott dare. i pray God no harm fall to Master Roger but if he shoulde hang that other shal nott live nor doe she desserve. So may God helpe us al and doe deere mistress I pray thee com home.

from CHARITY thes, moste dutifull.

'GARTH, *this tenth daye of July.*'

Simone laid the crumpled sheet on the table without a word, and stood looking down at the bright bowed head, a speechless sorrow in her face. In the weeks she had passed in Marion's company she had learned a great deal about Garth, could see the inmates in a picture gallery of her own imaginings: the Admiral, the old Salt Eagle, whom she already loved; Roger Trevannion, one, she was certain, to be wholly trusted at sight; and, the sinister figure in the group, her outlines filled in mainly by Marion's silences, the Admiral's ward. The quiet brown eyes lightened with a sudden fury as she thought of Elise, then sobered again to grief and fear as she looked at the stricken form huddled in the chair. There was something terrifying in Marion's stillness and silence.

Kneeling down before her, Simone passed her arms round Marion, and leaned her face against her shoulder. All idea of fitness of manner due in a servant for the moment left her mind. Here was the only being she loved in the world, wounded sorely. She rubbed her cheek up and down the passive arm. Presently Marion gave a shuddering sigh, and lifting her head, looked into the faithful brown eyes searching her face.

'He is dead by now,' she said quietly. 'Dead. Do you hear me?'

The eyes took on again that set look, wandering over Simone's head to the brightness of the garden. Simone dropped her face down on to Marion's cold, folded hands. Her warm lips sought the fingers. Marion leaned back in her chair.

'Dead. 'Tis all over.'

Still Simone made no reply. She opened the lifeless hands, and pressed her cheeks into the cup of the palms. Marion's head sank down again, the warm russet hair touching the smooth brown. A trembling seized her. Suddenly she sprang up, shaking her hands free.

'Tell me,' she said as Simone faced her, 'do *you* think he is dead?'

'I am quite sure he is not.'

Simone glanced hastily round the room. There was a decanter of wine on a side table. Quickly she poured out a glass, and gently forcing Marion into the chair, held the glass to her lips. With her eyes on Simone's face, Marion drank a few drops, then pushed the wine away.

Simone took up her position on the rug again, and holding the girl's hand, looked into the fixed grey eyes that were watching her.

'Listen,' she said. 'He is not dead. There is not time.'

'Not time?' Marion tried to shake off the stupor into which she had fallen. She pressed her hands to her face.

'No—there is not time,' continued Simone. 'It is but a few days. Charity wrote on Saturday. To-day is Wednesday. And also, they would not dare.'

'Not dare?'

'Because of your father. Roger is in the bounds of his magistracy, is he not?'

The drops of wine had eased a little the grip of the shock upon the girl. Simone rose, and held the glass again, but Marion shook her head.

'In a few minutes you will be able to think,' said Simone quietly. 'Then you will know I am right.'

Silence fell on the room as Simone stood beside the chair, watching the set look slowly disappear from the face, the eyes lose their hard stare.

When Marion spoke again her voice was trembling, but the tones were her own.

'Sit down, Simone, and let us think. You see what Charity says.'

'Charity has written in a panic,' said Simone softly. 'But I like her greatly, that simple, loving soul. What are the facts, now? Master Roger has heard that some one—his friend?—' Marion nodded, 'was in danger of arrest, and he has warned him. I do not know just what an offence in the law that may mean. Sir John will say when he returns. And Master Roger——'

Marion flamed up in sudden anger, a bright colour flooding her face. 'Such folly!' she cried. 'Roger was ever a fool! I can't think why folk do not mind their own affairs. He must have known 'twas dangerous. Think of his mother! Arrant wickedness, I call it.'

Simone smiled faintly as the storm swept her by. Any outburst was more welcome than silence and stillness.

'Ma belle dame,' she said, her eyes warm, 'you had wrought just such a service yourself, had you been there.'

Marion passed the speech by. 'And my father is down at Truro, on Jeffreys' affairs, doubtless. Oh, that Protestant duke whom they hailed as a hero and a saviour! Would to God he had never been born! I was saying to my aunt the night of the ball, you people here have not the slightest idea of the horrors of that time, when my Lord Jeffreys was in the West.' Marion detailed a few of the happenings. 'Now after that,' she concluded, 'can you wonder I fear for Roger?'

'That tempest is over,' said Simone. "Tis but the growl of the dying thunder now. Dear Mademoiselle, believe me, you have caught a panic from Charity's own state when she wrote that letter, she having doubtless just heard, and saying

what people had told her. Something can be done. We must think. May I be forgiven if I order some tea, Mademoiselle?'

Marion nodded absently, and going to the window, set the casement wide, and leaned her arms on the sill.

A little later the servant entered with the tea. Setting a chair by the fire, and taking one of the bowls in her fingers, Simone gently touched her mistress's arm.

'Where is yours?' asked Marion.

Simone's little mouth made a slight moue. 'Je ne l'aime pas, Mademoiselle. But there is some milk. I will drink that, with your permission.'

Presently Marion set down her bowl, and turned to her companion.

'I am going home,' she said abruptly. 'Will you accompany me?'

The brown eyes glowed. 'I ask no greater pleasure, Mademoiselle. But how? What of Madame your aunt?'

'I will write a letter, telling her. But I may not wait for her permission. Unfortunately, too, my uncle is away, and I know not his direction. What can we do?'

'Mademoiselle cannot travel without an escort.'

'There is Colonel Sampson.'

'True. Le bon Colonel. I had not thought of him.'

'I will write him at once,' said Marion. 'Will you bring me paper and pen?'

Within a few minutes a manservant was dispatched to Colonel Sampson's house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, bearing a short note from Marion to the effect that she wished to see him on a subject of great urgency. Marion bade the man take the fastest horse and ride hard; then sent word to the housekeeper that Colonel Sampson would in all probability be a guest at supper, and asked that a bottle of the Colonel's favourite Burgundy should not be overlooked.

This done, Marion mounted to her own room, and threw herself feverishly into preparations for the journey. She found great relief in merely busying her hands among her clothes. And though she did and undid, set her dresses here and set them there, declared this should go in that trunk, and then in another, Simone made no objection to her contrary ways. Quietly the waiting woman followed her orders, knowing that she could very well pack Mademoiselle's clothes properly while the young lady was asleep.

Presently Simone insisted that it was high time for Mademoiselle to dress for supper. The toilet took some time, and Simone talked with animation of the days of travel that lay ahead, knowing that a person's mind cannot dwell at the same time on the end and on the means. Marion told her what she remembered of the course of the ten days' journey from Garth to London, adding that with swifter going they could surely vie with the post chaise and reach home in seven.

Just as Marion's gown was fastened, a servant tapped at the door. The messenger was returned, saying that Colonel Sampson's man had informed him of his master's having ridden away on a sudden visit to his country house in Hertfordshire, and was not to be expected home till the following evening, if then: there was no knowing when he would return. But as soon as he entered the house, the letter should be handed to him.

The servant withdrew, and having noted the disarray of the room went downstairs to report thereon, saying that all ladies were alike, and here Mistress Marion was driving yonder Simone to death, on a round of doing and undoing among her dresses; and 'twas a good thing Mrs. Martin was away with my lady, or the work might have fallen on her.

Meanwhile Marion stood looking at Simone, her mouth stubborn.

'I shall not wait for Colonel Sampson,' she said quietly. 'That would mean another two days at least. Get me the ink and paper. And bid the man not to unsaddle his horse. Go down yourself, will you? I like not that the domestics should come up here just now. Nothing shall be said of the journey till our plans are ready. Above all, nothing must come to Zacchary's ears. If Zacchary thinks I am taking an unwarranted step, he will be hard to move, harder than the four greys and the coach. Tell the man to wait at the door, and I will descend.'

'Bien, Mademoiselle.'

Realising that a new phase of her mistress's character was asserting itself, Simone went below. Presently Marion came downstairs with a note in her hand. The manservant was standing in the drive, bridle in hand; Marion went out at the door and down the steps.

'Reuben,' she said, 'you will go at once to St. James's and find where Captain Beckenham is. His orderly will know. If he be on duty at the Palace, find some means of reaching him. Here is money. If he be supping with friends, learn where is the house. Do not return until you have delivered the letter. The matter is urgent.'

Reuben took the note, touched his cap, and leaping into the saddle, cantered out into the square, a smile of pure pleasure on his face. Here was the twofold excitement of the prospect of hunting among pleasure haunts for my young gentleman, and the delight of serving a fair lady who wished to see her gallant admirer. Reuben was young, and a bachelor.

Marion supped with Simone for company, and dismissing the servants after the meat was brought, sat silent, eating a morsel here and there as her random thoughts came back to the present. Had Mistress Keziah seen her expression as she sat at the head of her aunt's table that night, she would have remembered her own thoughts of the girl months before. 'She'll go her own way; her mother has given her that sweetness, but she's a Penrock.' Simone, watching her unob-

trusively, attending to her needs with the perfect tact natural to her, was content that the face should wear that look. Better the girl should play the part of a mimic general marshalling a toy army, than sink into tears before an imagined grief. As she noticed the absorbed quiet of the steady features, Simone suddenly found herself wondering what Marion would be like when her tranquillity was swept away in stormy action, when that something sleeping in her was fully roused.

CHAPTER XIII
THE ESCORT

Reuben had not been page boy and footman to my Lady Fairfax for nothing. Standing on the step of her coach he had learned the roads and houses of Kensington, Chelsey, and the City; carrying my lady's cushion to the theatre, waiting outside her box, and hearing the talk of courtiers in between the acts, he had gained some insight into the world of fashion. Thus there was no need for Marion to detail instruction about the course he must take in hunting down the gentleman of the sword. Exactly two hours after starting, having visited St. James's and two theatres in vain, drawn the coffee houses blank, he finally ran his quarry to earth outside a cockpit in Covent Garden, where several gentlemen were discussing the rival merits of the birds.

'And my lord Duke,' Beckenham was saying, 'having lost £500 on Firebrand——' He broke off as Reuben elbowed his way into the group and stood hat in hand. 'What may you want, my lad?'

Reuben spoke in a low tone and delivered his letter. Captain Beckenham was delighted at the summons, but he gave his companions no hint of this. 'Lend me your horse, Grammont,' said he to one of the group. 'Here's a business that will not wait.'

'Zounds! and what may be this mighty hurry?'

'*Service du roi*,' replied Beckenham gravely. Grammont, recognising the Fairfax livery, whistled for his servant to lead up the horse.

'Give His Majesty my ardent remembrances,' he said with a smile, as Beckenham sprang into the saddle. 'Lucky dog! I say, Beckenham,' as the other rode off, 'as you are bound for Tunbridge to-morrow, say a word for poor Tom Grammont!'

Mr. Beckenham's reply was lost in the dusk as he spurred after Reuben.

The captain had been one of those who had suffered most from Marion's friendly ridicule on the evening of the ball, and his affections being in the nature of a flower that closes when clouds overtake the sun, he had decided that the 'little niece' was not the marvel that society proclaimed her to be. Beckenham was a man whose sterling qualities were undeniable; he was known in the regiment for a brave and loyal soldier; but he had been courted and flattered by the women of his acquaintance and looked on with too much favour by mothers of daughters whose marriages were not yet arranged. With somewhat changed ideas Beckenham now rode to Kensington and presently found himself in the presence of young Mistress Penrock.

Marion, a trifle graver than was her wont, extended her fingers to the gentleman's low bow, and begging him to be seated, in a few words explained the nature of her wishes. Grave news from the west had determined her immediate return to Cornwall; she prayed the kindness of Captain Beckenham's escort.

The young soldier's surprise was clear in his face as the nature of Marion's wish was revealed, and Marion stiffened herself for another battle. She had just dismissed Zacchary after an hour's wordy warfare that had left her desperate and weary; nothing but the sound of tears in her voice and her declaration that she would go by the public stage coach had made honest Zacchary see that there was nothing for it but to fall in with the outrageous plan. Like Beckenham, he thought more of the perils of the way than did the young lady herself.

'I should not have dreamed of troubling you, Captain Beckenham,' finished Marion, 'but my uncle is away on a private expedition, and our good friend, Colonel Sampson, is in the country. Failing these two, I have called upon yourself.'

The gentleman rose and paid the friendliness of the last sentence the honour of his lowest bow. When he reseated himself his face was troubled. His usual flattering speech failed him; he went straight to the point, not hiding his regret and anxiety.

'In the first case, Mistress Penrock, and to my infinite sorrow, I fear it is impossible for me to accompany you. I am in Her Majesty's suite, and should have been at Tunbridge this day but for an affair of the regiment for which Her Majesty gave me a day's absence. In the second—your pardon—but is it wise, this project of yours?'

Marion gave no sign of the dismay she felt as Beckenham explained his position; when he offered his criticism of her plan her eyes flashed. She rose.

'As you are in Her Majesty's service, sir, there is nothing more to be said, except to thank you for your kindness in coming to the house.'

Beckenham bowed.

'Forgive me,' he said, something of the look his messmates knew coming

into his eyes. 'There is something to be said. It would be an ill reward to the friendship with which Lady Fairfax has always favoured me if I failed her at this point.'

'Failed her, sir?'

'Failed her, madam. Lady Fairfax is away, her husband is away, Colonel Sampson is away. For the moment you are unprotected. I would not let my sister or my mother travel so far without suitable escort. Shall I allow a lady whom I would honour as I do either, to set out on such a dangerous road? I must offer a very humble but very real protest, Mistress Marion. May not the matter wait?'

'It may not wait.'

Marion sat down again, her anger undone by the manner of Beckenham's speech. The two were silent awhile, the gentleman watching his companion, who was toying with the lid of her aunt's sweetmeat box, her thoughts already running ahead to the problem as to which of the Fairfax servants she would choose to take Beckenham's place.

'Is your mind fully made up, Mistress Marion?' asked the soldier, his face still troubled.

Marion's grey eyes met his own with what was known by her aunt as the Penrock look.

'I am setting out for Garth to-morrow, with or without escort. That is quite decided. Look on it as a fact, Captain Beckenham,' she added with a fleeting smile, 'and not as a proposition.'

The young man watched the mouth droop at the corners again.

'I will come,' he said suddenly. "Twill mean disgr——' He stopped short.

Marion gave him an indulgent glance. 'I would not allow my brother or my father to imperil an already tender reputation, sir,'—she smiled again—'by disobeying royal commands. The same protecting watchfulness I must apply to yourself. To withhold it would be an ill return for the services you have rendered my aunt. Take that as final, like the fact of my going.' The gentle tone of her voice and the raillery of her smile eased the straightness of her speech.

'How she has suddenly become grown-up,' mused Beckenham, for once tongue-tied. "Tis not the same frightened child I found in the coach that first night. What a villainous ill fortune that I should be thus tied to Her Majesty's apron!' Then striving to put the personal part of the question out of his mind, he bent his thoughts to the problem of the lady's service. 'I have it!' He jumped up, speaking with a boyish eagerness that stood him better in Marion's favour than all his courtly airs. 'There's my servant, Tony. May I not lend you my servant, Mistress Marion? He's a brave lad and a tough soldier—worth three others, any day, though I myself say it.'

Marion felt a relief she did not show.

'If the servant be like his master, Captain Beckenham,' she said demurely, 'I am sure he will be worth—three, did you say?—or was it four?'

Beckenham laughed outright, then sobered again. 'There's Grammont, too,' he said. 'I had forgotten him.'

'Lord Grammont? No, sir. I do not like Lord Grammont,' said Marion bluntly.

Mr. Beckenham's head swam a little, but he made no comment on the obvious comparison. 'Grammont's a good fellow,' was his reply.

'There's another thing,' said Marion suddenly, a vague notion in the back of her mind asserting itself. 'I want your promise that you will keep this affair private.'

Beckenham felt a slight shock and his face sobered. 'Forgive me,' he said, 'but Lady Fairfax——'

'You will make an excellent grandfather in time. Captain Beckenham. 'Twere a pity to hasten the day. Of course I shall write to tell my aunt and also Colonel Sampson, and leave a note for my uncle. Could anything be more open? I meant that you should keep this matter private from the Lord Grammonts of your acquaintance. It concerns myself alone.'

'I will promise not to say a word, Mistress Marion,' said Beckenham after a minute's thought, 'if you will on the other hand promise me to take Reuben as well. I myself will accompany you as far as Hounslow, and then strike across country. I shall feel more comfortable once you are past the Heath. But Reuben is a youth of parts. He is quick of thought, has all his five senses in excellent working order; whereas my good Tony is apt to rely too much upon his sword. With those two, and the excellent Zacchary, who is a stalwart fellow, for an escort, I should feel more at ease when I am called on to report this affair to my Lady Fairfax. Even then, 'twill be an ordeal,' he added with a comical air.

'Fear not,' smiled Marion. 'I will make your case plain enough for my aunt's full forgiveness. 'Tis I who will have to meet her anger, some time, but not yourself.'

Beckenham shook his head. 'A man who has the honour of being a friend has nevertheless a certain responsibility.'

'I think I will take Reuben, if he will come,' said Marion, her spirits rising as the difficulties fell away. 'If he will come! Is there a youth in London who would not covet the privilege more than all——' Beckenham stopped short as he met Marion's look.

For a few minutes more the two talked of the journey. Then Marion rose, saying how very busied she must be in the short time left, and thanked the soldier for his kindness.

'I trust,' said Captain Beckenham, 'that you may find your trouble—your

errand that causes this urgency—not so great as you may think when you reach your journey's end.'

Marion started and her eyelids drooped. Then she held out her hand, and the eager words Beckenham had to say concerning his sorrow at her departure from Kensington froze before the distant, sorrowful look in her eyes. He lifted the fingers to his lips and turned on his heel. At the door he paused. Marion was looking in his direction, but her gaze was on something remote. The young man bowed again in silence; Marion, recollecting herself as the servant appeared, dropped a low curtsey and bade Captain Beckenham a very good evening.

With heavy steps she mounted to her bedroom. In the adjoining chamber Simone was busy with the travelling boxes. The door between the two rooms was ajar, and Simone, seeing her young mistress enter, ran forward and stood mutely waiting. Marion went to the open window and leaned her head wearily on the casement. The song of a nightingale in the lanes beyond Kensington village came to her ears.

'Listen,' said Marion, as Simone stole up to her side, 'listen to yonder bird. How can he sing so? There is no sorrow in the world for him!'

'Nay, Mademoiselle, 'tis sorrow tunes his song, you forget. But, Mademoiselle——'

'Yes?'

'Pardon, but I should so like to know——'

'"Tis well. Captain Beckenham cannot come, but he is lending his servant, and I have also promised to take Reuben.'

Marion roused herself and went across to her writing table, glancing into the adjoining room as she passed the door.

'All packed? Good. You have done bravely, Simone. Now I must write to my aunt and uncle, and Colonel Sampson.'

Simone still lingered. 'Mademoiselle——'

'What is it?'

'I have been thinking about——'

A knock at the door interrupted her. 'Come in,' called Marion, bending over her paper. A subdued exclamation from Simone made Marion turn her head. Zacchary and Reuben stood together in the doorway. Reuben was stepping forward, but Zacchary caught his sleeve.

'"Tain't but me, Mistress Marion,' began Zacchary, his free hand touching his forehead. 'There bain't no gainsaying this 'ere young man. Her's some set on travelling wi' we to-morrow.'

'By your leave, Madam,' said the Cockney youth, 'it would give me the greatest pleasure.'

'A did say,' put in Zacchary, with a sidelong withering look at the man

who borrowed the speeches of the great, 'a did say as 'tweren't no use nohow. Stands to reason a Lunnon man knows nothing o' country going. But if you'm so minded, Mistress, as to allow un, a might serve to hold the horses' heads—'lowing her knows head from tail—ony roads her'll run back fast enough when the highwaymen start on we.'

'Zacchary, Zacchary!' said Marion. 'And 'twas yourself told me of Reuben's valiant fight with footpad at Knightsbridge yonder, two years ago.'

'A don't deny as a be a fule sometimes,' said Zacchary meditatively, scratching his head, 'but it bain't the same——'

'I'm busy now,' interrupted Marion. 'Take Reuben downstairs and tell him as much as you can of the journey up to prepare him for the journey down. I shall be very glad of your company, Reuben. You may ride on the coach seat with Zacchary. Are your carbines ready, Zacchary?'

'Ay, Mistress, but a were saying——'

'And plenty of shot?'

'Us 'as enough shot to fight the battle o' Sedgemoor all over again,' declared the Cornishman.

'Then 'tis highly likely you won't pull the trigger once, Zacchary. But, Reuben, you need not fear these tales. The roads have been quieter, I think, since the coming and going of the King's men these months. My father and I came up to Kensington without being murdered on the coach steps. And, in any case, Captain Beckenham's servant is coming as outrider. From what I hear,' added Marion, 'he shoots three men at once.'

'Presarve 's!' said Zacchary. 'Like as not her'll shoot we, Mistress.'

Marion took up her quill. 'Be ready to start at eight o'clock,' she said briefly.

'Can't think what have come to the little maid,' mused Zacchary, as he lumbered downstairs in the wake of the delighted Reuben. 'Her's growing more like the Admur'l every day.'

Meanwhile Simone waited, sadly noting how soon the grave expression had overrun the smile with which her young mistress had talked to Zacchary.

'You had something to say, Simone?'

'Mademoiselle, have you thought about money?'

Marion laid down her pen again with an exclamation of dismay. 'I had quite forgotten money!'

'I had been wondering. You'll want a good deal, Mademoiselle.'

Marion counted out her purse. 'And there are two guineas in my jewel box.'

'Madame Romaine has the little money I have saved,' remarked Simone. 'I never thought of asking her for it. But it is very little.'

'It is kind of you to think of that, Simone. What can I do? Oh, if only Colonel Sampson had not gone away on that sudden journey! What can I do?'

'Mademoiselle,' said Simone after, a pause, 'when ladies find themselves in need of money, they generally borrow on their jewellery.'

With her forehead resting on her hand Marion thought awhile.

'There is no other way that I can see,' she said in a low tone, 'and she would not mind. We shall have to sell the pearl necklace, Simone.'

'There is no need to sell, Mademoiselle,' explained Simone. 'The goldsmith will lend you the money, and you can leave it with him and get it again later.'

'But,' said Marion in dismay, a new thought striking her, 'that means delay. What is the hour now?'

'Close on ten o'clock, Mademoiselle. Impossible, of course, to-night. But if Mademoiselle will trust me, I will go up to Lombard Street to-morrow morning, and seek a man I know of there.'

'How will you go?'

'My lady left the small coach, and there are plenty of horses. I will be back with the money by the time Mademoiselle is ready.'

Marion turned with a sigh to her letter. 'Be sure to take a servant with you in the coach. I cannot think what I should do without you, Simone.'

Simone dropped on one knee, and laid her cheek against Marion's idle hand. 'Je ne cherche aucun plaisir que de vous servir, Mademoiselle.'

'Tais-toi!' said Marion huskily, her fingers touching the glossy head. 'I have not time to weep.'

With her mouth in set lines, Marion wrote her letters. When they were directed and sealed, she found Simone waiting to undress her. Her jewel box, a present from Lady Fairfax, was by the bed. Marion took from it the case containing the pearl and turquoise necklace, and handing it to Simone, dismissed her for the night.

She sank on her knees by the high, canopied bed. 'Our Father,' began the tremulous whisper. Then the golden brown head fell on the coverlet. 'O Roger, Roger!' she sobbed.

CHAPTER XIV
A HALT ON THE ROAD

Marion sat in the corner of the coach, wondering why the roads had become so much more uneven, the vehicle itself so comfortless, the sturdy greys so slow

seeming, since she had travelled that same course with her father not more than two months ago. And she had not the consolation that pleasanter riding lay ahead; ruefully she thought of the waggon tracks of the west country, compared with which the narrow lanes, deeply rutted, through which the coach now rocked and jolted, made easy going.

On the first day, after Beckenham had left the party, and the coach had settled down to a steady pace, the sense of slowness had been intolerable to the girl. Her fear and dread sped backwards and forwards between Roger in his gaol and herself crawling snailwise over the intervening space, and taunted her with her helplessness. The enforced inaction left her a prey to mental maladies that otherwise she would have shaken off. Moody and irritable, she had words for none.

At the outset, she had been forced to recognise one drag on her speed: she dare not press the greys beyond their strength, nor dare she leave them at some posting-house and take fresh horses for the succeeding stages of the journey. That she risked her father's displeasure in any case, in returning thus, she was certain. She saw her position from his point of view: merely because she could not bear to stay behind, she had come home; but that was no reason why she should ruin the horses. Therefore it was needless for Zacchary to preach rest and caution. At the inn where they stopped for the night, Marion saw to it that the weight of her purse and the new-born authority of her manner ensured the best stabling and food the house afforded. She had done all she could. Everything now depended on the coach and the animals. But in the meantime only some few hours had passed since she left London, and long days lay ahead during which she must perforce sit idle.

The morrow found her in the same gloomy condition, her desperate fancy dwelling on each coming stage of the interminable road. One day pressed on to another without any incident to ease her unhappy mood. Slowly the sun rose, and slowly sank to rest; the young moon over her casement mocked her restless sleep; and for Marion the incomparable beauty of the green summer turned into the spite of prison walls.

Simone, unobtrusively watching her young mistress, began to be concerned for her state, and would have almost welcomed an accident, a stray highwayman, if only the face in the corner would lose its set look.

But so far no such ill hap had occurred. Travelling only by daylight, and so well guarded, and, as the men on the box averred, protected by a special fate, the coach had gone on its way unmolested. Tony the valiant, as Simone had dubbed him, was indeed worth the three men of his master's boast, and his splendid horsemanship and elegant livery had called for no few admiring glances from the farm lads and rosy-cheeked wenches who stood at times to watch the coach

and its outrider go by. The travellers had done almost half the journey before Simone found out that while Zacchary and Reuben slept in a hayloft above the horses' stalls, Tony chose for his bed the boards of the landing outside the ladies' bedchamber. Simone herself, water jug in hand, had come suddenly upon this unexpected barricade one morning when Master Tony had overslept himself. She had all but fallen headlong over the prostrate body, and her exclamation finding its way into his dreams, the young man had become aware of a slippered foot within reach of his hand. At once his fingers closed on the foot, while he wriggled into a position that would enable him to see who was daring to pass so close to the door behind which his fair charges were sleeping. Scarcely had he brought his drowsy eyes to rest on Simone's dainty face before the few drops of water left in the ewer trickled on to his own. Her foot released, Simone stood back with a smile. 'So 'tis thyself who snores so loudly that my mistress and I have feared our walls were but thin boards! Snore on, valiant warrior,' said Simone over her shoulder, as she went along the passage. 'Henceforth the sound of thy slumbers shall be music to our ears.'

In the late afternoon of the fourth day the coach was making a rather slow progress along the Ilminster Road. Zacchary had discovered, or imagined, as Marion asserted, a slight lameness in the inside leader. Nothing would induce him to hurry his pace, and Marion had been obliged to bow to his will.

To Simone's unbounded relief, Marion's attack of depression had worn itself out. The consciousness that in a few more days, granted no ill fortune, she would cross the boundary into Cornwall, lent an added buoyancy to her reacting mood.

The sound of the broad Dorset speech, which had induced a home-coming sensation in Marion, had greatly diverted Simone. Marion, giving her a lesson in west country dialect, did not notice the narrow lane, deep ditched at one side, into which they had passed, and was unaware of any danger until, with a sickening heave, the coach slanted down into the hollow, and rested there.

'Bide where you be, Mistress,' came Zacchary's call. 'Us'll shift un all right!'

For a few seconds the men struggled at the horses' heads, the Cornishman's cries to the struggling greys running into a high falsetto and an affectionate reviling that made even Marion smile.

"Tis nothing,' she said to Simone, as the two balanced themselves against the list of the coach floor. 'We toppled into a ditch coming down, and were soon on the road again. Zacchary must have been careless for once. There! 'Twas a splendid pull. Ah—stay! What was that?'

The coach, almost balanced, had fallen back slanting-wise, and with the movement had come the sound of a snap, and a struggling of horses' feet. The voices of the men ceased.

'Something has happened,' said Marion, 'and I can't open this villainous door! Reuben!' she called.

The footman was already climbing on to the coach step, which appeared to be poised in mid-air, and in a moment the two girls were lifted to the ground.

Zacchary was bending over a broken trace.

'Oh!' said Marion in a relieved tone, 'I thought the pole had gone.'

Zacchary's mouth twisted under his beard. 'My lady would sing a different song by and by, when she saw the time it would take to mend the break.'

'You have all your tools, have you not?' asked Marion.

Zacchary straightened himself. 'There bean't nawt in yonder box at all, Mistress. A wor that struck at the sudden hurry of coming away a' clean forgot.'

Marion stood in silent dismay.

Meanwhile, Tony had been scouting ahead, and now trotted down the lane with the news that a likely inn was perched in a hollow over the next hill.

'Didst see aught of a cobbler's bench perched by un?' demanded Zacchary, his wrath rising. 'Streak off now, tha girt gawk! And if thou should light on a few sheep up over—and us allows tha'll be some scared—there bean't no call to trot back to tell the Mistress. A body would ha' thought—but thy head's too full o' Lunnon impidence for aught else.'

Not waiting to hear the end of the speech, Tony wheeled round.

'Will it take long to mend it, Zacchary?' inquired Marion.

'Maybe, maybe. 'Tis a bad split. Easy, now there,' called Zacchary, watching Reuben freeing the wheelers. 'So. Let un graze quiet-like.'

Marion sighed. 'Do your best, Zacchary,' she said gently. 'We will walk on a bit, and wait at the inn till you come.'

After a short walk between the steep flower-grown hedges, the two reached the little hostelry which Tony had espied from the crest of the hill. A smiling, rosy-cheeked innkeeper, with a smiling, rosy-cheeked wife at his side, stood on the steps as the two came up, their approach having been noted from the kitchen windows. The woman smoothed her apron and dropped a series of curtseys as her husband greeted the travellers.

'Thank you,' said Marion. 'We should like to wait awhile, but 'twould be more pleasure to walk about in the garden yonder than to sit indoors. We have had over much sitting in the coach these days past. But,' she added, rather anxiously, 'did not our man come up to ask for an awl and some leather for mending the trace?'

'He has but now gone up over, Madam,' said the innkeeper. 'The cobbler's cottage is that you see yonder, next the blacksmith's.'

As he spoke, the man pointed out the few dwellings of a tiny hamlet across the fields.

'If you would see that the cobbler comes himself,' began Marion:—then she broke off, smiling. 'Tony is indeed worth three men,' she said to Simone. 'See yonder where he comes with the cobbler riding behind.'

'A don't allow but that his horse be tired some,' remarked the innkeeper as, in a few minutes, Tony's chestnut went by at a canter with her double burden. 'Would it not be best to lie here and go on to-morrow?'

Here the wife chimed in. 'There be a dish o' trout from the brook, caught this morning, a fine ham up the chimney ready for cutting, Mistress, and sheep's kidneys, and a venison pasty, and a good fat fowl hanging yonder. Killed yesterday, 'twas.'

Marion shook her head. 'We want to get to Ilminster to-night.'

'Ilminster! For pity's sake, Mistress, think of the horses!' cried the innkeeper. 'But in any case, wife, get the ladies a pot of cider.'

For close on an hour Marion and Simone walked in the garden and to and fro along the lane, waiting for the rest of the party to reappear. Towards the end of the time Marion fell silent, and Simone forbore to draw her into conversation. At length the sound of horses was heard, and with an impatient word Marion turned to greet the laggards; but the word died on her lips, and she stared in dismay as the coach came up the lane, drawn by the wheelers only, Reuben following with the leaders at the rear of the vehicle.

'There bean't nothing amiss, Mistress Marion,' said Zacchary as the coach came to a standstill in front of the inn. 'Us have mended the trace all right, but you must see, with Jennifer falling lame, it be wellnigh impossible to reach Ilminster to-night. In any case the horses be weary. Cobbler tells me there bean't near so good stabling this side Exeter as to this here inn. I vote we stay, Mistress, and get on the road at sunrise.'

There was a doggedness in Zacchary's voice that Marion remembered from her childhood's days. It was no good arguing the matter when Zacchary spoke in that tone.

'Very well,' said Marion. She turned to go into the garden again, and Simone went to the well of the coach to find her mistress's box that had been set apart for necessities of travel.

'Then my lady will stay?' cried the innkeeper's wife. 'Supper shall be ready in a very short time.'

Her husband, meanwhile, was looking along the road to the west. In the bustle of stabling the greys no one had noticed another rider coming in from the Ilminster direction. The landlord listened intently for a minute, then his rosy face broadened into a still wider smile.

'Here be another for supper and bed, an I mistake not,' he called to his wife. 'Yonder roan hath cast a shoe.'

From inside the garden, which ran westward of the inn, Marion looked curiously for the arrival of another victim of the hazards of the road. Presently the roan trotted up, and the rider dismounted. He was a lean, spare young man, and from his garments and manner of speech as he greeted the innkeeper, Marion vaguely classed him as a lawyer's clerk.

'You have ridden hard, sir,' the innkeeper was saying. 'And a finer brute I never saw.'

Mine host had evidently no suspicion that Marion was within earshot; precisely the same approval he had cast on her greys.

'I ride on a hard errand, my good man,' said the new comer in a slightly pompous tone. 'Is there a smith hereabouts?'

The landlord indicated the cottages across the green. 'My boy shall take your horse, sir,' he said, 'and supper will be on the table presently. We have youth and beauty for our guests to-night, sir.'

'Aha!' said the stranger, squaring his shoulders and pulling his moustache—'and who may——?'

With a smile, Marion moved out of earshot.

Presently Zacchary came hesitatingly into the garden. Having won his point so easily, he was wishful for a word of peace with his lady. "Twas for the best,' he said, his old eyes looking into the clear grey ones.

'I know it, Zacchary,' said Marion gently. 'Are the horses all right? What of Jennifer?'

Zacchary nodded. 'Jennifer will be all right to-morrow. Yonder Tony be a power o' help. A don't allow but her be as handy a man with the brutes as ever a clapped eyes on. Beats me how her knows such a terr'ble lot about horses, and Lunnon-born and bred.' The old groom moved a step nearer. 'Yonder be a Devon man now come,' he pursued, his voice dropping. 'Do 'ee look out for your purse, Mistress.'

'Zacchary! I am truly ashamed of you!'

Zacchary looked stolidly at his mistress. 'Like as not a rogue,' he insisted. 'A don't niver trust they Devon ikes. I should be main surprised if her haven't robbed somebody already, being that careful with the saddlebags and all.'

'I don't suppose his saddlebags contain anything more than a bundle of documents,' said Marion. 'You're as bad as old Mother Borlase, Zacchary.'

'And the man was that solemn and grand,' went on Zacchary, 'a body might a took un for Governor of Bodmin, no less.'

'Go and get your supper. And don't be such a quarrelsome wretch. The man is very well.'

Marion followed Zacchary indoors and was escorted by the innkeeper's wife to the best bedroom, where Simone had laid out a change of dress for her

mistress.

'I feel mightily inclined for a quiet meal,' remarked Marion as the last deft touches were put to her hair and gown. 'And perhaps I may get one if you will show the same kindness that you showed in entertaining Captain Beckenham on my behalf that first day.'

A slight spot of colour showed on Simone's cheeks.

'À votre service, Mademoiselle,' she said in a rather constrained voice.

Marion glanced at her curiously in the mirror. 'He was certainly very gallant and delightful,' she went on. 'No one can be more so than Captain Beckenham. Yonder man downstairs is of a different order, though. Still, I have no fear your fine steel will fail in meeting his heavy blade.'

As Marion spoke a kitchen-maid knocked at the door to announce supper, and the two went down into the little dining-room. Mine host, all smiles and delight, stood within the doorway. He was one of those innkeepers who made travelling a pleasure; the comfort and happiness of his guests and not his own gain seemed to be his one consideration. By the window stood the newcomer. He turned as the ladies entered. From the amount of self-importance he contrived to put into his greeting Marion understood at once Zacchary's hostile feeling.

With the slightest lift of her eyebrows Simone followed her mistress to the place allotted and sat down. After acknowledging the stranger's bow with a cold salutation, Marion turned her attention to the innkeeper and then to her supper. Her sense of weariness and lurking anxiety was weighing on her spirits. Nothing but the eager face of her host as he hovered by her chair, pressing dish after dish for her acceptance, would have made her break the silence that, in her present mood, was the only comfort possible.

Meanwhile the stranger had turned his attention to Simone, and presently, as the good cheer of food and wine stole over Marion's senses, easing a little her mental strain, she became aware that a very fine play was going on across the table. The countryman could make no headway against Simone's cool wit. He fell back on the resort of his kind: boasting. Mine host's wine, too, in the quantities the man drank, would have made a braggart of the humblest spirit.

Thus it was that Marion, her eyes on the June roses that overran the grey walls of the inn, flaming red in warm sunset, suddenly became aware of the man's rising voice, of his flourishes as he talked of himself. She brought her cool, level gaze to bear upon his heated face. At the moment he was explaining for the benefit of the innkeeper his own very great impatience as compared with other folk who wandered aimlessly on this dull planet.

'Show us thy merit, then, sir,' broke in the smiling innkeeper. 'Give us chapter and verse!'

'Ah!' said the other, bridling, "tis a secret mission.'

Simone slightly shrugged her shoulders and turned to her custard.

'Tis an interesting word—secret,' she remarked idly.

'Tis a word not much liked hereabouts,' interposed the landlord with a look for his guest. 'Tis main near to Dorchester for that.'

'Ay, well mayst thou look so, my good man,' said the other, laying down his glass. 'And there be others who would look on me thus did they know what I carry. Before you, madam,' he said, turning to Simone with a clumsy, top-heavy bow, 'you see a man in whose hands is a mission of life and death.'

Marion looked hard at the speaker.

'La, la!' said Simone. 'You are then arranging a duel. Where is 't to be fought?'

'Ay—a duel, mistress, wherein but one shall bear a tool. But—' the man puffed out his chest, 'the result of my mission may mean that even that one tool shall be idle. In the main I hope it may, for I hear 'tis a well-known youth of excellent parts who has tripped in the path, and that more out of friendliness than roguery.' Taking Marion's unwavering look for a stare of admiration the man paused for further effect. 'Ay,' he said again, 'in these hands lies the life of one who pines yonder—' he jerked his head in the direction of the setting sun. 'More wine, mine host. 'Tis a worthy vintage. Mistress, the honour of a bumper.'

Marion rose. 'Our host himself will bear you company, sir,' she said, her face calm. 'I pray you—' turning to the innkeeper, 'take a bottle at my charges. 'Tis a most excellent supper, and should not be spoilt with haste. But as for ourselves, we are somewhat weary, and we wish you a very good evening.'

The innkeeper's wife came trotting in in answer to her husband's call, and taking a candle, accompanied the ladies to their chamber. In response to Marion's question, she explained that Zacchary and his fellows had supped, and, the night being yet young, had gone over with her own serving men for company for a friendly hour at the blacksmith's. The kitchen wenches were abed, she added, for they must be up before dawn. And if the ladies had no further need of her, she herself would retire. Marion had already learned that the inn was also something in the nature of a farm, and knowing the double labours that must fall on those plump shoulders, she bade the woman seek her own couch at once.

'We ourselves must be up before the sun,' she said. 'I would fain be well on the road by seven o'clock.'

With a bobbing curtsey the woman departed. As she went down the land-

ing Marion turned and looked at Simone.

CHAPTER XV
IN THE HARNESS ROOM

The two stood in silence until the sound of a door closing came from the farther end of the house.

'You have the same dread,' said Marion heavily. 'I can see it. I had hoped perhaps 'twas my nervous fancy that, like a colt, shies at every stone in the path.'

She sat down on the low window seat.

'He bears a letter,' said Simone suddenly.

'And 'tis not in his pocket, or he would have slapped it bravely. 'Tis in his saddlebags.'

'In the stable, Mademoiselle?'

'In the harness room, I expect, next to the stable. I noted the place when we were waiting.'

Marion buried her face in her hands. A silence fell on the little chamber. The sound of laughter and voices rose from the room below.

'Mademoiselle,' presently came Simone's whisper, 'this is unbearable. Perhaps we are both mistaken. Our thoughts naturally go the same way. If you saw the letter, you would know. Let me find it for you.'

'No,' said Marion firmly, lifting her head. 'No hand is laid to such an action but my own. I take myself whatever risk may befall. And if I do it, I must do it at once, before the light fails—and before delay makes a coward of me. I had already thought of it. 'Twould appear easy enough; the men abroad, the servant girls in bed. And if I am discovered, I must be looking at Jennifer's knees.'

'Mademoiselle,' ventured Simone, 'you must be ready, you know. The letter will doubtless be sealed. I have heard that a hot knife, run under the seal, will ease it without breaking it. You will find a knife in the kitchen, and the logs are alight. I saw the glow from the passage.'

Marion shivered slightly. "Tis a foul thing that I set myself to do, but I must know. I must know. Quick, Simone! Take off my shoes. Stockings make no sound.'

A minute later Marion crept stealthily downstairs. Mine host and the traveller were talking over their wine, their heads dark against the sunset light which

fell slanting through the latticed window.

From the crack of the door, as she stole by, Marion caught a glimpse of the two figures, the smoke rising from their pipes. How long would they stay thus?

Noiselessly she crept along the passage in the direction whence she had seen the servant girl come with dishes for supper. A glow from some interior warmth lay across the passage stones, the same light that Simone had noted. With a quick backward glance Marion turned in at the open kitchen door.

A fire of logs burned in the huge chimney place, casting gleams on the brass cooking utensils hanging on the chimney breast. On the table stood various dishes and jugs. Rapidly Marion looked about for a knife. Would she, she thought with a sudden tremor, be obliged to open a drawer? Neither on the dresser nor on the table was a knife to be seen.

She tiptoed across the room to an open door. Beyond lay the inn yard and the stables. The exit was clear. So far so good; but the knife?

Another door just on the latch stood in the opposite wall. Peeping in, Marion saw the place she sought: the 'wash-up.' A pile of knives and forks stood on a side bench, clean from supper, but evidently awaiting scouring. Hastily she selected the one with the slenderest blade.

As she turned to go back into the kitchen, her foot caught in the slanting leg of a rough stool just inside the little room. It jerked on the stones. Marion stood still, her heart thumping so loudly that she felt that the men whose voices came dimly down the passage must be hearing its beat where they sat. Something moved overhead. In an agony of fear Marion waited. Should she get out of the kitchen at once before those steps came downstairs? Better anything than be caught indoors in this fashion. For close on a minute she stood, the throbbing pulse in her brow measuring out the seconds.

The sounds did not recur. She crept towards the fireplace. With her ears straining for any sound she plunged the knife into the glowing embers, and took her handkerchief to protect her hand from any heat which the handle might catch. Not until the blade was red did she allow herself to withdraw the knife.

Hastily she darted out at the open kitchen door. A second later she was in the harness room. At the doorway she turned and peeped up at the house. From the small window of an upper chamber came the gleam of candle light: the bedroom of the inn-keeper's wife, she guessed.

With the rapidly cooling knife in one hand Marion cast an experienced eye on the saddles, bridles and general gear hanging on the walls of the harness room. On a shelf above stood the only saddle whose bags were packed and buckled. Desperately she struggled with the first buckle. If the document proved to be in the second bag she knew she would have to go back and heat the knife afresh.

Tears of relief blinked in her eyes as she opened the bag and drew out a

folded paper sealed with a large red seal. Now for the knife. Never before had she tried such an experiment. Was the knife hot enough? Gently she slid the blade under the wax. The seal came easily away. Bearing the letter to the half-open door she glanced hurriedly over its contents.

The letter was written in a bold, legal hand, and was easily read. It was inscribed, with many flourishes, to the Lord High Chancellor of the realm. Marion's eyes ran down the lines. She caught her breath painfully and went on.... 'The question being of one Roger Trevannion of the parish of Garth, Esquire. Whereas the prisoner now in the County gaol, Exeter, hath been found guilty of lending aid and sustenance to the King's enemies in that he did privily and treasonably forewarn one Richard Merrion Hooper of the parish ...' Marion looked farther down the page ... 'which crime should assuredly merit death; but inasmuch that the prisoner be a man of note, indeed a lord of the manor in his own parts, we lay the case before your Illustrious Highness in the hope that your well-known clemency may dictate terms of mercy.

'Given under our hand and seal....'

With hands that seemed turned to stone Marion folded the letter. Mechanically she pressed the knife to the under surface of the seal. The blade was almost cold. For a few moments she stood, her hand on the doorpost for support. An owl hooting in his soundless flight across the yard made her start and drop the knife. Her head swam as she stooped and picked it up. Without any further delay, her teeth on her white, trembling lip, she stole across the yard into the kitchen and thrust the blade once more into the glowing embers. Cold beads stood on her forehead. She knew she was fast losing control of herself. But the hideous task must be finished. It seemed an hour before the steel yielded to the heat. Mechanically she wrapped the handkerchief round the handle again. As she went out she heard a chair grate loudly on the floor in the dining-room beyond. The men were moving.

A minute later and the seal was pressed home and the letter replaced.

As she buckled the saddlebag a wave of faintness overcame her and she leaned against the wall. She struggled for breath. Then stepping to the door, a new thought seized her.

Why allow that document to go? There were sheets of paper in her box upstairs. Why not risk the enterprise still further, carry the letter upstairs and transfix the seal? Yonder logs in the kitchen would be hot an hour or more.

Her hand to her forehead, Marion strove desperately to summon judgment and reason to the aid of her distracted thoughts. But as she stood, round and round in her head, like a clanging bell, sounded the phrases she had read. She closed her eyes. Immediately before her vision came the words *Roger Trevannion of the parish of Garth, Esquire.*

She opened her eyes with a start. Yonder men had been moving in the dining-room when she left the kitchen. As she rallied herself, voices sounded in the still night across the fields. There came the distant, quick bark of a dog. The men were returning from the blacksmith's. She stood between two dangers of detection.

With every nerve tense, trembling from head to foot, Marion worked out the problem. If she destroyed the paper and the courier did not find out the substitution, the hand of the law might be stayed. She would gain time. On the other hand, the messenger evidently knew something of the nature of his mission. He would supply certain facts; and Jeffreys' wrath at being duped would immediately result in a swift condemnation.

The girl started and clutched the door as the quick bark sounded again, this time much nearer.

If she let the letter go there was a faint hope of pardon, in any case she would gain a few days—four perhaps—while the man was going to London and back. It was better so. The letter should go.

Just as the men opened the outer gate of the farm, Marion ran back across the kitchen and stood in the passage. The innkeeper, in the middle of the dining-room, his back to the girl, was yawning loudly. The courier was emptying his last glass. Like a ghost Marion stole past the door and up the stairs.

CHAPTER XVI
EXETER

Simone was waiting on the landing, and as her mistress crept into the room she noiselessly barred the door. Marion sank on the bed, breathing unevenly, her face showing the strain she had undergone. Simone held a glass of water to her lips. She drank eagerly, then buried her face in the coverlet.

Along the passage without went the heavy steps of the courier. Simone was seized with a sudden horror as she realised how near success had run to failure. Success? She looked at the bowed head. Gently she took up the trembling hands.

"'Tis he,' came the broken whisper. 'He is in Exeter gaol—condemned. 'Twas to Jeffreys, yonder letter, saying that the prisoner, Roger Trevannion—' Marion's whisper became almost inaudible—'had been found guilty of lending aid and sustenance to the King's enemies and should rightly be hanged. But I

can't remember the exact words—the Governor said that seeing the prisoner was a man of note ... he wondered if—if—' Marion's words stumbled, and Simone bent low. 'If,' finished the girl with a sudden burst of bitter, contemptuous anger, 'my lord Jeffreys' well-known clemency would not dictate another—another sentence. I can't remember the rest. Already I would that I could forget what I have remembered.'

The flame died away as Marion's voice sank into silence. The russet gold head drooped forward. For several minutes neither moved.

After a time Simone knelt down and gently examined her mistress's feet. The stockings were cut here and there, but the skin was unbroken. Presently she coaxed Marion to allow herself to be undressed. Marion got up and sat down mechanically as the deft hands did their work, and finally crept into the sweet, lavender-scented bed.

'Try to sleep, Mademoiselle,' said Simone, bending over the pillow to stroke the waving hair from the forehead. 'You will need all your strength.'

'Ay,' said Marion dully, 'all my strength and yours, and all my wits and yours. I have not time to sleep. I must think. There is one thing for which we cannot be sufficiently thankful: we are nearing Exeter. To-morrow night, with speed, should see us there, at the end of the journey, but,' she continued in a voice that matched her haggard face, 'at the beginning of a worse thing—a race with time. Get you to bed, Simone, and to-morrow——'

'Hist!' whispered the other, as a heavy stockinged tread sounded in the passage and the boards creaked outside the door, 'yonder comes our bodyguard. We had best be silent.'

Soon the steady snores came to their ears. The innkeeper moved about in a further room; then silence fell on the house.

Presently, Marion sat up in bed, her arms round her knees. Simone still crouched by her side.

'Have I ever said aught of my Aunt Keziah?' she whispered.

'No, Mademoiselle.'

'She lives in Exeter.'

Simone's face lighted up. Her hands clasped each other. 'Oh, Mademoiselle, what amazing good fortune!'

'Why? I had rather lodged at the New Inn. Being in my aunt's house I shall be obliged to tell her everything. But I dare not go to the inn; she would find out, it being almost next door to my aunt's house. It all depends whether she will be friend or foe.'

'Is Madame your aunt at all like Lady Fairfax?'

'In looks, yes.'

'A second Lady Fairfax had been an ally, Mademoiselle. But—but—Madame

your aunt may have influential friends.'

A ghost of a smile flickered over Marion's face.

'Or enemies. She makes rare enemies, my Aunt Keziah. I have only been to the house once, when I was eight. 'Twas the first coach ride I had ever had. Then my aunt quarrelled with my father about my upbringing, and I never saw her again until this year when she came to Garth. I remember the house, in the High Street, near the East Gate.'

A question burned on Simone's lips. Presently Marion unconsciously answered it. 'I do not in the least know where—where the gaol is.'

For close on an hour the two whispered together, Marion finding a temporary relief in going over and over again the possibilities of the situation. Presently she fell silent, her face showing haggard in the candle-light.

'There's one thing,' she said at the last. 'Now something has got to be done. Only one more day in that hateful coach, sitting idle. I have thought and thought and thought; for four days I have sat thinking. There will be to-morrow for thinking again. Then——'

Presently, Marion lay quiet and Simone put out the candle and turned to her own little pallet bed. The moon swung clear above the sloping land, the silver beams creeping through the cracks of the shuttered window. Out in the lane rose suddenly the full-throated song of the nightingale, answering another across the valley. With a stifled moan Marion buried her face in the pillow.

Simone, undressing in the darkness, shed bitter tears, and for a long time she crouched by her chair, summoning remembrance of those two, one near and one distant, to a Presence where remembrance would be availing. The June night went up in beauty; the world lay bathed in an exceeding peace. But Marion tossed to and fro in the darkness, counting the minutes of each endless hour.

Just about sunset the following evening the coach wound down the valley and entered Exeter by the East Gate. Zacchary's reluctance to speed up the horses had been overborne, not so much by Marion's words as her looks. It dawned on the old man that his beloved mistress must be ailing. Tony the watchful confirmed his suspicions. If the mistress had an aunt in Exeter, said the Londoner, 'twas nothing short of a providence they should be so near to the town, for to his way of thinking the young lady was sickening for a fever. Zacchary said no more.

Mistress Keziah was sitting down to supper in the low, lattice-windowed room that looked out on the courtyard. Beyond the flagged stretch rose high, creeper-covered walls, in which the great oaken entrance doors were set. The house was a rambling, gabled building, with a garden at the rear, which was only kept in order because of Mistress Keziah's sense of duty to her forbears. Rarely

she walked therein; only part of the large house was inhabited, Mistress Keziah loving to spend the greater part of her income on her visits to Bath, where she lived some months of each year in state and splendour.

The sound of horses and wheels, and the clang of the courtyard bell, roused in her a lively curiosity. Quickly she thought of the few folk in the neighbourhood who might pay her an evening visit in a coach drawn by at least four horses. When the footman opened the courtyard door and a tall young lady walked in, wearing a travelling cloak and hood which bore the unmistakable mark of a London tailor, Mistress Keziah was filled with amazement.

A minute later the footman entered the room and stood aside to allow the visitor to pass.

'Mistress Marion Penrock.'

'Marion! My child!'

The lady stepped forward with open arms. Any doubt Marion had as to her welcome was swept away in a close embrace.

'I can scarce believe my eyes,' said Mistress Keziah, holding her guest at arm's length for a survey.

'But you have grown, I declare! You look mighty different.'

The stern look Marion had remembered disappeared from the angular features. The old lady was secretly overjoyed that Marion had elected of her own free will to make a visit to her house. 'But why such a pale, worn face? How far have you come? Are you alone? Take the saddle of mutton back, Thomas, and keep it hot while my niece prepares for supper. Tell Mercian to see to the guest chamber. How many servants have you, my dear?'

'Three men and my waiting woman, Simone. I should like you to speak to Simone, Aunt Keziah,' said Marion dropping her voice. 'She is more companion than servant. Where are you, Simone?'

Simone stepped forward from the hall. Her faultless slow curtsey, the grave dignity with which she responded to the lady's greetings, pleased Mistress Keziah mightily. Just such a servant would she have chosen herself.

The two girls followed their hostess up the oaken stair, across the gallery and into her own room, where Simone hastily prepared her mistress for supper. The old lady would not allow a change of dress. She had already remarked on Marion's pallor. When she heard how far they had driven since daybreak, and the speed with which the party had come from London, she decided that food and rest were more necessary than fair raiment.

'*D'ailleurs*,' was Simone's inward comment, 'she wants to know all about it. But she has a store of kindness somewhere under a crust of something. How beautiful she must have been in her youth!'

Marion never quite knew how that seemingly interminable meal passed.

In the presence of the servants she talked of London and her aunt, the queen's illness and visit to the Wells, trying meanwhile to eat a little of the food piled on her plate. But her aunt's shrewd eye was on her, 'Why has she come?' her unspoken question. She knew at once that the girl was under the spell of some unhappiness. When the servants withdrew, Mistress Keziah looked inquiringly at the pale face across the table, where the candlelight picked out the shadows under the eyes and the gold of the hair.

Marion responded to the look. 'Forgive me, Aunt Keziah, I can't talk to-night. My head aches so. Will you bear with my silence till to-morrow?'

'How she has changed!' mused the lady as she strove to soften the habitual rigour of her speech—about which she was quite conscious and in fact complacent—and set the girl at her ease. 'No longer a child. What is it? Has some gallant yonder bruised her simple, unprepared heart? Oh, that brother of mine, and his upbringing!' Thus, running back to her old grievance, Mistress Keziah's face hardened again. Then recollecting herself, she presently rose and took the girl to her room.

'I am very sorry, Aunt Keziah,' faltered Marion, as her aunt bid her good-night.

'So am I, if you are going to be poorly, my dear child, but for no other reason. Are you sure you will not take a dose of my herb tea?'

Marion made a slight grimace. 'I could never abide the idea of physicking. For that matter, I have never been ill, except for childish complaints.'

'Just like your father,' commented Mistress Keziah. 'But,' she added, 'don't be afraid of me. I am not an ogre.'

Marion smiled faintly. 'I was terrified of you at Garth, Aunt Keziah.'

'But you have seen a little of the world since then,' drily commented the lady. 'The same kind of fear should never recur. Good-night, my dear. Sleep well.'

But darkness brought no relief to Marion. With morning she was feverish, wild-eyed, more awake than ever. A new horror seized Simone when, in response to her mistress's call, she sprang up from a troubled sleep and drew the curtains wide. If the girl could not sleep, she would soon be really ill. And what then?

Presently Simone took her courage in both hands and, saying nothing to Marion, sought Mistress Keziah. The gaunt face in its frilled nightcap, and the many wrappings by which the lady imagined she warded off rheumatism, made in their way the most awe-inspiring sight Simone had yet encountered. But, as Marion said, Simone never made a mistake. After a few minutes' conversation, Mistress Keziah pulled the bell-rope at the head of her bed. 'I must get up,' she said.

'If Madame will pardon me,' ventured Simone, 'Mademoiselle is a little

strained. This is to my knowledge two full nights that she has not slept. Since we left London, in fact, she has slept very little. And—Mademoiselle is accustomed to my nearness.'

'And you think I should frighten her?' grimly demanded the old woman. 'Well, well. The point is, she must sleep. And sleep well; whatever her trouble may be—'twill not be eased by a fever! You say she lies and stares and plucks at the sheets? I will cure her.'

Here the servant entered, and Mistress Keziah gave minute directions concerning a particular bundle of herbs in the still room. 'Brew it thrice the strength, Alison,' she concluded.

Presently Simone came to Marion's side with a steaming cup.

'If you care at all for the success of your journey, Mademoiselle, you will drink this.'

'I must get up,' said Marion wildly. 'Do you know yonder courier is now within a day of London? Another day, and he will be thinking of return; three more, and he will be here, in Exeter. Have you thought of it?'

'I have thought of everything, Mademoiselle. But you will be tossing in a fever, soon, and the week will go by none the less. Drink this.'

With her distracted gaze on Simone, Marion took the cup and drained it. Anxiously the French girl sat by the bed, watching and soothing the restless hands. She dared not think of the result should the potion prove to be ineffectual. But presently the weary, purple eyelids drooped, the strained lines on the pallid face relaxed. Marion sank into a heavy, motionless sleep.

CHAPTER XVII
AN EAST WINDOW

As the day wore on, Mistress Keziah came several times into the room, nodding with grim satisfaction as she noted the steady breathing, and the natural look on the sleeper's face. The afternoon sunlight was sloping through the trees when, after the hour's rest she always took in her chamber at this time, she again opened her niece's door. Simone rose quickly from her seat by the bed, and joined the lady where she stood.

'Is it well that my mistress should sleep on thus, Madame? She has scarcely stirred since you were here before!' Simone spoke in undisguised anxiety.

'Excellent! Excellent!' said Mistress Keziah. 'The potion was a secret of my grandmother's. I have never known it fail. The brew your mistress drank would make a strong man sleep for twelve hours. In her case, youth will assist in the fight. Once the clock turns, mark my words, she will sleep for another twelve hours, and will wake like a little child.'

Simone started. 'Another twelve hours! Oh! what shall I do?'

The words slipped from her before she quite realised their import, and as she met Mistress Keziah's look of amazement she changed colour.

'Well,' said Mistress Keziah, 'and why should she not sleep?'

Simone held a swift parley with herself as she stood with downcast eyes before the old woman who was so like, yet so unlike, her sister. With Lady Fairfax, Simone would have known at once what course to take.

'I am waiting,' said Mistress Keziah.

Simone looked up at her, her dark lashes heavy with tears; her lips trembled.

'You are yourself scarcely fit to be out of bed,' said Mistress Keziah. 'Come into my chamber a minute. Alison will stay here.'

'But,' faltered Simone, 'if Mademoiselle should wake?'

'When Mademoiselle does wake, she will be herself again. And Alison is a comely maid. I understand 'tis from my own face you would protect her.'

A smile broke over the angular features, and to Simone's amazement, Mistress Keziah passed her arm round her shoulders, and drew her across the gallery. The comely Alison, sitting at the needlework table, was sent to Marion's chamber. With her own hands Mistress Keziah poured out a glass of cordial and tendered it to Simone. She took a seat in a high-backed chair by the window, and beckoned Simone to a stool at her side. The girl's fingers trembled as she held the glass.

'You are in trouble,' said Mistress Keziah, a gentleness in her voice which Simone had not heard before, 'and so is my niece. A burden shared is a burden eased. Can you not tell me? I should not have asked for your confidence, but Mistress Marion said she would tell me to-day, and I gather there is a question of urgency. If you think 'twould be better for me to know to-day—if I could do anything—— Do not be afraid of me, *mon enfant.* I am an old woman and quite—quite harmless,' she finished with a smile that lay warmly on her wintry face.

Simone buried her face in her slim, fine hands. Then looking up, brushing away the tears, she spoke. 'I think I must tell you, Madame. I—I cannot bear it. I know Mademoiselle intended to tell you everything, and I will risk her displeasure in speaking myself.' She glanced towards the closed door, and dropped her voice. "Tis thus——' she hesitated a moment, then made a sudden plunge. 'Master Roger Trevannion is here, a prisoner, in Exeter. He warned a friend—an old

school friend, Madame—that he was in danger of arrest by Jeffreys' men. Master Roger was betrayed. The friend got away, but Master Roger was taken. A girl of the village wrote a letter to Kensington, warning Mademoiselle that she feared trouble was coming, before this happened. Then another letter to say Master Roger was arrested. On the journey here we learned that he is condemned to death, and there are but a few days of grace.'

Not a muscle stirred in Mistress Keziah's face as Simone went from sentence to sentence of her story. When the girl paused, she sat looking fixedly through the window for several minutes. Simone watching her, saw an expression of mingled sorrow and scorn settle on her features. Simone's heart sank. A sense of unutterable foreboding assailed her. Was the worst still to come—Mistress Keziah's enmity?

'You will see, Madame,' she presently ventured in trembling tones, stating the case for her dear lady as best she might, 'Mademoiselle felt she was the only one who might be able to help. Monsieur the Admiral she dared not appeal to. A magistrate has but to see the course of the law fulfilled. And Mademoiselle has a sore heart for her playmate. There is no one she can trust. Hence Mademoiselle has come herself. You knew Master Roger, Madame?'

Mistress Keziah looked hastily down at the girl. 'I have no blame for my niece,' she said abruptly. 'I was thinking of her father.' Simone remembered Marion's words: 'She quarrelled with my father on the question of my upbringing.'

For some time neither spoke. Then Simone ventured again: 'You knew Master Roger, Madame?'

The hard old face softened. Before Mistress Keziah's eyes was a vision of the tall youth of whom she had heard so much. He had never come to the house while she was at Garth; she had never spoken with him save once, when she was walking with the Admiral, and Roger had ridden by. In her heart of hearts the old lady had liked the boy, but she had chosen to lecture her brother on the foolishness of allowing Marion to have such a playmate: precisely the same word as Simone had used had come from the Admiral in describing the boy. And now the playmate was in the dark shadow, and Marion was heart-broken.

All Mistress Keziah's theories and denunciations fell away. The sense of romance which had been sleeping for a generation stirred, reminding her of other days, of her own youth, when some one else, just such another, had come her way and gone his way, banished by her pride. The storm that had sunk his vessel had made shipwreck of her own happiness, but no one had ever known. She saw the years of her life as they had gone by. Should such a fate be Marion's? She sighed. Simone, watching her face, saw the expression changing, and knew the day was won. She lifted the wrinkled hand to her lips. 'You will be kind to her, Madame? You will not be angry?' she implored. 'You are the only friend she—she has.'

Mistress Keziah brought herself back to the present. She smiled down at the wistful face, and Simone was comforted. Mistress Keziah fell into deep thought.

'Does Lady Fairfax know of this?'

'No, Madame. She is at Tunbridge with Her Majesty; there was not time for us to go or to send. Mademoiselle wrote to her, though, telling her why she had left London in such haste. She must have had the letter ere this.'

'Who betrayed him?' presently asked the old lady.

'"Twas said by the fisher girl that a Mademoiselle——'

'Elise!' cried Mistress Keziah, and her hand smote the arm of her chair. 'I knew it! I knew it!'

Simone looked perplexed as Mistress Keziah got up.

'Go and lie down, Simone,' she said, her old brusque manner returning. 'I must think. Stay! Has any one any inkling of the reason of your mistress's visit to this house?'

'No one, Madame. The menservants think Mademoiselle is ailing, and would rest here a few days.'

'Excellent. You know, of course,' said Mistress Keziah, falling back into the whispering tones, 'that should this be noised abroad, the fate that overtook poor Master Roger will fall on your mistress.'

Simone shivered. 'No one knows, Madame, I assure you.'

'And on myself, and on you,' relentlessly pursued the lady. 'There is no mercy to temper justice in these days. Well, well, no need to say more on that.'

'Madame—just one thing—where—where is the prison?'

'Ah! I bethink me of another thing. How did you learn the lad was condemned?'

Simone hesitated, and her colour rose. But there was no retreat. In a few words she told of Marion's search in the courier's saddlebags, contriving to get into her short story a sense of the danger the girl had run. Mistress Keziah's eyes gleamed, but the bolt of wrath Simone dreaded did not fall.

'She is her father's daughter!' she said abruptly. 'As foolish as she is fearless. Tell me the exact words: was it Exeter gaol, or the Castle?'

'Gaol, Madame.'

Mistress Keziah leaned back in her chair. 'Ah!'

Simone waited.

'If you would just tell me, Madame?'

'From the most easterly chamber yonder, leaving the gallery and going along the far passage, into a room that is rarely entered, you will get a glimpse of the gaol and the yard. Now go. Go quietly. Do not arouse the servants' curiosity, and when you have satisfied your own, remember I told you to rest.'

Simone gave one hasty glance into Marion's room, then set out to explore.

With the doors opening on to the gallery she was by this time familiar: Mistress Keziah's bedroom, dressing-room and sitting-room occupied one side, on the other came Marion's two rooms, another bedroom, another sitting-room. In the corner of the gallery were the double doors that led into the passage Mistress Keziah had mentioned.

With a hasty glance around that told her she was unobserved, Simone quietly slipped through the double doors. The unmistakable odour of tenantless rooms greeted her as she went along, glancing into the chambers she passed. The passage ran almost due east. On one hand the windows looked cheerlessly out on to stables and coach-houses, and the wall which divided the grounds from the road beyond. Behind the wall rose the slope of Castle Hill, with its grey stone walks and cluster of buildings at the summit. The rooms on the southern side were filled with the afternoon sun, and caught the green of the garden trees.

Simone entered the last room, paused, then looked back along the landing. Mistress Keziah had said that the end chamber faced the east: the single, half-shuttered window of this room looked north. Could there be another passage branching off?

She looked round the room again. Behind the door was a smaller one, looking like that of a closet. With difficulty Simone forced the door open, and saw in the dim light a narrow winding flight of steps. With her skirts tucked round her knees, Simone climbed the uneven dusty stair, and presently stood in a small dark chamber under the eaves. It was empty, dusty, foul from non-usage. Light streaming in through the crevices of a shutter outlined a single tiny window set low—the eastward wall. Gasping a little in the closeness of the air, Simone struggled with the rusty bolts, and presently shot back the shutters and opened the pane. It was not more than a foot wide and two feet deep.

As she knelt down and peered through, Simone could scarcely breathe for the quickness of her heart beats. Directly below her ran the length of the rambling garden, ending in thick, tall trees. A little to the left, Simone caught sight of a grim-looking building which needed no explaining. She leaned forward, putting her head through the little opening. The south and west parts of the gaol were clearly visible, being indeed not more than a hundred yards away, only separated from Mistress Keziah's garden by the cobbled road. A thick high wall ran close up to the south side, on the west and north widening to enclose a bare foul patch, strewn with refuse, on which the sun fell with baking heat: the gaol yard. A faint odour seemed to strike the girl's nostrils, and she shivered as she remembered the dark stories of prison life, of uncleanness and gaol fever which from time to time had come to her ears. She no longer wondered why Mistress Keziah lived in the west wing of her house.

Over several grated windows Simone looked, one by one, but could see

no signs of the life of the interior. Then, realising there might be a guard-room down there, whose windows looked out on the yard, and whence to a curious observer she might be visible, she withdrew her head. Crouching on the worm-eaten boards, she found a position that enabled her, unseen from without, to watch the prison and the yard.

As Simone waited, wondering if the prisoners would come out, there was the sound of shuffling feet, and from the shadow at the end of the building a man came in sight, carbine on shoulder. He paced the length of the gaol, turned, and was again lost in the shade. Presently Simone saw him walking the length of the yard. Then the footsteps were silent awhile.

Simone crouched until her limbs were aching and she dared stay no longer, lest Alison should seek her in her own room. But no face or form rewarded her vigil; only the gaunt walls and mocking bars showed, hideously bare in the sunlight. Behind which of those narrow apertures was the condemned youth hidden?

Presently the girl rose, and cautiously crept back along the passage. She waited several minutes behind the double doors, and looked carefully along the gallery and into the hall below before she gained her own room. Then, bathing her face and hands, and removing all traces of dust from her dress, she went into Marion's chamber. Alison rose with a smile, and beckoned her past the sleeping figure to the farther door.

'My mistress has gone to make a visit,' she informed Simone. 'Have you rested well?'

'Very well, thank you.'

'The young mistress is sleeping bravely. Her'll be fresh as a daisy come the morning.'

With her usual gentle politeness, Simone thanked the girl for her services, and closed the door as she went across the gallery to the servants' stairs. Taking up her old position by the bed, Simone looked sorrowfully at the face on the pillow.

Marion was in the same position. Her breathing was that of a child; the strained lines had gone from her face. Simone could have cried aloud on the unkind kindness of fate in ordering her healing so. By the morrow there would be only two clear days left, the third should see the courier returned. As she thought of the gaol, with its impassable walls hiding the sinister, watching shadow, the stout-barred window niches, Simone felt sick at heart. Who could break through such barriers? Two frail girls and an old woman?

Sitting idle was intolerable. Simone stole into Mistress Keziah's empty room, and taking up the sheet Alison had been stitching, bore it back to Marion's chamber. For a couple of hours she sat thus, and it seemed, as each quarter

chimed from the church beyond, that the next would be unbearable.

A kitchen-maid brought in her supper, with a message from Mistress Keziah that she would speak with Simone the next morning. So that was the end of another day.

The westering sunlight sloped across the hill, and the golden radiance fell on Simone's pale face as she sat before the generously piled dishes. She drank some milk, and ate a little bread and honey, afterwards resting motionless in a kind of mental and physical apathy. Presently she roused herself, and in unutterable weariness and despondency sought her own bed. For the first time she understood fully just what the strain of waiting had been to Marion. Rather than wait another day, Simone vowed, she would scale those prison walls herself. Her desperate fancy dwelt on the picture until, towards midnight, a restless sleep stole over her. She dreamed of horsemen innumerable bearing down towards her, each carrying a warrant of death. As they neared, the lane down which they rode—the same lane where the coach had foundered—broke into prison yards and opened again. All through her sleep the dream seemed to come and go, making a lifetime of its passing. At length, in a sudden access of horror, she saw that one of the riders charged into her room. She woke with a scream in the grey dawn, to find Marion standing by her bed, shaking her arm.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE SIGNAL

It was almost three o'clock. Marion and Simone, crouched by the window in the little room over the east landing, were watching for the prisoners to come out into the yard. Mistress Keziah had said that it was the custom for them to be given an hour's exercise at that time.

Marion, fully recovered, was strangely quiet. Her anger at the method of her aunt's cure had soon worn itself out. The knowledge that the prisoner was almost within hail absorbed all her thoughts, and she was secretly thankful to find that the day which had passed so idly had not only spared her the ordeal of an explanation to her aunt, but had brought great gain in the way of restored mental and physical strength. Forgetting all that lay behind, she now drove her whole energies forward in one channel.

The morning had passed in speculations indoors and a drive round the

Castle and the town, during which the horses had, strangely enough, halted to rest near the gates of the gaol. While Mistress Keziah's coachman had exchanged friendly remarks on the health of the inmates with the sentry peering through the wicket, Marion's eyes had taken in the exact height of the prison wall, its character, its distance from the eastward bounds of her aunt's garden across the way.

'No need to stay here, Tom,' sharply called Mistress Keziah a minute later, and the coachman had driven on, remarking on the increasing ill-temper and contrariness of his mistress. Had she not called a halt just there? As if the horses needed resting, forsooth! Down the road that bordered the gaol the coach had gone, passing Mistress Keziah's own gate and thence into the town. Marion had thus a first-hand knowledge of the respective positions of the two buildings. During the drive in the streets she had remained silent. On the homeward way she turned to her aunt.

'Have you a long rope or cord in the house, Aunt Keziah?'

'Plenty, I should think, my dear. I will find out. The chief trouble, you know, is the servants' curiosity. Mercifully, yonder London men, Reuben and Tony, are completely turning the heads of the kitchen wenches. There is no fear of their having an idle hour to watch your movements. My greatest difficulty is Alison, who spends quite half her time above-stairs, and Josiah, who is her shadow when she descends.'

'Has she not a mother or a father, Madame?' inquired Simone.

Mistress Keziah made no reply. But afterwards when Alison was arranging her gown for dinner, Mistress Keziah said with her usual abruptness: 'You are looking pale, Alison. I think 'tis well you should take a rest. The day is fine. The walk will be pleasant. Get you to your home and stay there a week. Yonder Simone will manage my hair and gowns, I trow.' Then, when Alison's face had darkened in jealousy, the old lady had added indifferently, 'Unless, of course, you too are held by the company and amusement of the men in the kitchen.'

Alison tossed her head. The goad to her pride served its purpose. She said no more, but soon after dinner she set out on the five-mile walk to her father's farm, escorted by Josiah, who was carrying her small bundles and had been given a hint by his mistress that if he truly loved the comely Alison, here was a chance of prospering his suit.

The old lady sat for a long time thinking, alone in her room. The two girls, she knew, were at the little window, hoping for a sight of Roger. Mistress Keziah's face was stern and fixed. During the conversation of the morning she had judged it best to withhold two facts from the knowledge of her guests. The first was her discovery that her old friend the governor of the castle was still away in the north country, where he had gone to visit the governor of York. The

deputy-governor was a man whom Mistress Keziah held in open dislike because of his truckling politics when Jeffreys was in the West. (As Marion had said, she made rare enemies.) There was therefore no chance of an appeal. She knew of no other quarter whence any influence could be brought to bear on the doings of Jeffreys' men.

Her first thought had been to seek the governor and pray for time; not knowing whether he was returned or not she had refrained from visiting the castle, but had sought the house of a friend overnight through whose rooms as in a living stream poured all the news of the county. Once the governor's compliance won, she had determined to send her fastest rider to Lady Fairfax in order to seek a royal pardon, if, indeed, her sister had not already taken that course.

With the discovery that the governor was away, the old lady's solitary hope had fallen. She could not think of any possible means by which, in less than three days, the fortress could be won. When it came to the moment, prison bars and walls were mightily inaccessible: it was only in Biblical days that the stones fell down.

On any other save a question of time she could have won the day. But Exeter was three days' ride—two in an extremity—from London. And while Royal Pardons were being sought, yonder courier, fresh from his audience with Jeffreys, was bringing back the word of doom. Of Jeffreys' clemency Mistress Keziah had not the slightest hope. She remembered too vividly that red Assize in Exeter. She also knew the deputy-governor well enough to surmise that 'twas not in hopes of mercy he had sent the courier, but rather to show in what faithful stewardship the affairs of Devon reposed. Roger Trevannion was no ordinary prisoner: a very long feather in the cap of justice.

The second item that she had sorrowfully withheld had also been learned in her friend's house. Admiral Penrock had been seen, two days previously, riding in his coach at a gallop, London bound. Another futile errand. She knew from Marion that her father had been much abroad in the far west on magisterial affairs. Evidently the news of Roger's arrest had at last reached him. He had posted off to London and would arrive in the presence of the Lord Chancellor, Mistress Keziah estimated, about a day after the courier had left for Exeter.

With these sad thoughts for company, Mistress Keziah had spent most of the night. Secretly convinced that the quest was hopeless, she had nevertheless humoured her niece to the utmost, taking her where she would, sending her servants out of the way so that no hint of Marion's strange doings should become common to the household. And now she sat, slowly gathering her strength for the ordeal of the day after to-morrow, when Marion, pale, sweet Marion, with her childhood's loyalty and unavowed, growing woman's-feelings would find herself beaten down, helpless, broken-hearted.

There was still a great store of fighting strength in the old woman, and when she pondered on the comings and goings, Marion and Simone here, her brother urging his horses to London, her sister—the more she thought the more she was sure—using every ounce of power and influence to obtain a Royal Pardon, and all one day—two days—too late, she knotted her thin hands together in fury at her own helplessness. When she thought of Marion, hot tears scorched her eyelids. When she thought of Roger, she buried her face in her hands and prayed. *In the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgement...*

Meanwhile Marion and Simone crouched by the window. There was just room inside the tiny casement for the two, unseen from without, to watch the door that led into the gaol yard, Marion to the front, Simone peering over her shoulder.

'What are you going to do, Mademoiselle?' queried Simone.

'I do not in the least know. But I have a feeling that when the hour comes I shall do something.'

Simone said nothing. The revelation of Marion's quiet strength was nothing new to her. She prepared herself to serve in whatever way might lie in her power. But Simone's eyes were shrewd, and she had read the expression in Mistress Keziah's face as she watched Marion's eyes counting the yards and feet outside the gaol. She knew that in her inmost heart Mistress Keziah had no hope. But she had said 'Yes, my dear,' her grim face unusually gentle, when Marion had asked for a rope; 'Yes, my dear,' when Marion had asked was there a well-ground file handy, and perhaps a ladder to be left carelessly in the garden: 'Yes, my dear.' Everything that Marion wanted in the way of properties and personal help would be hers until the hopeless game was played out. Simone saw it all very plainly.

What was going on behind that calm, pale face whose cheek, softly curving, was so near her own?

As Simone, sorely cramped, was moving her limbs, Marion suddenly cried, 'They come!' Simone craned forward. In the quiet afternoon rose a sound of shuffling feet and voices. Out into the sunshine lurched a number of men.

Marion caught her breath painfully as she looked at them. They were rough, ill-clad, foul-featured. There was evidently some quarrel among them, for they settled in a group, their voices rising. One held his fists clenched. But where? Ah! Marion's sudden movement told Simone who was yonder tall, broad-shouldered youth who strolled idly out to the yard. He leaned against the prison wall and looked up at the sky, across at the trees of Mistress Keziah's garden. In a flash Marion saw her opportunity. No other face was turned her way. She thrust her head out of the tiny window. The sunlight, falling over the eaves, made a halo of the shining, gold hair. Roger's eyes caught the glow. He started perceptibly. For a second he stared up; his eyes held hers. Then Marion withdrew, and

Roger turned and walked away.

Marion's breath came and went. She sank back on the floor.

'He saw me!' she panted. 'Has any one noted his glance? Look, quickly.'

'No one has turned this way. He walks up and down. He does not glance up at all.'

'Let me come.' Marion crouched forward again, her trembling hand resting on Simone's. That sight of Roger, his face so pale, his eyes sunk under the brows, had almost unnerved her. Tears blinded her vision as she looked down at her old playmate pacing the prison yard. The last time she had seen him, he had been arguing with her, in his old masterful way, on the folly of her going to London; had made her promise to send to him should she need help. And now!

The sound of angry voices rose again in the quiet air. The prisoners were still quarrelling. Inside an eager ring a couple of men set on each other, watched on the one hand by Roger, idle, aloof, and on the other by the gaolers, greedy of bloodshed. While the fists were flying, Roger allowed himself one more glance at the little casement, taking in its position in a lingering sweeping look at the sky. A hoarse chuckle came from the shadow in the buttressed wall. 'Thinking of heaven already, my lad?'

Marion shuddered.

'Don't listen,' urged Simone. 'Don't look. Come away, Mademoiselle. He has seen you. You have gained your end.'

Marion shook her head. For a seemingly endless time the two crouched by the window, watching the fight in the gaol yard.

'His window must be visible from here,' presently said Marion. 'See there, just behind, where there is another cluster of chimneys close to the back of the building. There cannot be cells on that side.'

'Except dark cells,' assented Simone. 'And those would be for murderers. Ah! they are going in.'

The two were silent as the gaolers drove in their charges. Roger did not turn his head, much less venture a look.

'You watch the south side and I the west,' said Marion. 'He will wait for one second when the sentry is not looking, and will let us know. He must realise we are here to help.'

The minutes idled by. Neither stirred. Marion sick at heart, was beginning to think of condemned cells, when Simone gave a cry.

'I saw it! His hand for one second through the bars! There is the window, Mademoiselle, the third from the end, the south side.'

As she spoke both Marion and Simone uncurled themselves from their cramped position and sat side by side on the floor. Simone winced as her aching muscles asserted themselves, but she soon scrambled to her feet. 'We have been

here for hours, Mademoiselle. I am still afraid of the curiosity of the servants.'

Unseen, the two regained the gallery. Marion sank in a chair by the window of her room, her brows knitted, deep in thought. Presently she raised her head...

'It is simple enough,' she whispered. 'He just needs a file and a rope. With two of those bars gone, and a rope, he could let himself down to the ground. That rough boundary wall he could easily climb. What can we do? Oh, what *can* we do?'

'If we had any friends in the gaoler's house,' said Simone after a time, 'we might send in something—a pie, a dumpling with the file inside. But to arrange that takes a long time and much management. Still, if you think it worth while, Mademoiselle, I will disguise myself as a cook. I will seek the gaoler and—win his regard,' finished Simone.

'Then I should lose you both. No—such a plot—I had already thought of it in the coach on the way—as you said, needs a network of conspiracy. It would involve the kitchen here, and my aunt. It needs knowledge of the interior of the prison, of the particular kind of character of the gaoler. An ordinary gaoler would eat the pie himself. No, the risk that is run must be mine. Above all, my aunt must not suffer. It looks so simple,' Marion added desperately, 'just to get that file and rope into his cell.'

'That is the trouble with most prisons,' said Simone naïvely.

Marion did not hear her. Her head had fallen on her hand again. An hour passed by. The girl seemed to be turned to stone. Just as Simone, busy with her needle, was about to break the oppressive silence, Marion raised her head. There was a strange look in her face, as if she were greeting some one unknown at a distance.

'Don't speak to me,' she said. 'I think—I think I have found a way.' She drew a long breath. The wide grey eyes resting on Simone slowly came back to the measure of the room. 'Yes.' She rose. 'Get my cloak and hood, Simone. I must ask my aunt if we may walk down into the town.'

Marion had barely finished her sentence before Mistress Keziah herself opened the door. She heard in silence Marion's request.

'Had you not better drive?' she said, after a minute's thought.

'I think not, Aunt Keziah. A person can go unnoticed where a coach cannot. And there is not time to explain just now. Do not, I pray you, Aunt Keziah, deny me this hour's liberty.'

'My dear child,' said the old woman, her voice breaking, 'I have but one wish, and that is to help you.'

Marion looked at the speaker. In her hardly suppressed eagerness and excitement, her hands on her cloak, she had scarcely noted her. Now she saw traces of tears. Her arms went suddenly round her aunt's neck in a mute embrace. Then

she withdrew herself with a gesture Simone understood. There was no time for weeping.

Mistress Keziah sat down. 'Listen. I can't let you go alone. You must take old Zacchary. He is the most to be trusted, the least inclined to chatter. Ring the bell, Simone—better still, go down and fetch him: say I wish to speak to him.'

'I did want to keep Zacchary out of the way of any possible suspicion, now or later, Aunt Keziah. He is an old man.'

'We are all either old or young,' remarked Mistress Keziah drily.

As Marion tied on her hood Zacchary appeared at the door. His wrinkled face lighted up at the sight of his 'little maid.'

'Come here, Zacchary,' said Mistress Keziah.

The old groom stepped awkwardly forward. He was always at a loss what to do with his feet, save in the stable yard or on the box. His fingers tugged at his hair.

'Mistress Marion and Simone wish to take a walk in the town, Zacchary. You are to follow them close behind. If they enter any house or shop, wait.'

Zacchary nodded.

'There is no need to say anything in the kitchen, Zacchary,' said Marion.

Zacchary pulled his hat from under his arm.

'Her told me' (with a look at Simone), "twas to go down along. There hain't no call to go to the kitchen. Here a be.'

'You understand, Zacchary, that should you at any time be questioned as to the doings of your mistress while in Exeter, you know nothing.'

'A don't be knowing in any case, Mistress.'

'Continue not to know. Otherwise there will be danger for Mistress Marion.'

Zacchary thought hard as he followed his young charges into the town. Something was amiss. He realised, looking back, that something had been amiss, all the way down from London. But in the meantime, he had his orders.

With Simone at her side, looking neither to the right nor to the left where passers-by were concerned, Marion went over the town on a search which greatly excited Simone's curiosity. She saw that in one shop her mistress bought a hank of the finest grey embroidery silk. Before another shop she paused, bidding Simone wait with Zacchary. Simone looked curiously at the sign, which showed that a gunsmith and armourer carried on his trade there. Marion came out empty-handed. The end of her search was evidently not yet.

"Tis getting late, Mistress,' said Zacchary, his eye on the sun, as she joined the waiting pair.

A fleeting look of horror passed over Marion's face, and she turned aside from old Zacchary's vision. At that moment a man lounged by, his gait marked by

the obvious roll of the sailor. Marion glanced idly at him. Then she swung round and looked again, a puzzled expression in her eyes. What was there familiar about that face and figure?

Zacchary's eyes were also on the retreating sailor. He noted his mistress's glance, but said nothing. Like herself, he was musing on the vague likeness to some one he knew very well. Marion and Simone walked on, followed by Zacchary. Suddenly the old man stopped in his walk, and turning, looked at the feet of the man just making the corner of the street. His old eyes gleamed.

'May a be everlastingly goshwoggled!' he exclaimed. He quickened his pace, and joining Marion, said something in her ear.

'Are you sure?' asked Marion incredulously.

'Sarten sure, Mistress. Couldn't mistake they feet nowhere. A allus said Poole'd escape again. Good for little maid Charity, bless her heart!'

Marion glanced quickly round. 'Gently, Zacchary,' she said. 'Don't take any notice of me, if I think of speaking to him.'

Zacchary fell back, his face sombre; the world seemed very much awry.

In the meantime, Marion's wits were hard at work. She was walking slowly on.

'Now I think I want to buy a yard of ribbon I had forgotten, for my aunt's lavender cap. Did you not see how the ribbon was worn, Simone?'

Simone made a slight *moue*. 'As you like, Mademoiselle.'

The haberdasher's shop was at the extreme end of the street down which, Marion had noted, the sailor had gone. Making a detour, she entered the street from another direction, timing her arrival at the door so that the clumsy figure rolled by just after she had bidden Simone enter the shop. Zacchary stood a few paces away, chewing a straw, his eyes in the opposite direction. Marion followed the sailor a couple of yards.

'Jack!'

The man stopped and turned, a smile lighting up his features as he recognised the speaker. Marion looked affectionately up into the face of the sailor-boy of her childhood's days. The rough beard he had assumed for a disguise changed him greatly. But the merry eyes were the same. Marion went straight to the point.

'This is a great danger for you, Jack.'

Poole nodded. 'I couldn't stay down along, or sail, or anything, with Master Roger in gaol, Mistress Marion.'

'I guessed it. We must not be seen talking. Listen. He shall escape. I need help at the other end. You can do nothing here. Bob Tregarthen is lying in the Catt Water. Take a boat down there, and persuade him to sail down to Garth and wait off the headland. Tell him to be prepared for a voyage; ready to sail at a

minute's notice, night or day. You understand?'

Jack hesitated. 'I'd a sight rather bide along o' you, Mistress. How be you going to manage the escape? 'Tis over dangerous for a maid.'

'Never mind me. I have my plans. But don't you see, Jack, you are an added danger? They are sure to trace you here. When did you escape from Bodmin?'

'Three days ago. And when I heard from Charity what was doing, I couldn't sail, I couldn't. Let me bide and help 'ee, Mistress!'

Marion reconsidered the position. She shook her head. 'No,' she repeated, 'you make an added danger. And I need your help at the other end. Go now, Jack. I'm so afraid you may be recognised. Give my dear love to Charity. And Jack—have a care. Yonder renegade may be on the watch.'

'I know all about he,' said Jack. 'I only ask just to set eyes on un.'

'Then good-bye, Jack. And—and God bless you.'

'God bless ee kindly, Mistress Marion,' came Poole's husky tones, as he turned away.

Marion glanced hastily along the street. Only a few men lounged at the other end, outside a small inn, and these, she saw to her infinite relief, had been joined by Zacchary, and were looking at something in the distance, something Zacchary was pointing out. 'Dear old Zacchary!' commented Marion. 'He has his wits about him.'

She entered the shop. Simone was arguing on the subject of the colour of ribbons with the shopkeeper and his assistant, who were fully absorbed in the conversation, to the exclusion of any affairs in the street.

'Here comes my mistress,' said Simone. 'I was saying, Mademoiselle, that no lady could wear a ribbon of such a vile texture as that, and the colour of this is too garish. What do you think, Mademoiselle?'

Gravely Marion went into the subject of the silk, and finally bought a couple of yards and went out. She turned straight up the hill towards her aunt's house.

CHAPTER XIX
THE GAOL YARD

Across the candles of the supper table Mistress Keziah looked curiously at her niece, and the footman behind her chair could scarcely attend to his duties for watching the face of the young mistress. Her eyes were bright, spots of colour

showed in her cheeks; she was wearing a beautiful London gown; Mistress Keziah knew that for some reason Marion was calling up her defences. 'For a complete actress,' mused the old woman, 'give me a girl who is at her wits' end with anxiety and grief.'

Marion was talking of her childhood at Garth, of the various activities that had filled her days. From that she went Lightly back to Kensington, and thence again to Cornwall. She appeared to be relishing greatly the prospect of returning to Garth.

'Only my promise to stay with you a sennight would keep me, Aunt Keziah. I am suddenly become mightily homesick. I want the stables and the horses—my horses—the boats and the beach. I declare I should like to look at my dolls again, and my skipping rope. Oh yes! and my bow and arrows. Ah, those days! 'Tis a pity you never learned to shoot, Aunt Keziah. I remember your telling me you had never handled a bow. If only you had one, 'twould have pleased me mightily to set up a target in the garden. Did I tell you,' she went on, 'that Colonel Sampson and Captain Beckenham took me to an archery one day, and I beat my lord the captain by a good two yards?'

Marion laughed merrily. The footman, his wits dissolved in admiration, stored up the gossip for the kitchen, and wondered where a bow was to be had. He would like greatly to watch the young lady shoot.

'Who is Captain Beckenham?' asked Mistress Keziah.

'One of Aunt Constance's friends, in Her Majesty's suite. He was mightily kind. He risked the Queen's displeasure in absenting himself to ride with us over the heath past Hounslow, giving me to understand it was for the sake of my *beaux yeux*. But,' added Marion, a smile coming and going, 'in the coach I discovered that my own were outshone by Simone's. He amused me somewhat, that young man. He changes from one weighty affection to another as lightly as he changes a coat.'

Mistress Keziah, following her niece's lead, talked in a similar vein until the cloth was removed, and William departed. As he closed the door Marion leaned back in her chair, and drew a long breath. Mistress Keziah waited. Marion had nothing more to say. In silence the two finished their meal, the girl toying with the sweets on her plate. She followed her aunt into her little sitting-room upstairs, where Simone, who always ate her meals in her own chamber, had been bidden to wait. From a stool by the window in the dusk-filled room, Simone looked anxiously at her mistress. The evening had been heavy for her. She had once more been counting the hours; the lingering daylight showed her face wan and grave.

'Well,' said the old lady drily, as she sat down, "twas mightily pretty, all that talk. What did it mean?'

'It means, Aunt Keziah, that by fair means or foul, I must have a bow and arrows.'

Mistress Keziah stared at her niece.

'I am not demented,' said Marion, 'though I see you think so. I sought the town this afternoon. There seems not to be such a thing in Exeter. But there must be, if one knew where to look.'

'So that is why you discoursed on the subject so pleasantly that William spilt the gravy all over the trencher.'

'Just that, Aunt Keziah. If William knows any one who possesses a bow, 'twill be forthcoming for the young mistress's amusement.'

Simone and Mistress Keziah stared afresh at the speaker. Marion had given no inkling of her motives for wandering about the town during the afternoon, nor had she explained her reason for making the purchases she had.

'But why?'

'To kill the sentry?' queried Simone.

'To shoot sparrows, *ma petite*. See,' Marion looked round, 'just glance over the gallery, Simone, lest some one should be within earshot.'

'No one is about,' said Mistress Keziah. 'William is holding forth in the kitchen on the subject of Mistress Marion. 'Tis long since he has had such entertainment.'

Simone returned to her seat. Her face was grave.

'See,' said Marion again, speaking slowly, looking from one to the other of her hearers. 'To the end of an arrow may be attached a length of fine silk; to that a length of stout thread; to that'—Simone gave a little cry—'a length of fine cord; then a rope; to the end of the rope may be tied a package containing a note and a file. Simone, if you go into hysterics, I shall put you to bed!'

Simone was struggling between tears and laughter, her Gallic temperament suddenly roused in a helpless emotion. She clasped her hands over her face. 'Oh, Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!' she sobbed. 'I see it plainly. He will be saved! Oh!'

Aunt and niece were looking at each other. 'Well?' said Marion.

'*Mes compliments*,' returned Mistress Keziah quietly. A gleam of pride flashed in her keen old eyes. She looked from her niece to Simone, who was rocking to and fro on her stool. 'Any one would know you were not English, Simone!' she said, with a touch of asperity.

'*Eh bien*!' sobbed the girl, 'one may love one's mistress, even if one is not English.' Simone was completely undone by the swift reaction of four days and nights of anxiety and hopelessness. Marion laid a soothing hand on her shoulder. By degrees she calmed down.

'But where can one be got, Aunt Keziah?'

'So. Before shooting the arrow of fate it is first necessary to have a bow.'

'And any day after to-morrow the courier may return.'

Silence fell on the little room.

'You did not say how you would do it, Mademoiselle,' presently said Simone.

'From the little window across into the cell, through the bars.'

'But, Mademoiselle, can you do such a thing? It seems incredible, at that distance, through those narrow bars!'

'I know not whether any one can do such a thing or not. But I am going to do it.'

'That is the right spirit,' commented Mistress Keziah, her eyes gleaming again. 'There speaks victory. But taking your skill for granted, my dear, how avoid the risk of shooting the lad himself?'

'I have thought of that. We had a trick, Roger and I,' Marion made a swift gesture with one hand, 'like that, when we were shooting together in the country, a gesture that told the one who was marking where arrows fell to stand to the left or right out of danger as the other changed his aim. I will make the sign when they are out in the yard. There will be one second in the hour when the sentry is not looking, as there was to-day. Also, to make sure, I am going now to note what his cell looks like by candlelight. I feel sure that if Roger has sixpence in his pocket he will have a candle to-night. He will want us to see him. You may be quite sure Roger is thinking hard, as well as ourselves, and doing all he can. He will know I am not here in Exeter just now simply to take the air.'

Mistress Keziah pondered a while.

'Suppose your silk catches in the trees?'

'It cannot. The window is too high.'

'Will it not interfere with the flight of the arrow, Mademoiselle?'

Marion shook her head. 'The silk I bought is tough, but very fine.'

'But,' said Simone, her brows puckered, 'I do not understand, Mademoiselle. How will you dispose of the silk so that it will run easily?'

'I see you are not a sailor, Simone,' remarked Marion.

Simone looked puzzled. Mistress Keziah smiled.

'In which storey is Roger's cell?'

'The first.'

'Are you sure the boundary wall of the gaol will not be in your way?'

'Quite sure, Aunt Keziah. This house is much loftier than the prison, and the little window is under the eaves.'

'"Tis a hare-brained scheme, and would e'en seem hopeless,' remarked Mistress Keziah, 'had I not a lurking feeling that fortune favours the brave. I must think it over. But, dear, you have been some months at least without any great practice. Are you sure of your aim? It will be in the dark, I suppose?'

'At dawn; just before three o'clock.'

Mistress Keziah nodded. 'Better so. But as I said, 'tis a good distance for a shot.'

'Close on a hundred yards,' said Marion. 'I measured this morning. And to-morrow I shall practise in the garden.'

'Suppose there is a wind, Mademoiselle,' said Simone presently.

Marion clasped her hands. 'I pray not,' she said simply. 'That would be difficult. But,' brightening again, 'I have certainly shot in a wind before now. Do not let us think of——'

'And in all this,' burst in Simone, laying her hand on her mistress's knee, 'you have forgotten the sentry!'

Marion stroked back a strand of the glossy dark hair.

'I have forgotten nothing, *mon amie*. The sentry at night will, I expect—we will ascertain presently—patrol the yard as his comrade does by day. The sentry is of course the greatest difficulty. I shall have to time my venture when he is at the far end of the yard. That,' added Marion naïvely, 'is where the speed of an arrow is a fortunate thing. Once the arrow is in the cell', the cord and rope can be drawn in while the sentry is walking round the buildings.'

'And should he hear, Mademoiselle?'

'He shall not hear.'

Simone glanced at Mistress Keziah. Marion intercepted the look. 'Dear aunt,' she said gently, 'I cannot deny that there is danger of detection. But—his need is greater than any peril we run. And should the plan fail, and be discovered, 'tis I alone who am the culprit. I shall make a full avowal. You shall not suffer, Aunt Keziah!'

'Hoity toity!' said Mistress Keziah. 'What happens in my house is my business, I trow! And who in Exeter, do you suppose, is going to lay a finger on me?'

Remembering the lady's words of warning to herself on the previous day, Simone was mute. She sat folding and unfolding a pleat in her gown, tears welling into her eyes again. There was something that would not bear thinking about in these two, one old and one young, who thus vied with each other for the honour of taking blame. To Simone's relief, for her control was fast weakening, William's step was heard in the gallery.

'Here comes a dish of tea,' said Mistress Keziah tranquilly. 'Open the door, Simone. And fetch me the cards from my chamber,' she added as the footman entered. 'Will you join me in a game, my dear?'

'I have been wanting to,' said Marion. 'Aunt Constance taught me a new one in Kensington. I should like to show you.'

Mistress Keziah dealt the cards, and Marion arranged her own share on the

little table William had drawn close to their chairs. Simone seated herself at a distance with her needlework. When William returned later for the tray, to all appearance a lively game was afoot.

'He will not come back?' asked Marion, after William had departed.

'Not unless I should ring. You were saying?'

'I was saying, Aunt Keziah, that I should feel vastly more comfortable if you would go away. Go down to Garth, to my father.'

'For one so quick-witted, you are singularly stupid,' remarked the lady, with a touch of the imperiousness that reminded Marion of the personage she had first known and feared. 'I must stay here to cover your sudden departure with the lad. No, leave my comings and goings to me, my fair general. See you to your own and Roger's. Simone and I will follow you to Garth.'

Marion rose and bade her aunt good-night without any further argument, and accompanied by Simone stole along the gallery to the little chamber under the eaves. The moon was breaking from a bank of golden haze in the eastern sky as Marion gently put back the shutter and peered out. The silence of the night lay about the garden, and save for one lighted niche the gaol was in darkness. As Marion had surmised, Roger was playing his part in the game whose nature he could only guess. A candle stood on his table, which he had drawn out of vision so that its flame should not blind the eyes of the watcher to the disposition of the room. He himself, sitting at the table, reading, was partly visible to Marion's eager eyes. But what she had longed to see, and was comforted to behold, was the end of the plank bed half way along the bare wall. She had been secretly haunted by the possibility that her arrow might alight on the sleeper, should he be sleeping. The corner of the room which was her target was empty.

Cautiously Marion withdrew her head. The heavy footsteps of the unseen sentry sounded, making the corner of the buildings. Like his comrade during the day, he steadily patrolled the wide stretch of yard, coming from time to time round the gable end to take in the narrow patch at the south front of the gaol. Knowing that soon the moon must lie full both on that side of the prison and on the little eastward casement, and fearing the eyes of the sentry, Marion half closed the little shutter. There was a sharp creak she could not avoid, and watching through the crack she saw that Roger had heard the noise. He rose and looked upward through his bars. Then, either fearful of the sentry's comments on his candle, or, as Marion guessed, content that he had been seen, he put out the light just as the sentry turned the corner.

Marion watched the dark form of the sentry as he walked the length of the building, turned, and heavily stamped back. He disappeared; presently the measured beat was heard in the yard beyond. A minute later the moon swung clear of the curtain of haze.

More cautiously this time Marion moved the shutter back, then thrust out her head in the clear light. Immediately a hand stole from between the bars across the way, and waved a stealthy greeting. Marion raised her own hand and pointed to the moon. Her finger travelled in a mimic motion of the moon crossing the sky, once—twice. Then swiftly she gave the gesture of warning which she had mentioned to her aunt. She repeated the motion. The hand across made the signal of assent. Then, greatly daring, after a rapid survey of the gaol yard where the invisible sentry was still tramping, Marion gave in dumb show the action of shooting an arrow.

The moon was full on her face as she moved. Simone caught her breath. There were other cells in the south front of the gaol: other eyes might well be watching the little play. The hand across waved again. In the gloom of the building Roger's face, a white patch crossed by the bars, was clearly visible. The sound of the sentry came nearer. Again Marion closed the shutter.

'He understood,' she whispered. 'He nodded. Did you see?'

Simone gripped her arm. 'Come away, Mademoiselle. Do not attempt to look again. The moon is on this window as clear as day. I am afraid. There may be other eyes yonder, as well as Master Roger's.

'Not so,' replied her companion. 'But we will go now. 'Tis better, perhaps.'

The two crept back along the passage to Marion's chamber. In the light of the sconces Simone looked anxiously at her mistress. Marion smiled.

'You are over nervous, Simone. Think of those men we saw brawling and fighting in the yard to-day. Are they the kind, think you, to watch the rising of the moon at an hour when all the town is sleeping? They are more likely to be snoring on their plank beds.' She stopped abruptly as she thought of Roger's couch in the dark little cell. 'Still,' she said, commenting on her own thoughts, 'a plank couch is no matter when one's sojourn is short. Now we are going to bed, Simone. My aunt said there was no need for you to attend her to-night. There is much to do to-morrow. Above all, do not forget to oil the joints and hinges of the shutters, yonder, early in the morning.'

Marvelling at her mistress's light-spiritedness, Simone went through her usual nightly duties. Soon the two were in their beds. Marion's hopeful mood, which assured her of victory and overlooked the hazards of the battle, carried her across the spell of silence and thoughtfulness which came when she laid her head upon the pillow, safely into the unconsciousness of sleep.

Simone, wide-eyed, listened to the steady breathing through the open door of her own room, and marvelled again. And in the next chamber Mistress Keziah lay, conscious of the dull weight of age pressing on body and soul alike. An hour's quiet consideration had roused in her a strong doubt of the wisdom of Marion's plan, a deep scepticism of its success. She was oppressed by the sense

of the risks the girl ran, but could think of no measure that would make her desist from the attempt. It was Marion's safety against a slender chance of Roger's life; and Marion was not the one to be deterred by a thought of peril for herself. Of her own share she thought little; she had lived her life, and Marion's was hardly begun.

What she had been able to do, she had done. A letter addressed to Lady Fairfax lay on her table. With the early light it should be despatched to London. It was not only for Roger that a reprieve might be wanted.

CHAPTER XX
ZACCHARY'S QUEST

Zacchary was standing by Mistress Keziah's chair, tears running down his cheeks. He had at last learned the secret of Marion's visit to Exeter.

For some time Mistress Keziah allowed him to talk, easing himself thus, she knew, of his grief and distress concerning Roger; and as she waited, Zacchary poured out a string of broken reminiscences from which the old lady unconsciously built up a picture of Marion's and Roger's childhood on the hillside at Garth.

She could well have wept herself. The morning had shown her no grounds for any reasonable hope; Zacchary's instant scorn for Marion's plans had secretly added to her own misgivings. Zacchary had scarcely, indeed, paid any heed to the scheme for Roger's release. In his mind it was a foregone failure: to him Master Roger was beyond all human redeeming. When at last he paused in his jumbled tale, and was staring sorrowfully out into the garden, Mistress Keziah brought her attention to the point at issue.

'I sent for you, Zacchary, because you are the only one we can trust with this secret. And also, you are the only one who can search for the bow and arrows.

'A bean't for doing aught of the kind, Mistress,' Zacchary rejoined, a stubbornness in his manner. "Tis clean gone foolishness, the like as a never heard. More seemly 'twould be to set the horses to the coach and take the little maid home. Arrows, indeed! 'Tis the wild fancy of a maid who've set herself to do a man's work. 'Tain't no job for Mistress Marion. If you'd told me two days gone, Mistress, me and yonder Tony would have done something, and Reuben.'

Mistress Keziah controlled her rising impatience. She had not dreamed that Zacchary would rebel. At once she realised that the old man would have to be argued with, not commanded. His very virtues on which she had counted, his loyalty, his love for Marion and Roger, his fifty years' service at Garth, became a barrier that threatened the advancement of Marion's hopes.

'Don't you see, Zacchary, Master Roger is suffering this fate because he tried to help? Would the lad himself like it, think you, that strangers should be imperilled for his sake? Would he not rather die thrice over than allow Tony and Reuben to be drawn into gaol? And to leave that side of the question, what chance of safety has a secret shared with two such men? How much opportunity have you had of judging their characters? They are not of your county: a Londoner is never trusted by West country folk. A week you have passed in their company; they have proved able grooms on the road, they are mightily pleasant in the kitchen. Is that a reason why they should be entrusted with a mission which means life or death to a man they have never seen, and is of such exceeding danger, that should it fail, they might hang at the next assize? 'Tis a job for a man's friends.'

Zacchary, convinced on the point, but unwilling to own it, was silent. His slow peasant brain was working.

'If a body had ever heard of such a thing afore as bows and arrows to get a man out of gaol,' he said, after a while, 'I'd have some patience thinking on it.'

'By the mercy of Providence,' retorted the old lady, her eyes flashing in her angular old face, "tis not every day in the week that a lad like Roger Trevannion lies within an hour of death, as you might say, and no help forthcoming. Extreme cases need extreme measures. For my part, I am willing to take all risks to help my niece. I had not expected to find an enemy in you, Zacchary. One might think you were unwilling to hold out to Master Roger a slender chance of life.'

"Tis the little maid I be thinking of now,' said Zacchary abruptly. 'If so be her's taken too, what be I to say to the Admur'l? Her was left in my care in Lunnon. 'Tis a hundred to one Master Roger will go just the same, and liker than not her'll be in gaol at the end on 't.'

'Give her the hundredth chance. And remember, she is a quick-witted, brave woman, playing a woman's game. You are always thinking of her as a little child. And,' added the lady, with an outward show that arrogantly hid her feelings, 'leave her safety to me. Do you think my niece, Admiral Penrock's daughter, will easily be imprisoned?'

Zacchary glanced at the old lady. 'You'm some like the Admur'l, Mistress. Well. How'm you going to hide the lad?'

'We are not going to hide him. To-morrow morning, early, you will take out two horses and wait outside the town. If you are seen, why, you are taking

one of my greys up to the Stows. They are for travelling a spell, and one of their chestnuts has fallen lame. That is clear?'

Zacchary nodded gravely. 'And then? Be the lad going to take refuge on the moor?'

'Mistress Marion and Master Roger are going to ride to Garth.'

'To Garth!' The old man's voice showed his consternation. He stared at Mistress Keziah, as if unable to believe his own ears. 'To Garth? To the one place where every man, woman and child knows un? 'Tis sheer folly, Mistress!'

'That is just the reason why he will be safer there than anywhere. Because, as you say, it is sheer folly. They will search Exeter. They will beat the coast and the river. They will expect him to take to sea. Garth is the one place where they will never dream of looking for him.'

On Zacchary's slow mind there dawned the realisation that by its madness there was hope in the project laid down. Mistress Keziah, watching his face, knew that the time was come to drive hard. She looked at the clock.

'You have been here an hour and a half while you should have been at work. Leave all the rest. We will talk of it again later. Mistress Marion is out just now, seeking some purchase she needs. You can speak with her afterwards if you wish. Say nothing in the kitchen. Go first into the inn on the street. Get into conversation, and learn if there is any one who makes bows and arrows in Exeter. There must be some such, although archery has become but an idle pastime. And remember there are only a few hours. If only I could make you understand, Zacchary——' Mistress Keziah's voice broke, and tears stood in her eyes, 'you are the only help and hope we have. You, and no other, stand in between Master Roger and his death.'

Zacchary straightened himself. 'If there's one to be found, I'll find un, Mistress.'

'There is one to be found somewhere. But I have never been directly interested in archery. And the servants, who might know, being native to the town, I dare not send urgently without exciting curiosity. Mistress Marion went as far as she dared last night that way. We have to think of afterwards, of protecting her from any shadow of suspicion.'

'Ay,' said Zacchary. 'I heard on 't. Her turned William's head and no mistake. A's talked of nothing but bows and arrows and the mistress's eyes since. A little thought what the little maid was up to.'

Mistress Keziah went to a drawer, and took out her purse. 'Here is money. Spare nothing. But do not show any need of urgency. And above all, be careful in the kitchen.'

Zacchary went out without further words, and Mistress Keziah sank back in her chair.

It was close on eleven o'clock. She looked out into the garden, where, in the earlier part of the morning, Marion had been spending, to all appearance, an idle hour wandering to and fro with Simone at her side. Secretly Marion had counted the yards in the trim walks and grassy stretches until she had fixed on two slender trees as a target. The trunks stood close together, twin growths from one root. A certain spot, which Marion and Simone committed to memory, not daring to set a sign there, lest the servants should be watching, marked the distance of a hundred yards from the trees. Marion knew that if she could shoot at that distance into the crevice between the rising stems, she could shoot between the bars of Roger's cell. She determined to practise both by day and at night, when the servants were in bed; in the daylight shooting casually at any mark; in the dark or half light aiming at her target.

Everything was ready. The rope had been found by Marion in the harness room where her aunt had directed her; the file she had taken from the coachman's tool box. A note to Roger, directing him to scale the wall and run along the road to the courtyard gate, where she would be waiting him, was written and locked in her box, ready to be tied to the rope, with the file, later on. To please her mistress, Simone had laid out her riding habit. Her cloak was rolled into a bundle, to be strapped to the saddle. Everything was ready, so Marion had said, when she had kissed her aunt before setting out to buy a length of cord to take the place of the unsatisfactory piece she had found in her aunt's boxes. It only remained now for Mistress Keziah to send Zacchary to find a bow and arrows, a task which Zacchary could perform without any suspicion. He only needed to go to the New Inn for a pint of ale and get into conversation with mine host. All was quite clear in Marion's mind.

Mistress Keziah could still feel the girl's caress, could still see the suppressed eagerness in her face. The old woman sat motionless, only glancing at the clock from time to time. Already the day seemed interminable. The June sunshine bore too hotly into the room; she drew the shutter half way across and sat down again. There was a tension in the air of the house which, added to the languor of the day, weighed on her spirits. She dreaded Marion's return, dreaded Zacchary's return. As she had said, archery was merely a pastime, the implements of the craft not being found easily like the contents of the gunsmith's rooms. Quite likely William might unearth a bow and arrows in the course of the week—everything would happen just too late. And she was afraid to speak to William lest, later on, he should begin to think and remember. As she had said to Zacchary, Marion had gone as far in that direction as she dared.

All too soon the door opened, and Marion entered.

'Has he got it, Aunt Keziah?'

Mistress Keziah looked up at the face bending over her. Marion had thrown

aside her hood. Her white muslin dress seemed to wrap her in a cool serenity. It seemed incredible, thought Mistress Keziah, looking from the eyes to the hair, and back to the serious, sweet mouth, that misfortune should lay its blight on that countenance.

'He has not yet returned,' quietly said the old lady.

Marion's eyes grew wide. 'But there has been time,' she faltered.

'He is scarcely an hour gone, my child. Sit down.' Mistress Keziah related the story of her conversation with Zacchary. Before the two had finished talking midday struck, and the servant came to announce dinner.

'Already?' said Marion dully.

Mistress Keziah said nothing. There was nothing to be said, nothing to be done.

Marion sat on the arm of her aunt's chair, and laid her golden head beside the grey one. 'May we not wait for dinner till Zacchary returns? I could not eat anything. I was hungry before, but not now.'

All the life had gone out of her voice. The reaction Mistress Keziah had dreaded was upon her. Marion had found it comparatively easy to pass the morning, her thoughts and activities engaged in the immediate moment. Now she found herself once more faced by the ordeal of waiting in suspense.

Mistress Keziah roused herself. 'You must eat, and eat well. Otherwise your nerves will weaken. Come along! A battle lies ahead. This is but a game. You played it well enough last night.'

Presently aunt and niece faced each other across the board, and Marion struggled to recover something of her everyday speech from that deep place of silence into which all her faculties had seemed to fall. Mistress Keziah played her own part well. When Marion, suddenly finding words drying on her lips, ceased to speak, Mistress Keziah took up some tale or anecdote. William, watching his two ladies, was unaware of anything amiss. Mistress Marion was quiet, certainly, but that was the way of maids, all bubble and froth one day, a dark pool the next. Dish after dish came on the table, and Mistress Keziah failed not to pile her niece's plate.

Slowly the meal wore itself out. A casual question from Mistress Keziah concerning the stables elicited from the unsuspecting William the news that Zacchary was still abroad in the town.

As Marion followed her aunt upstairs, half-past one chimed from the church near by. Marion went to her own room. Simone, according to her habit, had eaten her dinner upstairs, and was waiting for her mistress. Marion stood still in the middle of the room, her hands pressing back the hair from her forehead.

'Is it possible,' she said, 'possible, that in all Exeter there is no such thing

as a bow and arrow?'

Simone felt tongue-tied. 'Surely not, Mademoiselle,' was all she could find to say.

Her mistress moved about restlessly for a while, then sat down, and taking up the needlework with which Simone had been busied, stitched for a short time. The French girl quietly found other occupation, and made no remark when Marion flung down the sheet and went into the next room. There she turned over her riding habit. Again she passed through her fingers the long line of silk which Simone had bound on to the cord in such a way that no roughness of joining was left which might catch on any surface. With the same dexterity Simone had attached the cord to the rope. Lifelessly Marion laid down the lengths. To and fro she paced the little room. A fever was slowly mounting to her brain. She dared not trust herself to seek the eastward window. To wait: to do nothing but wait, within a few hours of doom—could she endure it?

She went back into her own chamber, and silently held out a hand to Simone. Together the two passed out into the garden. To and fro under the trees they paced, and from time to time they fell within the line of the shutter niche of Mistress Keziah's window. Looking down on the girl's face, Mistress Keziah suddenly felt herself to be an old, old woman. Wiping away a few tears, she strove to consider afresh the problem of the necessities for Marion's plan. Failing the main road, were there no by-paths?

A little later she opened the casement, and called down to Marion.

'I have just thought, my dear,' she said, when the girl entered her room, 'that I should like to drive out to see Mrs. Burroughs. Her house is but three miles out of the town. There are children there,' she added diffidently. 'Would you care to accompany me?' The rest she left unsaid, but Marion understood. She rang her aunt's bell, and Mistress Keziah ordered the coach.

Half an hour later the horses were climbing the steep lane out of Exeter.

At the house they descended, and were welcomed by a pleasant-faced woman, the daughter of a girl friend of Mistress Keziah's. Very soon the visitor mentioned the children, and a boy and girl of ten and twelve years were summoned to the room.

Marion devoted herself to the newcomers with such friendliness that presently she was borne off to see the stables and the ponies, the trout brook at the bottom of the field, then back to the house to the play-room to look at their treasures. By dint of adroit questioning she learnt the favourite pastime of the two. The boy, talking eagerly to his guest, told her proudly of his skill in archery. At thirty yards he had hit the target. His sister, standing by Marion's side, obviously lost in admiration of such a visitor as rarely came her way, noted Marion's changing colour.

'I used to shoot once upon a time,' she said. 'Let me see your bow. I should like to try again.'

Then the little girl, amazed, saw the 'beautiful lady' suddenly stiffen. She could not think what had happened: merely that her brother had explained that his bow was broken, and another was promised by his father for his birthday.

Later on, with a child at either hand, Marion descended to the sitting-room. Mistress Keziah's glance read the story in her face. Soon she rose to bid her hostess adieu, Marion's cold lips framing what answers she could to the lady's genial parting words.

As the coach rolled up to the courtyard gate, the old woman laid her hand on Marion's. She had forborne to question her, and the girl had remained silent on the homeward drive. Marion returned the pressure without speaking: she recognised the challenge in her aunt's touch.

In the hall, Mistress Keziah turned and spoke indifferently to the servant who opened the door, asking had there been visitors in her absence. Then, as she set foot on the stairs, Marion walking behind, the old lady paused. 'Has Zacchary returned yet?'

'Not yet, Mistress.'

In the stillness, the churches in the town chimed six. Marion went to her own room, and closed the door. A kind of stupor seemed to fall on the house.

Just before supper time, Zacchary walked heavily up the stairs and knocked at Mistress Keziah's door. Hearing the lady's voice, he entered.

'No good, Mistress,' he blurted out.

Mistress Keziah gripped the arms of her chair as Zacchary told the tale of his fruitless search. After much talk he had heard from mine host of the New Inn the name of a man—a friend of the innkeeper—who was the possessor of a fine bow. Saying nothing to the innkeeper, Zacchary had found out the man, only to learn that the 'fine bow' was a valued heirloom, not at any price to be sold or lent. From the possessor he had heard of another: a similar result. Then he was told of a man whose father used to make bows and arrows, and who, it was believed, occasionally carried on the work himself. By that time several hours had passed. The man in question now lived on a farm some five miles out of the town. Thither Zacchary had dragged his old legs. The man was ill in his bed: an ague, Zacchary said. There was no bow to be bought. Nor did the man's wife know of any other maker. Archery was little thought of in these days save for children's play. True enough, there must be bows in some one's possession in Exeter. But the day was gone.

'What be I to say to the little maid?' queried Zacchary, his voice husky. He was worn out with sorrow, and the fatigue of walking in the hot day.

'I will tell her,' said Mistress Keziah from her chair. 'You may go, Zacchary.

You need rest and food. Tell them to keep supper waiting till I ring.'

Zacchary turned, to find Marion standing in the doorway.

'I heard, Aunt Keziah,' she said. 'Thank you very much, Zacchary.' She walked quietly back to her room.

At the peculiar, calm tones of her niece's voice, Mistress Keziah shivered as if a cold wind had struck her. She got up stiffly from her chair, and walked slowly into Marion's chamber. The girl was standing, her hands locked, staring dully out into the garden. Without speaking, Mistress Keziah sat down by the window. She did not look at the motionless figure. After a while she held out a hand. Slowly Marion came, and sinking on the floor, buried her face in the old woman's lap. The wrinkled hands passed slowly to and fro over the shining hair.

The sun sank low behind the trees. Mistress Keziah's tears had stayed. Marion still crouched, dry-eyed, her face hidden, motionless save for a convulsive shudder which shook her from time to time.

Neither heard the sound of light footsteps in the gallery. The door burst open and closed again.

'Mademoiselle!'

There was a new ring in Simone's voice. Slowly Marion raised her blanched face. Simone was pouring out a story in mixed French and English, plentifully watered with hysterical tears. The name of the good William ran in and out of the story. Marion scarcely heeded her. She was staring at a bow and a sheaf of arrows Simone had laid at her feet.

CHAPTER XXI
DAWN

The gaol buildings and yard showed dim in the diffused light. A cluster of small clouds clung to the face of the moon, and down in the west lay a grey bank which rose imperceptibly, its edges caught by the hidden glow. From time to time a cat's-paw of wind tapped the branches in Mistress Keziah's garden, breaking the dead calm of night with the rustle of the leaves. The storm was coming. For days the heavy heat had been gathering for a break.

In Marion's room there were whispering voices. Mistress Keziah, fully dressed, herself was superintending the robing of Marion for a long and arduous ride. The light of the candles on the dressing-table fell on the dark, shapely

form, the bodice buttoned close, the wide skirt falling away. The gleaming hair was securely bound in a long plait, and then knotted at the nape of the neck. On the bed, beside the gloves and whip, lay the cavalier riding hat with its long, soft plume, which Lady Fairfax had given to her niece. The habit adjusted, Simone knelt and drew on the long riding boots, reaching almost to the knee, wide in the leg, tapering down to the foot.

Simone rose, and surveyed her mistress from head to heel. Her teeth caught on her trembling lip.

'Are you sure your arms are not held in any way, my dear?' asked Mistress Keziah. 'You have enough freedom of movement?'

'Quite, I think,' said Marion gently. 'Now do let me go, Aunt Keziah.'

'"Tis not yet the dawn.'

Simone blew out the candles, and threw the shutters and casements wide. A sweet air crept into the room. At first, after the light of the interior, the garden seemed filled with the gloom of midnight. But soon the three at the window were aware of the shapes of trees, softly grey; of the diffused radiance of the sinking moon.

Marion leaned far out of the casement, and looked towards the east. A faint bar of light lay on the horizon. Over the sleeping land that rose beyond the town a breathing motion seemed to pass, as if Nature were stirring in her sleep. Again came the fitful breeze tossing the leaves in the garden.

'Hark!' said Marion. 'The cocks are crowing on the hill. Dearest, dearest Aunt Keziah, bless me, and let me go!'

There was a tremor in the clear voice, but outwardly Marion was calm. Simone had already stolen away.

Mistress Keziah wrapped her arms about the comely figure and pressed trembling kisses on the soft face. A few broken words fell from her lips; then she dropped her arms and turned away. With one backward look, Marion went out of the room. The old woman sat down and hid her face. She dared not follow to that little eastward room; she dared not witness the speeding of that silken thread.

Across the gallery Marion stole, her wide skirt gathered up on her arm. She listened awhile, leaning over the rail. There was no sound in the dark, sleeping house. For fully an hour the servants would be abed. Marion gently opened the double doors. A pitch darkness lay on the narrow passage. She groped her way by the wall, and presently climbed the dusty stair.

Simone was crouching by the little window, the grey of the coming dawn on her face and hair. Without a word she gave place to Marion, and stepping back, took up the bow, and held an arrow ready in her trembling fingers.

On the window ledge, where there was nothing to impede its run, lay the

silk thread coiled as sailors coil a cable in the bows of a boat. Its upper end was attached to the arrow Simone held in readiness; the lower end ran to a corner of the room where the fine cord was similarly coiled atop the rope.

Marion examined the coils afresh, tested the knot that tied the silk to the arrow, then, giving the shaft back to Simone, knelt at the casement.

A dusky light touched the gaol chimneys. The niches of the casements were still dark, but Marion imagined she saw a white patch behind Roger's bars.

'Where is the sentry?' she whispered.

'I do not think he is there, Mademoiselle. But he must be, somewhere.'

Simone crouched behind her mistress, and the two pairs of eyes searched, inch by inch, the dark patches of the gaol buildings. Nowhere could they descry any shape that could be construed into the form of a man.

'Perhaps he is resting at the other side, Mademoiselle. There must be a bench or something there.'

'He is certainly not in sight,' decided Marion. 'Please God he is asleep on the bench, as you say.' She glanced anxiously at the sky. 'I dare not wait.'

Her hand shot out of the window, making the gesture of warning. She waited. A dim movement from the cell showed that her surmise was correct. Roger was awake and ready.

Freeing her knees from any constraint of her dress, Marion took her position just inside the casement a little to the right. With deliberation that seemed unending to Simone she fitted the arrow, drew the bowstring taut, once, twice, thrice. Then she gathered herself and rested motionless. A second later there was a flashing gleam in the grey air. Then a sharp tap. Aghast, Marion peered forward. The arrow had fallen wide, striking the masonry of the wall.

Simone gave a low cry of dismay, and stared at her mistress. Deathly white, Marion laid down the bow, and drew gently on the silken strand. Somehow the arrow must be retrieved.

There was a faint scraping noise as the shaft was drawn backward up the face of the wall. Twice it stuck in the masonry. Marion had a sickening fear that the silk would not carry the light burden she eased the length a little, then, with a swift lunge, played the silk outward, and jerked the arrow up above the wall. Rapidly she drew in the silk, hand over hand. On the wall of her aunt's garden the arrow stuck again. Less carefully Marion drew at it. The arrow caught on its point, and dropped sharply down inside the garden. At the next tug the silk broke.

'No matter,' said Marion. '"Tis safe. Another.'

Carefully the two coiled up the silk again. Marion dared not hurry. Should the length not run easily, the direction of the arrow would be warped.

Just as she knotted the line to the second arrow, there was a sound of scrap-

ing feet in the gaol yard. The girls looked at each other in the dim light.

Peering through the casement, Marion saw a dark figure detach itself from the buildings on the north side. With his arms wide, the sentry wearily stretched his body. He gave himself a little shake, and yawned. The watchers could plainly hear his loud 'Ha-ho!' Then he took up his carbine. A few notes of a tavern song came to their ears. The sentry was waking up. He shouldered his gun, and marched up and down the yard. A minute later he appeared on the south side, tramped the narrow space between the gaol and the wall, retraced his steps. As he turned, Marion was already fitting the arrow to the bow. His shuffling feet echoed in the silence of the enclosure. There would be about thirty seconds before he would turn again.

With hands clasped, shaking from head to foot, Simone watched the second arrow speed. Was it home? Yes. No. Again came the sickening tap. The shaft had struck the middle of the central bar in the grating, half an inch wide of the mark.

Once more Marion hauled in the silk. A deadly chill gripped her heart. The sentry's feet sounded nearer. A little puff of breeze came again. The silk shook as the arrow was drawn up the wall. Would it stick in a crevice this time? For a few seconds, during which Marion seemed not to breathe, and the room spun round her, the arrow caught on the stones. Round the corner came the sound of the sentry's feet. Marion leaned far out, and with a swift sideways motion played out the silk and drew the arrow over the coping of the wall. Just as the sentry appeared in view the shaft fell into the road that bordered the gaol.

'Never mind,' said Simone, through chattering teeth. 'I will go and get it later.'

As Simone snapped the silk and tied the broken end to the third arrow, Marion sank back on the floor. She closed her eyes, and leaned against the wall. A faintness had assailed her. If her courage once fled, failure would be certain. Twice she had missed the mark.

The man below trod noisily to and fro on the south side. Again came the snatches of the ditty. Drawing a long breath, Marion rallied herself, and peered out of the window. A white patch showed dimly between the bars of Roger's cell, immediately over the sentry's head. In the grey light, Marion imagined that she saw Roger's face. He seemed to be smiling up at the little window. To Marion's wild fancy the look was plain to be seen. It seemed to say, 'Bravely, little Mawfy!' as he had said of old when she had just failed of the mark.

Some quickening influence ran through the girl's blood. Her dread and fear fell away. She looked searchingly down at the cell grating; then, as the man below swung round, her fingers flashed the signal. The white patch behind the bars disappeared.

'How many arrows are there, Simone?'

'Twelve.'

'I shall win on the twelfth,' said Marion calmly, fitting the barb as she spoke.

Marion, kneeling, drew the bowstring taut. Simone held herself ready to draw in the silk, her ears strained for the fall of the arrow on the stones of the yard. Could either of them bear the strain of the twelve? Would not the sentry hear the faint sounds? His footsteps paused in the yard beyond. Marion held her breath and waited. The tramping steps began once more. Again came the lightning streak through the dim air. The silk ran out. There was no tap of the falling shaft.

Marion leaned forward. The bow dropped from her nerveless hand. With a low cry, Simone brushed the girl aside out of the way of the shining strands. Roger was hauling in the silk. Gently the length passed through Simone's fingers.

'Hist!' said Marion. She laid a steadying hand on the line. The sentry's footsteps sounded again. His clumsy form swung round the corner, the light gleaming on his barrels. He paced the length of the south wall, and stood still: then, laying down his carbine, he looked searchingly round, and groping in his pocket, drew out pipe and flint and tinderbox. Leaning against the wall, directly under the slender line, he proceeded to fill and light his pipe. From time to time he glanced nervously about.

Again the wave of faintness stole over Marion. Her eyes, wide with horror, stared at the man below. Simone gently took the silk from her.

The sentry was fumbling with his tinderbox. Would he look up and see that fine strand, grey as the sky, stretched over his head?

The world was waking to the dawn. Thrushes piped their first notes in the garden. Puffing at his pipe, the sentry turned and scanned the eastward horizon. Lines of rosy clouds showed themselves, forerunners of the storm. Marion clutched Simone's hands, waiting for the man's eyes to sweep the sky. She was struggling with an overpowering desire to scream aloud. Another minute ticked by. Three o'clock struck from the churches in the town. With a grunt the man lazily took up his carbine. He looked idly at the trees across. It seemed to Marion's distorted vision that he stared straight into their little casement. For another space he lingered, his legs wide, leaning against the wall. Then he straightened himself. He shouldered his carbine, and turned away. There was a stifled cry from Marion as she took the line with trembling fingers, and gently paid it out. For a second it slackened over the trees. Then the hand at the other side drew in again; and more and more rapidly as silk gave way to cord. Before the sentry had time to pass the corner again, Roger had secured the package tied on the rope, and drawn in the trailing end.

There was a dead silence in the little room. Unheeded the sentry paced

the south front, unheeded tramped out to the wider stretch of the yard. Simone said something her companion scarcely noted, and the next minute Marion was alone.

The first act was over; the second, containing a still more perilous movement, was about to be played; of the third—the headlong flight to the west—Marion did not think at all.

What was going on in the cell yonder? She fancied she could see Roger's kneeling figure at the grating; he was evidently filing the iron near to the base. The bars were not very close together; when two were gone, Roger should be able to get out. There was a drop of about fifteen feet. With the help of the rope he should be able to let himself noiselessly down.

In reality only a few minutes had passed since the arrow had reached its mark, but to Marion it seemed already an hour. She looked anxiously at the eastern sky, now suffused with stronger light. In another half hour the daylight would be making very plain all the features of town and country alike. A few hoarse notes came to her ears, punctuated by the heavy footfall of the sentry in the yard. "Tis a cheerful soul!' mused Marion, with a wry smile. A minute later the dark form loomed round the corner.

The first drops of rain were falling. The fitful breeze of the early morning had strengthened into a westerly wind. Instinctively Marion's thoughts began to dwell on the prospect of the ride over the border in the face of such a storm as was brewing.

Something moving in the road caught her eye, and switched back her thoughts to the present. Simone's noiseless figure was creeping along in front of the gaol wall. The blood rushed to Marion's face. She had forgotten that arrow. Her eyes went alternately from the sentry's steady movement to the fluttering figure in the road. Suppose he should open the wicket?

The light form glided noiselessly back, and Marion glued her eyes again to the grating of the cell.

As the sentry passed round the corner, Marion bent forward and listened for the sound of the grinding of the file. But not by straining her ears to the utmost could she hear anything save the steady tramp of the soldier. Surely there had been time to file through those two bars! In her impatience she forgot that the prisoner was bound to restrict his efforts to the time the sentry spent at the back of the building.

As she sat motionless, her whole forces divided between watching and listening, there was a movement at her elbow. Simone was there with her hat and gloves. Behind her stood Mistress Keziah, her face grey in the dawn.

The clocks in the town chimed half-past three. Marion started. Half an hour Roger had been filing those bars.

'Had you not better go down to the gate and be ready?' said the old lady.

Marion, pulling on her gloves, shook her head. She crouched down again, no eyes for the others in the room, and was unaware that Simone, at a glance from Mistress Keziah, had quietly stolen away.

Marion felt a cold terror grip her heart. Could some one have entered the cell and seen Roger working—seen the arrow and the silk and the cord?

There was the sentry again, idly walking the south front. It seemed hours before he retraced his steps.

As he turned the corner, Roger's face appeared at the grating. He was ready. First knotting the rope to one of the side bars, he pressed his knee against the stone sill, and pulled with both hands first one bar and then another. Slowly the bars yielded. Roger flung out the rope.

What was that? The step of the sentry returning already? Marion leaned out to wave a warning. It was too late. Roger had thrust head and shoulders through the gap. He drew one foot up on to the ledge, then leaning out, caught the rope and bore on it while he freed the other foot. He slid down. Just as he landed on the ground, the sentry swung round the building.

Roger was the first to see the man. For one paralysing instant he stood still. The sentry started and stared, dumb with amazement. Before he had time to level his carbine, before he had the wit to shout, Roger leaped at him, his fists clenched. Out flashed his right hand, and caught the man a crashing upward blow on the jaw. The sentry fell like a log. Roger darted to the wall. Marion only waited to see him spring from the coping into the road. With a swift word to her aunt, she ran along the passage and down the gallery into the hall. The door stood wide open. She sped down to the courtyard gate.

Roger was already there, wrapping himself in the coachman's cloak. Simone was holding his hat and crop. Roger gave a swift look at Marion.

'We have to pass the gaol for the east gate,' said she. 'Can we? Have we time? Shall we make for the west?

'The man will be a good five minutes at least. Then another five remembering what has happened,' said Roger quietly. 'Come!'

With a fleeting glance for Simone, Marion followed him out. The two ran lightly back along the road, past the gaol gates. There was not a sound from the building. No one was in the road. The whole town seemed deserted. Through the old east gate they went, and turned up towards the castle scarp.

Just beyond the ridge, in the shadow of some trees, Zacchary was waiting with the greys. Roger lifted Marion into her saddle, and leapt into his own. Then he looked down at Zacchary, and said a husky word of farewell.

Zacchary was staring as at a ghost. He had never believed the plan would succeed. Before he had time to consider was it really Master Roger, in Mistress

Keziah's livery, the two were on a narrow track that led by a round-about course to join the westward road some miles farther on.

For several minutes Zacchary stood still. The sound of the horses' hoofs on the soft turf died away. He stared about the quiet green fields and down into the town. The day had come.

Mistress Keziah had ordered Zacchary to make a wide detour among the country lanes, and enter the streets later by the west gate when folk were stirring and the business of the day was afoot. For a couple of miles Zacchary followed the track of the horses. On the summit of the hill he stood and looked round.

Through a straggling copse to the right, that shielded the path the fugitives had taken, the high road from Honiton was visible, winding down into the valley. A solitary horseman was riding towards the town. In the shelter of the trees Zacchary stood and watched. There seemed to be something familiar in the man's head and shoulders. Then he remembered.

It was the messenger whose horse had cast a shoe the day the coach foundered in the lane.

CHAPTER XXII
THE ROAD TO THE WEST

After close on two hours' hard riding the fugitives drew rein. They had not spoken except once to confer on direction, Marion having simply stated that they were returning to Garth. Roger had pointed out the cross-country track where he thought it most likely they would escape detection.

They were on the edge of a spur of the moor, and from its advantage they wheeled to scan the countryside. There was no sign of life save the cattle and ponies grazing in the rough grass.

Soon Marion became aware that Roger had turned his gaze on herself. Fingering her crop, she sat tongue-tied and helpless. She had dreamed of this moment, when she and Roger would find themselves riding homeward, the shadow of the gaol left behind, and a long chapter in their lives to recall, each for the other. The moment having come, she could do nothing but stare at her horse's head and run her crop in and out of his mane.

Roger's hand fell abruptly on hers. Marion raised her eyes and dropped them again. The hand tightened.

'I cannot say it,' said Roger huskily. 'I cannot.'

Marion glanced at the pale, worn face.

'Don't try,' she faltered, her composure breaking before the look in his eyes. 'I know just what you would say.'

'No one can,' said Roger in a low voice, 'who has not been at the very edge of the grave.'

Marion's hand gently touched Roger's. Tears shone on her lashes.

'I do believe,' she said tremulously, acting on a swift inspiration, 'I do believe I am hungry.'

Roger dropped his hand and turned his head away, and leaning over, Marion tried to unbuckle one of his saddlebags. Soon her companion became aware of her action. Hastily he dismounted. From the bag he drew out a flask of wine and a wallet of food.

'Venison pasty!' said he, staring at the piece Marion offered him. He snatched at it with an eagerness that went to her heart. Half-way to his lips he withdrew it. 'I am a brute!' he said. 'Forgive me. Where is yours?'

'Here. We have one each. Now I shall give you just five minutes, sir.'

Marion smiled down at the upturned face, but her hint brought Roger back to the present. He mounted again, and the two moved forward at a gentle pace, eating and talking as they rode. In a few words Marion explained her plans on his behalf.

'So you are going to banish me to the high seas,' said Roger at the end.

Marion was silent a minute. Then, rousing herself: "Tis strange by what crooked means a man's fate overtakes him. Do you remember that day on the headland when the *Fair Return* set sail? My father always said that being a sailor bred and born you would in the end go to sea.'

The slight meal finished, they set their horses at a trot over the springing turf.

'What about my mother?' said Roger. 'Can I not see her before I sail, think you?'

'If we get down to Garth untroubled, perhaps yes. But we may have a close run for it.'

'I think we have not been seen yet,' said Roger.

'Except for the old woman.'

Roger was silent a while. About five miles out of the city they had come face to face with a small apple-cheeked dame setting out from her cottage with her basket of butter. The little low building, tucked in a fold of the moor, had been unnoticed by them, and they had reduced their speed, hoping that their headlong flight had not already been noted by some one within the cottage walls.

Marion had bidden the dame good morning and talked of the weather. The

wind was steadily gathering, and every few minutes came fleeting squalls of rain. The old woman was not in a good temper. A wet market day in Exeter meant poor money for her butter. She feared a heavy storm was brewing. Then she added, not without several motherly glances for the pale-faced groom who rode just behind the lady: 'If so be you'm for Mortonhampstead, Mistress, 'twere best to take to the left down along and find the waggon track. Folk do sure lose themselves easily on they moors, and there be terr'ble danger of bogs up over. Only yesterday a gentleman got off the track. Mighty near to sinking in Tinker's Cup a'd been, with bog muck up to the horse's knees. 'Twas as fine a gentleman as ever a clapped eyes on. And a crown her gave me, as cool as day, for setting of un right.'

'Here's another to keep it company,' smiled Marion. 'Good day.'

In case she should be watching, the two had made a show of returning to the track she had pointed out, then branched to the north again, leaving Mortonhampstead, its chimneys beaten by driving smoke, away to the left.

'I don't think she noticed anything,' said Roger. 'And as you say, they'll be searching the river and the seaward country.'

After a time Roger reined in and looked about. They were out on the open moor. As he scanned the hills and gullies, the fair green bog stretches, he was seized by a conviction that they were not making the speed they should. In avoiding the dangers of the moor, they had been obliged to take a winding course. A landmark which should have been left miles behind lay at his shoulder.

'Marion,' he said suddenly, 'we must take to the waggon track if we wish to reach Garth to-day. We have lost half an hour wandering among these hummocks. Better make a rush for it that way than get hopelessly bogged or lost.'

Marion looked relieved. "Twill be vastly easier to ride straight on so. And this heavy land is bound to weary the horses.'

By tacit consent the two spared no energy or time in speech. In a short time they gained the track. An hour later they passed through Postbridge. There they decided to feed the horses. While the greys were being attended to, Roger playing the part of groom among the stable men, Marion was entertained by the innkeeper with the news of the countryside. Among other details the host gave a description of a gentleman who had passed through on the previous evening, wishful to lie at Princetown. Listening, Marion mused a little on the coincidence: twice that morning she had heard of the stranger westward bound.

At the crest of the steep rise out of Postbridge Roger turned in his saddle and cast a keen eye over the Exeter road. With a swift gesture he pulled up his horse and remained motionless. Instantly on the alert, Marion stopped and followed the direction of his gaze. There was a lull in the storm; the sky had lightened over the east. A bar of watery sunlight fell across the hills that lay be-

tween Mortonhampstead and Postbridge. A couple of men on horseback showed against the skyline, minute figures only visible to those who had been trained from childhood to scan far distances. For a few seconds their horses showed clear. Then a driving cloud swathed the sunlight, and the moor lay misty and uncertain again.

'Did you see?' asked Roger quietly. 'Or did I imagine it?'

Marion nodded, and settling herself in her saddle raised her crop. An unexpected, heavy blow startled the grey into a canter that soon became a gallop. The second horse came easily alongside, Roger looking into his holsters as he rode. Before they had gone half a mile the storm on the height of the moor redoubled its fury. Rain lashed their faces. Bending sideways to the blast they drove the greys mercilessly on, only slightly slacking their speed as Princetown was reached and passed. There the track dropped into the valley. As the steaming animals picked their way down the slope, Marion turned to Roger.

'Do you think we should try to change horses at Tavistock?'

Roger shook his head. '"Tis but another thirty miles to Garth. These brutes will soon know, if they don't know now, that they are nearing home. They can do it. 'Twould mean at least ten minutes to change.'

Marion took what ease she could from the slackened pace. Her cloak and habit were soaked and hung limply about her. Wearily she drooped in the saddle, thankful for the respite from the storm that beat the heights.

'I am not worth it, Mawfy,' said Roger suddenly.

Marion smiled and straightened herself a little, but she made no reply. The bed of the valley passed, the greys trotted slowly up the slope.

'Now for it!' said Roger, as they gained comparatively level land. Soon they were at a straining gallop again, their heads bent to the wind and rain. From time to time they looked back, but the valley had swallowed their pursuers.

After a few more miles Marion became aware that her horse was a neck ahead of Roger's; then a length. Roger drove his heels into the grey's flanks. For a few yards they speeded alongside, then Marion found herself ahead again. She slightly checked her pace and glanced at her companion. There was a queer look on Roger's face. He slowed to a trot, leaning over to examine the action of his horse's feet.

'Wait a minute, Mawfy,' he said quietly. Hastily dismounting, he examined his horse's shoes and knees. 'I can see nothing,' he said, springing up again. 'It is perhaps a tendon that does not show any swelling yet.'

The horse, urged into speed, ran unevenly, jerking on the off hind. With crop and heel Roger pressed the brute to his utmost, but both the riders knew his miles were numbered. Neither spoke. Each had the same cold dread at heart.

'How far are we from Liskeard?' asked Marion faintly.

'Close on ten miles, I should think. But there should be an inn half-way.'

Mercilessly Roger forced the pace of the limping grey. 'It grieves me,' he said abruptly, 'but 'tis his life against mine.'

From time to time Marion looked fearfully over her shoulder. She knew that the wind, driving against them, would make it impossible for them to hear their pursuers till they were close at hand. Another quarter of an hour, at this rate, should bring them within hail.

'Take my horse and go on,' said Marion suddenly. 'They would not dare shoot me, and if they took me back to gaol Aunt Keziah would get me out.'

Roger's answer was a look from which Marion turned her face away. They trotted on in silence. The road had turned into a winding waggon track that curled round the hillside. Beeches topped the steep, unbroken hedges bordering the way. Behind the hedges on the one hand the ground fell away steeply, on the other climbing to a ridge that was the last outpost of the moor.

Roger stood in his stirrups. 'I think I can see some sort of a building, a couple of miles or so farther on where this lane ends.'

Marion's heart sank. Another couple of miles would mean at least a quarter of an hour at the pace they were going. She had a mental vision of the devouring stride of the pursuers' horses.

'And should they come before that,' added Roger, 'you are to ride on out of reach of shot. Remember now.'

Marion flashed a withering glance at the speaker. 'I should of course do that, should I not? Give me one of those pistols. Ah. I hear voices. Where are they?'

'There is nothing,' said Roger. All his attention was given to the grey.

Marion looked swiftly over her shoulder. Through a gap in the trees she imagined that she caught a fleeting glimpse of red. Making a swift calculation, she knew the soldiers were but three miles away. She cast a despairing look at Roger's horse.

'Give me one of those pistols, Roger,' she pleaded. 'I shall not leave you.'

Roger's answer was lost in a sudden cry from Marion. She was riding slightly ahead, and could command a curve in the road. Roger saw her speed on. Stumblingly his horse followed.

A cart and horse were slowly making their way along the deeply rutted track. In the cart a boy sat, talking to a horseman who rode at the rear. The rider's face was turned to meet the sound of approaching hoofs.

'Colonel Sampson!' called Marion, her voice breaking. 'Colonel Sampson! Oh, thank God!'

The traveller wheeled round and stared in amazement from Marion to the horseman at her heels.

'Roger's grey has fallen lame,' cried Marion, 'and the soldiers are almost on us.'

Sampson glanced keenly at the boy, who, still more amazed than he was, made a courteous salute. In his face he saw the marks of prison durance. So this was the Roger whose fate had made a criss-cross track through so many lives!

In an instant he saw his course plain. With a gesture bidding the two to follow, he set his horse at the narrow space left between the waggon and the hedge. When all three were ahead of the vehicle, Sampson dismounted.

'Take my horse, sir,' he said quietly, 'and ride on. My friend and I here will arrange a barricade. Pull your mare over so as to block the lane, my lad. Get the wheel into the ditch, so. A golden guinea for you if you keep yonder soldiers back for half an hour and hold your tongue about this exchange. We must head them off on another scent.'

The farm boy's eyes shone. With alacrity he obeyed the gentleman's orders.

'Quick!' said Marion. 'Quick! I can hear their hoofs. I can almost see them!' She was dazed by the way life and death tossed their alternate greetings in her ears.

'But you, sir,' said Roger, hesitating.

'I am an old soldier,' smiled Sampson. 'I fought behind barricades before you were born. Apart from that, there will be no need to fight. 'Tis not myself they are after.'

With her fingers clenched on her crop, watching for the gleam of red through the trees, Marion listened in an agony. The encounter had really not taken a minute's time, but to the girl the talk seemed idle and useless.

'Quick, Roger!' she cried again.

Roger sprang on to the Colonel's horse, a powerful roan, and Sampson mounted the limping grey.

'Now no one is any the wiser,' said Sampson. 'And we have not even seen you, have we, my lad?'

The farm boy grinned. It was an encounter after his own green heart. 'A bean't be seeing nought, sir,' he said.

'And this wretched waggon is in a devil of a mess,' pursued Sampson, stroking his moustache. 'Yonder kind-hearted soldiers will surely help straighten it. Good luck, sir. Good-bye, Marion, my dear. I will follow you to Garth.'

Roger rode on and Marion held a trembling hand to Sampson, her eyes shining through tears. As she trotted away Sampson called: 'Where is Simone?'

Marion stayed a second to answer. 'With my Aunt Keziah in Exeter.' There was a reply from Sampson she failed to understand. She broke into a canter and the roan and the grey were lost to sight. The lane ended abruptly in open land, and the track curved down along the flank of the hill. Just as they bore round,

the fugitives turned once more and caught the gleam of the uniforms half way down the lane.

'Just in time!' said Roger. 'We can see them because of their colour, but 'tis unlikely they can have seen us since we left the open land.'

Side by side the two tore along the track, Marion bringing to bear on her horse the extreme pressure which so far had been unnecessary. Except when the nature of the track compelled, the two did not relax their speed until Liskeard was reached. Midday struck from the steeple as they rode through the town.

They broke into a gallop again, keeping a ceaseless watch for their pursuers. It was touch and go now. The land was so uneven that they could not see the track for more than half a mile at a time. At any moment the soldiers might gallop round the last hummock.

No words passed between the two, until, half an hour later, Marion suddenly pulled up, her eyes dim. She looked about.

'I remember that hill,' she said tremulously, 'and through yonder gap on a fine day we should see the sea. Oh Roger! we are nearly there!'

Roger looked over his shoulder. 'That mysterious Colonel of yours is a clever man. You must tell me some day how he did it. There, at that clump of trees, we turn off for a smugglers' bridle path. I know it well. It runs down to the coast and spares the hill outside Garth. If no one sees us for the next five minutes we are safe.'

Marion followed Roger, and leaving the grey to pick his own footing, fixed her eye on the backward track till a copse of wind-blown oaks hid it from their view. The path wound perilously down a stony gully, difficult to ride save for the moorland-bred. The wind was wearing away, a steady fine rain falling in place of the gusts and clamour of the morning. The realisation that the end of the perilous journey was in sight was slowly dawning on the girl's shaken senses. Another couple of miles, and they would sight the cottages and banks of Garth.

A few minutes later Roger slowed his horse and waited for her. The track had fallen to the river bed, and there was room for the two to ride side by side. Roger looked keenly at the girl's face.

'Do you know,' said he, 'we have ridden all this time and I have not said a word of all that is in my mind. Somehow 'twas enough to have you by my side and be riding to freedom. Nothing else matters. And now in a few minutes we shall be at the village. Mawfy, I cannot,—I—my mind is fevered. To say thank you to some one who has saved your life sounds like foolishness.'

'I told you this morning not to try,' said Marion, lifting her grey eyes to his.

Roger looked a long look at the pale face framed in the wet clinging hair.

'And I am going to sea,' he said suddenly. 'But I shall find some means of hearing of you. You and my mother. You will see my mother and tell her?'

'She shall know at once,' said Marion gently.

'See,' cried Roger, 'yonder on the hill is Mother Poole's cottage. Do you remember?'

'Ay,' said Marion. 'I remember.' She bit her lip, and looked straight ahead. Then, realising that village eyes would soon be on her, she straightened herself in the saddle.

'Mawfy!' Roger leaned over and took her hand.

She glanced at the warm dark eyes and looked hastily away again. A wave of colour wiped out the whiteness of cheek and throat. Roger was pulling the damp glove from her hand. The fingers lay limply between his own.

'It is good-bye, just for a little time,' said Roger, and caressingly he passed the trembling hand across his bent face.

Struggling for composure, Marion withdrew her fingers. The village lay before them. She dimly noted that a child had run out from a cottage, seen them, and run in again, shouting something. She dimly saw groups of sailors on the quay shading their eyes and staring up the valley. Then next minute a girl ran bareheaded to meet them and stood with clasped hands. It was Charity Borlase.

'Jack said as how you'd do it, Mistress,' she said simply, her eyes shining. 'The boat's waiting down along, Master Roger, and tide's running grand. Silas be going to row you out.'

Roger dismounted and lifted Marion from the saddle. 'Take Mistress Marion home, Charity, up the short path, and look after her well. She is very, very tired.'

He bared his head as his eyes sought Marion's, and once more, careless of Charity's presence, he lifted her fingers to his lips. The next minute he was striding down the beach. He leaped into a boat pointed out by a waiting youth and took an oar. As the boat shot out into the estuary hoarse cheers rose from the quay. The valley rocked with the sound. Women and children clustered by the water, waving their hands and crying. Charity's apron was at her eyes.

'God bless 'ee, Master Roger!' came voice after voice to Marion's ears.

Marion stood motionless on the beach. The last she saw was Roger's hand waving as the boat pitched into the heavy seas about the harbour mouth.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOME

The wind had fallen, and a soft mist lay about the house next day, when Marion opened her eyes. She lay for a long while in drowsy content, lost between sleep and waking, opening her eyes and closing them again on the dear delight of home. The sense of peace that had fallen on her spirit the previous night when she had returned from the Manor and stolen straight to her own chamber, seemed still more to fill the place where she lay. It was as if she had sailed into a familiar haven after long tossing on strange seas. All the dear associations of her childhood leapt from nook and shelf to greet her. She lay and smiled at roof and window, rug and chair. And behind her warm feeling of content lay a thought that was like a caress: Roger was safe; Roger was happy at sea; Roger was coming back soon. A rosy flush tinted her face as she remembered—would she ever forget? 'Good-bye just for a little time, Mawfy!'

While she was still half dreaming, the housekeeper gently opened the door.

'Come in, Curnow, dear!' called Marion. 'I know 'tis you. I have never known any one come into a room quite so gently as you do.' She smiled at the old woman. "Tis good to see you again, Curnow. What is that? Bread and milk? Fie, fie, Curnow! Do you suppose I have become an elegant old lady like Aunt Keziah, already? I cannot abide food in bed. It makes the whole chamber taste queer.'

There were tears in Mrs. Curnow's eyes as she threw a covering over Marion's shoulders and handed her the bowl. If only the Admiral would return, her cup of joy would be full. The same thought was passing through Marion's mind as she obediently began to drink the milk.

'I wish Father were home. I felt wretched last night when you said he was away. But he will soon be back. He must have left London for Exeter by this time.'

Mrs. Curnow watched her young mistress in silence for a time; then she began moving restlessly about the room, putting a chair here and a stool there.

'Come and sit down, Curnow,' said Marion. 'You will be tired before dinner time.'

"Tis past dinner time already,' said the housekeeper, looking at her indulgently.

'What! How could you let me sleep so, and all that there is to be done?'

'There bean't no tur'ble call for 'ee to get up, Mistress Marion.'

'But there is much to be done. There are the guest chambers to be got ready for Colonel Sampson and my Aunt Keziah. My aunt said she would follow in the coach with Simone. Most likely they lay at Tavistock last night. They should be here this afternoon, if nothing has delayed them. I do want my Aunt Keziah's chamber to look beautiful, Curnow.'

The housekeeper smiled fondly at the girl she had tended from babyhood.

Indeed, she had lain awake most of the night pondering on Marion's story, and trying to see her 'little maid' in the light of its revelation.

'You will like Simone, Curnow,' Marion continued. 'I told you I am going to persuade my father to let me keep her here with us, did I not? She is French, you know, but very different from——' Marion stopped abruptly.

The smile on her hearer's face gave way to the grave, unhappy look the old woman had worn of late.

'What is it, Curnow?'

'I ought to tell you, Mistress Marion. I scarce know what to do,' the housekeeper slowly began. '"Tis Mademoiselle.'

Marion handed the speaker her bowl, and lay back on the pillow. 'I know all about that,' she said quietly. Mrs. Curnow stared.

'I did not tell you last night,' pursued Marion. 'There were so many other things to tell.'

'You know——'

'I know she betrayed Roger, if that is what you mean. Charity Borlase told me in a letter. Does my father know?'

'Not of my telling. 'Tis now,' the housekeeper counted on her fingers, 'eight days since the Admur'l came home, changed the horses, and straight up over for London. The Admur'l had heard down along about Master Roger, and with the look on his face no one dared speak to un—leastways not me. Mayhap Silas have told. And there be other things too,' wearily added the old woman. 'I scarce do know where to begin.'

'Leave it till my father comes, Curnow. It is all over now—all the trouble, I mean. The rest is for him to settle. Where—where is Mademoiselle?' Marion spoke with an effort.

'In her chamber. Her've never left un since the day Charity came up to have a few words, private-like, with she. Fear of what folk may do to un, may be. Zora have been telling that Victoire do say——'

'Victoire!' There was a curious look on Marion's face. 'When did Victoire come home?'

'The very day afore you did, Mistress Marion. That is to say, the night before last, when the house was abed. All unbeknownst her came in a coach from Plymouth. Seemingly the old woman in France yonder do be better. And yesterday—' a grim smile came on the housekeeper's face—'heart-sore and sick as I was, with the thought of dear Master Roger pressing on me, as 'ee might say, I couldn't forbear a smile when I saw Victoire eagerlike to talk to the wenches in the kitchen, and me having forbade they, most severe, to say one word to she.'

Marion got out of bed and began to dress. 'Curnow,' she said abruptly, 'I was never so thankful for anything in my life as that my Aunt Keziah is coming.

Until Father returns, Aunt Keziah will see to Victoire and Mademoiselle. Don't let us talk of it, Curnow. I am trying not to think of it, even. It is horrible. Master Roger is safe. That is all that matters.'

The housekeeper presently went below, and Marion finished her dressing with a sober look on her face. The early joy and peace of the waking had vanished. For Marion, the last fortnight had been too much filled with immediate action to leave room for plans about the prime defaulter in the sorry affair. What should she say or do if she met Elise?

At length, feeling as uncomfortable as if she had to walk about alone in a haunted house, Marion went out of her chamber and set about the supervision of rooms for the coming guests.

In the meantime, Victoire sat talking by Elise's bed, talking softly, rapidly, in what the domestics called her heathen tongue. Victoire was angry, and Elise trembled as she listened. Just so, all her life, had that quiet, angry voice dominated her.

It had needed far less insight than Victoire possessed to learn that there was a new and bitter and unexplained feud between the household and herself and her young mistress.

She had found Elise in bed on the night of her arrival, and a feigned drowsiness on the girl's part had postponed any conversation till the morrow. With the morrow, however, a strange Elise had met her eyes, an Elise thin, worn, with a hunted, frightened look that perplexed Victoire. Elise was suffering from the old enemy, *migraine*, and preferred not to leave her bed. The waiting woman had descended to the kitchen, and at once became aware of the ban imposed by Mrs. Curnow. The serving girls answered her in yea and nay, and that was the sum of their speech. Neither did they talk in her presence, being only too pleased to carry out to the letter the housekeeper's instructions. Victoire, baffled, ascended to her mistress's room again. Elise's sufferings were not feigned, and she only prayed to be left alone till the pain became easier to bear. She would tell Victoire all the news later on.

Victoire, watching, saw that underlying the girl's physical suffering was the mental strain of some overpowering dread. Elise insisted on keeping the bolts of the chamber drawn; watched the door as footsteps passed without. In vain Victoire prayed for an explanation; at length she lapsed into sullen silence. In the late afternoon, while Elise was dozing Victoire crept downstairs. The kitchen was rocking with joyous sounds; laughter and tears, it would seem, and mid hilarious voices crying out on some unforeseen tremendous event. Victoire listened at the door long enough to disentangle the story wherein Marion's name and Roger's were freely tossed about. The waiting woman had known nothing of the happenings in Garth during the past month. Wrath at Elise's reticence, and

amazement at the story she had heard sent her hot-foot to the girl's room. She strode noisily to the bedside, and Elise, waking from a slight doze, started up in speechless terror.

'What is this,' cried Victoire, 'about Roger Trevannion being rescued from gaol by Marion?'

She got no farther. Elise gave a low cry, and sank fainting on her pillow.

The rest of the evening Victoire spent in real anxiety by the girl's bed. With the morning Elise rallied under the effects of the medicine given her, and while Mrs. Curnow and Marion were discussing her in Marion's chamber, Elise gave a faithful history of the neighbourhood during Victoire's absence in Brittany. And Victoire was angry; not, it appeared, because Elise had done Roger a grievous wrong, but because she had made a fatal blunder. Elise's poignant remorse she brushed aside as being of no moment; Elise's terror of Charity Borlase's threat of vengeance she passed by in contempt.

'It is monstrous, inconceivable,' she went on, her voice becoming softer and softer as rage consumed her. 'Here fate has worked in the kindest possible way. That stupid, inquisitive old lawyer Lebrun who might have ruined our plans, has by a merciful Providence been allowed to die. For young Lebrun I do not care a straw. The anxiety of years has been removed. Your inheritance lies clear before you, the d'Artois estates only waiting for a mistress. And just when we could have departed in friendliness from that fool, the Admiral, you have committed this indescribable folly. Why could you not leave Roger Trevannion alone?'

'Did I not tell you,' said Elise sulkily, 'that he spied on me, that he had found out all about the cove and the man?'

'Nonsense! He just happened to pass that way, and he saw you.'

'He would have told.'

'Nonsense, again! You do not know the world. Had it been a woman, a village girl, there might have been danger—even then supposing the Admiral would have listened to one word from a village girl concerning his guest. But a young man like Roger Trevannion! Roger is *gentilhomme, vois-tu?—gentilhomme.* He might have given evidence if asked, and only then if he had thought it was his honourable duty. They mind their own business, *ces gens-là*! You have judged him as if he were a fisher lad. And if you had wanted to get rid of him—and I should not have had anything to say about that if you had been successful and done it properly'—Elise shuddered—'why, could you not have gone down to the cove and signalled to the man to do it for you? He would do anything for money, and you had plenty of money. But to go yourself to Bodmin! I am speechless! You have ruined us, do you hear?'

'I wish from the bottom of my heart,' suddenly said Elise, her face mottled yellow and white, 'that I had never seen Garth. The whole thing has been

monstrous. For my part, I am willing to confess.'

Victoire stood and looked at the girl, and laughed. Elise sank back in bed, and hid her face.

'We will talk about that later,' went on the mocking, silky voice. 'In the meantime, prepare for a long walk, my good girl. As soon as dusk falls to-night, we set out.'

For a long time no more was said. Victoire busied herself with certain preparations, sewing money and jewels into the folds of her dress. The girl made no effort to rise and help her. She lay with closed eyes, from time to time falling into convulsive weeping whose sounds she stifled in the bed clothes. Her companion, busy among the garments hanging in the press in the inner room, failed to note, for all her caution, the dull sound of wheels, and if Elise heard, she made no comment.

'Listen to that!' said Victoire presently, emerging from her closet with a length of priceless lace on her arm. 'There is the kitchen still uproarious. They will be singing and dancing all night because of this escape. But—ah, good! while they are amusing themselves, I will get into the buttery for food for our journey. If I go through the hall, the wenches will not see me.'

'Marion may,' faltered Elise.

'And do you suppose the Princess Royal will speak to me?'

With a little laugh, Victoire went boldly downstairs, and entered the hall, one door of which gave access to the butler's pantry and the buttery. Too late she realised her mistake. Several people were sitting there, and Mrs. Curnow was carrying a tray of wine and cake from guest to guest. The open door in her hand, ready to retrace her steps, Victoire paused long enough to note the new arrivals. Her beady black eyes ran from face to face. There was a gentleman whom she did not recognise, standing by the window; in the big chair sat Mistress Keziah Penrock. Victoire had scarcely time to feel alarmed at the sight of the lady, for on the instant she caught sight of another figure, that of a young girl who was talking eagerly with Marion. Victoire's other hand clutched at the door post, and at the same moment Marion caught sight of her. A sudden pause in the conversation made Simone look curiously round. She gave a sharp cry, and passing her hand over her eyes, stared about the room, then seized Marion's arm with both hands. From that support she turned her head slowly, like a frightened child, and looked again at the woman clinging to the door. Across the room two pairs of eyes stared, each at a ghost. Simone dropped Marion's arm, and stepped forward. Suddenly the face at the door became distorted, the hand shot out to ward off Simone's approach, a broken gabble fell from the ashen lips. Then silence again.

Simone stepped quite close, and looked steadfastly at her.

'*Victoire!*'

CHAPTER XXIV
ELISE PASSES OUT

'Pray, sit down, Simone.'

It was Colonel Sampson's voice, even and decorous, that broke in on the strained silence. He drew a chair up to the oaken table as he spoke. Simone obeyed, holding a hand out as if for support. Marion took the hand and held it, gently passing her own palm across the trembling fingers. Motioning Victoire into the room, Mrs. Curnow quietly shot the bolt and latched the other door that gave on to the kitchen passages. Mistress Keziah looked curiously from face to face, then with a slight gesture she turned to Colonel Sampson.

Bending over Simone, whose eyes never left the woman at the door, Sampson spoke.

'Tell us, if you can, my dear, who this woman is.'

'My nurse,' instantly replied Simone.

'Your nurse?' repeated Mistress Keziah in a clear, steady voice. 'You are not mistaken?' She looked from Marion who, speechless, was staring at Victoire, to Sampson. The Colonel nodded once or twice, with a smile. Simone leaned her brow on her hand for a minute, then looked up at him. Her whole face was transformed.

'I can remember!' she cried, springing up. 'Oh, I can remember!' She pressed her fingers to her cheeks, staring beyond the room into the past.

'Remember what, Simone dear?' said Marion in a trembling voice, forcing the girl gently into her chair.

Simone's low voice broke on a hysterical note. 'But,' she cried, 'I am not Simone. Did I not say I have just remembered? I have been trying all my life to remember. I am not Simone. I am Elise.'

Marion stepped back, her grey eyes wide. She looked appealingly at her aunt; but that lady, her gaze bent on Simone, appeared to be making a reckoning and a remembrance on her own account. Sampson still smiled from the window seat.

Marion looked again from Simone to the woman who stood, her mouth closed tight, by the door. What could have happened to affect Simone's mind

thus?

'But,' she faltered, 'Elise is upstairs in her room. Are there two Elises?'

'I told my brother,' rang out Mistress Keziah's clear voice, 'I told my brother yonder girl was not a de Delauret. Had your nurse a child, my dear?' she asked, turning to Simone.

'Why, yes,' said Simone slowly. 'Let me see now. What was she called? Wait a minute. I have it! Suzanne Marie. We used to play together. How clear it is all growing!'

There was a curious pause. Marion stepped forward, a strange look on her colourless face.

'Then Suzanne Marie is upstairs,' triumphantly said Mistress Keziah. 'The whole thing is clear.'

A wail broke from Marion's lips. 'I cannot understand it. Aunt Keziah, are we all going mad?'

Simone, staring across at Victoire, seemed not to hear, and Sampson, watching the girl, saw that she was slowly linking together the scattered chain of her memories.

'The woman Victoire will doubtless explain,' said Mistress Keziah. 'I told your father there was some hideous mystery. The whole village knew. Any one else but my brother would have known. The woman just put her own child in Simone's place.'

Again a stupefied silence fell on the room. There was no word from the woman at the door.

Quite suddenly Marion burst into tears.

'It is horrible,' she said. 'Horrible! Have I been all these years playing and sleeping and eating with some one called Suzanne Marie, and the real Elise starving in London? Simone,'—she threw her arms round the girl's neck,—'forgive me, forgive us.'

Mistress Keziah's old eyes watered as she looked at the girl who had always been so self-controlled. 'My darling,' she said, 'it was not your fault.'

'I cannot bear it!' cried Marion. 'And I care not who sees me weep. Romaine says she found Simone in a fearful state in a gutter in Crutched Friars. She had been so dreadfully treated that she nearly died. Then when Romaine had nursed her back to health she could not remember anything.'

'No,' broke in Simone's toneless voice. 'No. But I remember now. Dear Marion, do not be unhappy.'

'I cannot help but be unhappy,' said Marion, drying her eyes. 'We ought to have found out. Somebody ought to have done something. Think of it, Aunt Keziah, Simone working in London, stitching all day for a bit of food. I cannot bear it.' Marion sat down and buried her face in her hands.

'My lamb,' said Mrs. Curnow gently, 'doan't 'ee take on so, doan't 'ee now.'

'Poor Simone,' said Marion in a strangled voice as she wrestled for composure, 'and left in a gutter to die! And that hard life! And she would have been so happy at Garth.'

Simone's low voice here broke in; Simone had grown curiously still. One would have said she was a detached spectator of affairs that concerned other people.

'Why did you do it, Victoire?'

Victoire's mouth tightened to a still harder line.

'Why did you do it?' repeated Simone. 'Were you not well treated as my nurse?'

'I can tell you that,' said Sampson. 'Victoire wanted the estates for her own child.'

Simone turned round in her chair.

'What estates, M. le Colonel? It is all quite clear to me now—my memory, I mean. My father told me when he was very ill, just before he died, that I was to go to England with Victoire and live with a very dear friend of his until I was grown up. He said nothing of estates. In fact, I always thought we were poor. But then, I was only a child of eight.'

'Your mother inherited lands from her father's family, my dear. Your grandfather's direct heir died. You are the inheritor of his estate. Victoire knew that.'

'I see,' said Simone. 'I can see it all. So that was why my nurse, to my great delight, brought little Suzanne Marie with us. I was so pleased. She was my playmate. I remember how nice it was to have Suzanne Marie going with me to the strange place. I remember the ship and the sea. I remember the queer English voices when we landed and got into the coach to go to London.' Simone spoke slowly as she called up the minute details of the distant day. 'There was a place Victoire took us to, to lodge until my guardian came. We had queer sort of meat for dinner, and a pudding with plums in it. Then we went out into the street to find a shop. Victoire was going to buy me a new ribbon for my hair. Probably you remember too, Victoire. "A nice black ribbon," you said. Then you—you left me in the street. I walked and walked and cried until I was sick. And then——' Simone stopped. 'I don't think I want to remember any more, M. le Colonel,' she said, in that quiet composed voice which drew from Mistress Keziah and Sampson cross-glances of admiration. 'That is all. And so Suzanne Marie came here and was the kind Admiral's ward.'

'But was there no one all these years who saw Victoire or Elise?' asked Colonel Sampson, his voice breaking in on the silence that had followed Simone's speech. 'No one of the family?'

The figure by the door stirred, and was still again. Marion raised her head.

There was something uncanny in this trying of a silent prisoner.

'Do you know, Marion?' continued the Colonel

'I remember my father told me,' said Marion in a low voice, 'that the only person left was M. Lebrun the lawyer.'

'Ah!' The exclamation came from Mrs. Curnow. 'So now us do be knowing. Mistress Penrock and you, Sir, I can tell 'ee. Victoire here have had as you might say a secret messenger all these years, a man as do be known for the vilest wretch in the waters. Her's gone to France and come back, many a time a year, putting into Haunted Cove down along and making a signal. A foul place that, Sir, such as no God-fearing man would step into. And they two Victoire and Mademoiselle, have gone down secret-like, to talk to un and leave messages belike. Always when there was rough weather or a thick mist, so as they thought, I suppose, no one would know. But the village knew. The village have known for years there was something tur'ble wrong. I see it now, plain as my hand. The only danger for they two was the old lawyer. And when at last the Admiral arranges for the old gentleman to be a-coming over, Victoire finds out, and her suddenly learns her dear mother be sick unto death, and needs a daughter's care.'

'Why?' queried Mistress Keziah. 'Having done all this, why should she fear meeting the lawyer? In ten years a child alters out of recognition. Elise and Simone are of the same complexion.'

Simone was watching the face by the door. 'She was afraid,' she said.

'Oh yes,' remarked Sampson. 'She was afraid of the old lawyer, afraid that in spite of her care a whisper of her secret might have been heard. It was very clever of her to go away. A lawyer is of an inquiring turn of mind, as a rule, given to asking questions. And this old gentleman who, I fear, must be dead, or Victoire would not be with us (I remember now your talking of him in London, Marion—he was ailing, and his journey had to be postponed), this old gentleman might have had the wit to question the two, Victoire and Elise, separately. There might not have been an exact correspondence in replies. And so Victoire goes out of the way and leaves Elise to manage the old gentleman herself.'

'And now us do be knowing another thing,' burst out the old housekeeper. 'Us knows why Mademoiselle swore away dear Master Roger's life. Master Roger had found out about the doings in Haunted Cove.'

Victoire made a sudden movement. At last she spoke.

'Lies!' she snapped out. 'All lies. Mademoiselle did nothing of the sort. 'Tis all nothing but lies and hatred. You have hated us all the time, you and you'—nodding from Mrs. Curnow to Marion. She fixed her beady eyes on Simone. 'You know as well as I know that yonder poor girl lying upstairs is Elise de Delauret, and you are a playmate of hers whom I brought over in the kindness of my heart. How could I help it if you strayed away in London? Did I not seek and seek——'

Colonel Sampson stepped forward. 'If I were you I should say nothing more.'

'Would you? But I've more to say. Who is there to believe what that upstart'—she pointed to Simone—'chooses to say? There is no one living but myself who knows who is Elise de Delauret. I have proof. Where is yours?'

'This is really very fine,' said Mistress Keziah, her eyes gleaming. 'But quite wasted. Curnow—take——'

'Your proof!' cried Victoire again. 'Her word against mine and Mademoiselle's upstairs.'

Colonel Sampson was fumbling in his pocket, and drew out a miniature portrait, a pretty thing, framed in pearls. He handed it to Mistress Keziah with a significant glance towards Simone, who, apparently unconcerned, but with a strained look growing on her face, was watching Victoire. Mistress Keziah looked from the face in the portrait to the face opposite her. Victoire darted forward and peered over the lady's shoulder. She caught a quick breath. Just as Victoire's hand clutched at the miniature Sampson cried out a word of warning. Mrs. Curnow swung her heavy weight on the woman and bore her aside.

'Take her out,' said Mistress Keziah to the housekeeper. 'Put her in a chamber by herself and have door and window guarded.'

'I'll put her in the kitchen, if it please you, Mistress,' said Mrs. Curnow grimly. 'There be plenty there glad and willing to watch what her does.'

Colonel Sampson opened the door and himself watched Victoire firmly escorted into the kitchen by Mrs. Curnow.

CHAPTER XXV
A FAMILY PARTY

'She will be quite safe there,' said Colonel Sampson, returning. 'From the looks of yonder maids I'll warrant they'll make excellent jailors.'

Simone was still sitting staring at the door by which Victoire had stood. Her face had grown white, and Marion's arm was around her. Mistress Keziah held a glass to her lips, and Colonel Sampson opened the outer door, letting in a breath of sweet air from the Channel. Presently Marion drew her outside on to the terrace, and the two began to walk slowly up and down. The sunlight was breaking through the mist, falling gently on the black and gold heads as the girls

passed and repassed the window of the hall.

'They will be best left alone,' said Mistress Keziah. 'It has been terrible for them both. Marion has only just found out how much she is attached to Simone, and she has had over much strain of late. What a warm heart beats under that quiet exterior of hers! As for Simone! Well, if I know my brother and my niece, they will endeavour to atone for the past.' She looked at Sampson. 'What are we to do?' she asked abruptly.

Sampson strolled over to the hearth, his hands under the lapels of his coat.

'I am afraid,' said the old woman suddenly.

'Lest Victoire might seek for vengeance?'

'Just that.'

'It is your brother's affair, really, you know,' said Sampson after a pause.

'Tush! My brother! Has he not been hopelessly blind? Oh!'—a flash of anger dyed the old woman's cheek. Her eyes gleamed. She looked at the moment curiously like the old Salt Eagle. 'I told him,' she said quietly, 'a woman would have known at once that there was something wrong. He chose his own course. I came back to Garth too late. I am not going to be too late a second time.'

Sampson paced the hall in silence for a while.

'What do you suggest?' he asked, stopping in his walk.

'I should suggest sending the two at once under escort to Plymouth. There are plenty of men to spare—my servants and my brother's. The men must not lose sight of them till they are safely embarked.'

'It is really a case for the law. They should be imprisoned.'

Mistress Keziah shook her head. 'My brother would never do that—for Marion's sake—for Simone's sake. Once he has got over his wrath, he will only have one desire, and that to end the whole contemptible story. If I thought he was coming back to-morrow, I would counsel waiting. But I know he can only just have left London. I will take the risk of his displeasure,' continued the old woman, 'but I am too much afraid of that terrible woman to let her stay under the same roof with Simone and my niece. Let us send them away, Colonel. And the whole thing will be done with.'

For some time the two talked together. Colonel Sampson, who had a man's dislike of meddling with another man's affairs, presently was convinced that Mistress Keziah was right.

'I will see them safely embarked myself, I think, or lodge them somewhere in Plymouth until the Admiral returns. Perhaps that will be the best.'

'I care not,' said Mistress Keziah, 'so long as they leave Garth this day.'

After a time Mistress Keziah picked up the miniature again, and looked at Sampson. 'I am an old woman,' she said, 'and a mighty curious one.'

Sampson made a low bow. 'To gratify your curiosity is a pleasure. Elise

d'Artois was the most beautiful woman in France. For a spell she did me the honour to accept me among her acquaintance. Then de Delauret came along.... Years passed—more than I care to remember. Then, at Lady Fairfax's house, I was confronted by Simone. Her face began to haunt me. One afternoon, in the coach with Marion she suddenly turned on me with her mother's smile, and I vow I thought the years had turned back, and I was speaking to the peerless Elise d'Artois. Not dreaming that that very night our dear Marion and Elise's daughter would have sore need of me, I took horse and rode into Hertfordshire to my house there. In a secret drawer in my cabinet was the miniature. My plan was to show it to Sir John, and then confer as to what steps should be taken. When I got back after two days, I found the Fairfax house deserted, a letter awaiting me. The rest you know.'

'It is a vastly strange world,' commented Mistress Keziah. She sat musing, turning over the miniature.

'Why do you smile?' queried Sampson.

'I was thinking of my sister Constance, and many things. She has a way of saying that Garth is a wigwam in a forest, where nothing happens save that the sun rises and sets; a desert island where the tide comes in and the tide goes out. I'll wager she will consider attendance on Her Majesty a poor exchange for this day's work.'

Mistress Keziah rose as she spoke, and passed out on to the terrace, while Sampson sought the stables, to arrange details of the unpleasant journey that awaited him.

It happened that at that moment Lady Fairfax was sitting at the dinner-table of the same inn at Postbridge where Marion and Roger had halted in the course of their ride. Captain Beckenham faced her across the board, and the two were listening to mine host's recital of events which had, in his eyes, lent the same importance to the Cornwall Road that marks a field of battle on the morrow of the fight. The fact that the innkeeper had been unaware at the time of the significance of the appearance of the headlong riders, the pursuing soldiers, the chariots and horsemen stopping at his door, and was thus distinctly a day behind the fair, did not in the least take from his powers as a story teller.

The lady and gentleman hearkened as they ate, and forbore to explain that they themselves were, in a manner of speaking, a belated rearguard of the procession, the epilogue to the play. Lady Fairfax listened with a grave expression thoroughly appreciated by her companion across the table. For a considerable distance now, at each inn where they had stopped for food or sleep, they had been regaled with the story which was at heart the same, but disguised according to the particular fancy of each succeeding narrator. The entertainment afforded them was thus akin to an air with variations, each variation a little more tortured

than the last, so that it was a matter for considerable skill on the hearers' part to beat out the original tune.

Until she had heard at Exeter from the Governor himself that the prisoner was safe from the reach of justice, Lady Fairfax had been too anxious to pay much heed to the rumours that had run to meet her on her way. Once that assurance gained, however, she gave herself up to a more leisurely journey, and failed not to profit by its diversions.

Mine host, having at length satisfied himself that he had done his duty as a story teller: shown the prisoner bearing marks of severe punishment, with bandaged head and broken arm, scarcely able to sit in the saddle; the lady accompanying him so unearthly pale and wrung with anguish that one might have thought she had got out of her coffin that morning, instead of out of her bed; after these two unfortunates a whole regiment, bloodthirsty and hot for vengeance, riding upon the wings of the wind; a broken-hearted father dead on the way beyond Salisbury; and innumerable relatives wearing the track into ditches in their haste to hear the reading of the will: after all this, I say, mine host retired to the kitchen with the bottle of his own wine to which Lady Fairfax had invited him, and left his travellers to sup in peace. As he closed the door, the eyes of the two guests met in undisguised merriment.

'I vow I am beginning to be sorry,' said Lady Fairfax, 'that to-morrow we arrive at Garth. 'Twill be an end of these Iliads. Had my brother only lived fifty miles farther west, why, my niece might have finished the journey with the dead body of the prisoner strapped across her saddle-bow. There is still one mystery,' she added, 'and with time we might have solved it. No one has told us anything about Colonel Sampson.'

'He is part of the pursuing army, I should imagine,' said Beckenham.

'That is but the outside of the affair, of course,' retorted the lady. 'The inmost heart thereof is the reason for his mysterious riding into the country just when my husband was away, and he had promised a father's care to my niece. Men are a faithless breed.'

'There will doubtless be some reason,' Beckenham replied.

'Doubtless! Doubtless!' mocked Lady Fairfax. 'He may have gone to count the milestones on the Oxford Road, or write a sonnet to the moon.' She yawned behind her pretty hand as she spoke, and presently rising, bade her companion good-night.

Lady Fairfax's curiosity was not destined to consume her outright. The travellers being early on their way in the morning, it happened that the coach had covered most of the distance to Garth, and its fair occupant was looking with secret exultation for old landmarks, when Captain Beckenham rode up to announce the approach of another vehicle just a little distance behind.

Lady Fairfax put her head out of the coach door.

'It cannot be the heart-broken father of our host's story,' she said, 'for I see my own servant, Reuben, on the box. Let us wait, Captain Beckenham. It would appear that at last something is going to happen. I am weary of riding ever on the morrow of the event.'

The vehicle proved to be the Penrock coach, returning from Plymouth. There, on the previous evening, Colonel Sampson had escorted Victoire and Elise, leaving them with a bodyguard of Mistress Keziah's providing until her brother should return. Nothing loth, Mr. Sampson accepted Lady Fairfax's invitation to enter her own coach, and Beckenham, suddenly finding he was weary of the saddle, gave his horse to Reuben and followed the Colonel.

'Tell them to drive more slowly,' ordered Lady Fairfax. 'My ears have of late been shaken into my boots. Now, Sir, and what have you to say?'

The Colonel, it appeared, had much to say. The story so absorbed his fair hearer's attention that the landmarks of the homecoming journey were left ungreeted. Lady Fairfax listened to the history of Roger's escape in growing amazement.

'My little niece!' she exclaimed from time to time. 'Who would have thought it possible?'

Before she had realised the extent of her wonder at Marion's activities, she found herself out of her depth, speechless, confounded, at Sampson's revelations concerning Madame Romaine's little sempstress.

From Simone back to Marion, from Marion and the unknown Roger back to Simone, Lady Fairfax's thoughts ran when at last Sampson paused in his recital. The Colonel, watching her face, was secretly amused. The anger which had been stored up for him on account of his 'desertion' of Marion never even found voice; the dismay and disappointment Lady Fairfax had felt in the manner of her niece's departure from Kensington was entirely swallowed up in the thought of this new, strange Marion. 'My little niece,' she murmured again.

While she was still pondering, the two coaches drove into Garth. A minute later, Marion's arms were round her, Marion's lips on her cheek. 'Dear, dear Aunt Constance,' she cried, 'I never dreamed you would come all this way to Cornwall.'

'I suppose you thought I should be content to sit in Tunbridge playing "I love my Love with an A,"' retorted the lady, her eyes nevertheless suspiciously moist as she kissed her niece. She held the girl at arm's length. 'Dear heart,' she said gently, 'I have feared for you greatly, all these days.'

'There was no other way,' said Marion, in tremulous tones. 'Do not be angered with me, Aunt Constance.'

'And a fine story you have left behind,' grumbled Lady Fairfax, recovering her old manner. 'Rumours of runaway marriages flying round Kensington, and

the Court not quite certain whether it can any longer tolerate the aunt of such a niece.'

Marion's smiling eyes ran beyond the lady to two figures just emerging from the courtyard.

'Why, there is Captain Beckenham,' she cried. 'Welcome to Garth, Sir.' Then as she rose from her curtsey, 'Simone is on the terrace,' she added gravely.

'Oho!' said Lady Fairfax softly, with a quick look at her niece as, followed by Sampson and Beckenham, the two walked round into the garden. 'Blows the wind from that quarter? Faith! 'Tis an uncertain world. And not a stone of this old place altered,' she mused as she went on. 'But how it has shrunk! It seemed to me, when I was a child playing in this garden, to be as big as the Tower of London.' She stopped and looked at the grey gabled house. 'Not a stone altered,' she repeated. 'And I declare if that isn't my elder sister Keziah sitting yonder. Dear, dear, I hope I'm not going to be whipped. And where is—— Ah! Simone, come here at once!'

Simone, glancing from Lady Fairfax to the gentleman behind her, was very glad to hide her sudden confusion under cover of a curtsey directed to both new comers at once. Lady Fairfax passed her arm affectionately round the girl, and with Marion on the other side walked across to the terrace.

'I was always terrified of your Aunt Keziah,' she murmured. 'I shall look to you two for protection. Ten years since we met.'

She nevertheless gently disengaged her arms as the three crossed the stone flags, and by mutual consent, while the sisters greeted each other, the two girls turned to talk to Sampson and Beckenham.

'It is over,' called Lady Fairfax presently. 'You may approach. Come and sit down. I want to hear the whole story again.'

Marion gently placed Simone in the spare seat of the stone bench and herself stood with one hand gently resting on Mistress Keziah's shoulder. The bond between herself and her Aunt Constance was a very tender one, but there was now another presence in her little shrine of loved ones. Mistress Keziah's face was wearing a hard look which Marion rightly guessed was only a mask. And the old lady was tired. The marks of the vigils she had kept on Marion's account could not at once be effaced.

'Have you not already heard it all, Aunt Constance?' asked Marion.

'A repetition would be good for one's pride, my dear,'

'How so?' queried Marion.

'How so? Thus. Here I come, after sleepless nights, after completely undoing the peace and quiet of the Court and setting Her Majesty at her wits' end by reason of the loss of her waiting woman and the most important officer in her suite; here I come, I say, with a Royal Pardon in my pocket. And it is of no

consequence whatever. All I do is to sit and hear what happened the day before. I feel as if I simply were not here. I might just as well have stayed in Tunbridge and—ah! there is that dear soul Curnow. I must go and speak to her. Would the Admiral but arrive now, we should feel like Moses and all the prophets.'

'Constance, Constance!' remonstrated her sister.

Lady Fairfax shot a glance at the two girls as she went towards the door. 'I told you,' she said, 'just what...' The rest of her sentence was drowned in Mrs. Curnow's greeting.

The household of Garth now gave itself up to an unaccustomed hilarity: a joy that was all the more heartfelt because of the secure, quiet happiness that underlay the merriment. Lady Fairfax's presence successfully bridged the gap between the old and the new; she made Simone feel that her place must always have been at Garth, made Marion look away from the uneasy yesterdays to the ever-brightening morrows. Mistress Keziah, it is true, wore still her old severity, but at times there were hints of the gentleness and love underlying her hard exterior. Even the Admiral, arriving weary and shaken, was fain to throw off with the dusty apparel of his journey the sorrow and grief of the last few weeks.

After one roaring fit of rage at his own folly, and one grim day spent at Plymouth, the old man wisely put the past behind him and settled down at the head of the merry company with supreme content. While seeking from Jeffreys a pardon which he was informed had already been granted by the King, the Admiral had seized the moment to lay down the burden of office as the special magistrate of the Lord Chancellor. And although Lady Fairfax and her brother failed not each to rate the other on the subject of the uselessness of Royal Pardons, there was an unspoken thanksgiving in their hearts; for the Deputy Governor's special courier, who had entered the gates of Exeter an hour after Marion and Roger had ridden out, had carried a death warrant in his saddlebag.

When Sir John Fairfax at last arrived bearing a summons for his wife to return to Her Majesty's service—a summons which included the unwilling Beckenham,—Lady Fairfax begged the Admiral to be allowed to carry her niece back to resume her interrupted visit. But the Admiral professed himself fearful of what might happen. Kensington was a place where one's peace of mind was insecure, and where, moreover, a 'little niece' was apt to change overmuch for her father's liking. When Lady Fairfax asserted that the 'little niece' was merely growing up, the Admiral pished and pshawed. Marion should stay where she was, he said, until Simone could be induced to go over and visit the d'Artois estates. When that happened—the Admiral looked as he spoke at Beckenham walking in the garden with Simone—why, then, he would come and bring Mar-

ion himself, perhaps; but he made no promises. And with that Lady Fairfax was obliged to be content.

CHAPTER XXVI
'SUMER IS A-COMEN IN'

Sumer is a comen in,
Loud sing cuccu.
Groweth seed and bloweth mead
And springeth the wood nu.
Sing cuccu.

Another spring had come to the West Country, crying over hill and dale its clear song of joy. Once more salt airs came up from the Channel, once more a delicious unrest filled the hearts of men.

Marion walked out of the house alone and sought the headland crowned with furze whence she and Roger, a year before, had seen the *Fair Return* sail out of the harbour. The year had made a difference to Marion, adding an indefinable shade of resolution to lip and brow; there was a touch of gravity in the quiet grey eyes, a hint of ripening in the girlish figure.

Something more than the restlessness of spring had driven Marion to the solitude of the cliff side, something more than the emptiness of the house which Simone had just left for a visit to her French home, something more than the realisation that soon she would be in Kensington again with her aunt.

Marion walked idly about the headland, pacing to and fro along the grassy stretch. From time to time her eyes swept the sunlit Channel. Presently she climbed to a higher ridge of the slope and sat down on the stone ledge that gave a view of the harbour.

A soft haze clung to the river mouth, and through it the spikes of the masts rose with a gentle motion. Suddenly Marion sprang to her feet and ran along a few yards to a higher point of the headland. Among the small fishing boats of the Garth men she could clearly discern the lines of a larger vessel. With her hand shading her eyes she studied the rig of the newcomer. Men were still busy on her decks. She had clearly just sailed into port.

As Marion stood, there was the sound of approaching footsteps on the hill-

side. She dropped her hand, turned, and remained motionless, her fingers plucking at the fold of her gown. A tall, bronzed figure, walking with a seaman's roll, was bearing round the cliff.

A wave of colour ran over Marion's face as the figure approached, and for a few seconds she struggled with a wild desire to turn and flee.

Then she heard her own voice speaking, and only a slight tremor, a deeper tone, betrayed her feeling.

'You always were a very sudden person, Roger,' she said.

Roger tossed his seaman's cap on the ground and gently took her hands. The dark eyes, with gold lights dancing in the brown, looked merrily into the steady grey ones. The look sobered, and Marion's glance fell. She did not see the brown eyes run over her face and shining, red-gold hair.

For a long second they stood thus. Then Roger suddenly dropped his face into the hands he held.

With a tremulous laugh Marion withdrew her fingers and lightly touched the dark head.

'There's that patch of hair as stiff as ever,' she said.

Roger ran his hand over his head with the old, rueful expression.

'I know,' he said. 'And I shall grow bald all round it, and it will stand up so to the end. I knew a sailor's who stood up, harder than mine. But never mind my hair, Mawfy. Let me look at you again.'

Marion turned away in silence, and they walked along a few yards and then sat down on the rocky ledge. Soft airs circled the headland; sea gulls flashed over the sapphire bar of the sea. The sunlight, glancing over the cliff, fell on the gold and black heads, on the fair face and the dark face, on the slender fingers held in the firm, brown hand. Out in the copses the spring song joyously rang again.

Sumer is a comen in,
Loud sing cuccu.
Groweth seed and bloweth mead
And springeth the wood nu.
Sing cuccu.

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