The Lost Treasure of Trevlyn eBook

The Lost Treasure of Trevlyn

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The Lost Treasure of Trevlyn A Story of the Days of the Gunpowder Plot

by Evelyn Everett-Green.

Chapter 1: The Inmates Of The Old Gate House.

"Dost defy me to my face, sirrah?"

"I have no desire to defy you, father, but—"

"But me no 'buts,' and father me no 'fathers,'" stormed the angry old man, probably quite unconscious of the Shakespearian smack of his phrase; "I am no father to heretic spawn—a plague and a curse be on all such! Go to, thou wicked and deceitful boy; thou wilt one day bitterly rue thy evil practices. Thinkest thou that I will harbour beneath

my roof one who sets me at open defiance; one who is a traitor to his house and to his faith?"

A dark flush had risen in the face of the tall, slight youth, with the thoughtful brow and resolute mouth, as his father's first words fell upon his ears, and throwing back his head with a haughty gesture, he said: "I am not deceitful. You have no call to taunt me with that vice which I despise above all others. I have never used deceit towards you. How could you have known I had this day attended the service of the Established Church had I not told you so myself?"

The veins on the old man's forehead stood out with anger; he brought his fist heavily down on the table, with a bang that caused every vessel thereon to ring. A dark-eyed girl, who was listening in mute terror to the stormy scene, shrank yet more into herself at this, and cast an imploring look upon the tall stripling whose face her own so much resembled; but his fiery eyes were on his father's face, and he neither saw nor heeded the look.

"And have I not forbid—ay, and that under the heaviest penalties—any child of mine from so much as putting the head inside one of those vile heretic buildings? Would God they were every one of them destroyed! Heaven send some speedy judgment upon those who build and those who dare to worship therein! What wonder that a son turns in defiance upon his father, when he stuffs his ears with the pestilent heresies with which the wicked are making vile this earth!"

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Nicholas Trevlyn's anger became so great at this point as well nigh to choke him. He paused, not from lack of words, but from inability to utter them; and his son, boldly taking advantage of the pause, struck in once more in his own defence.

"Father, you talk of pestilent heresies, but what know you of the doctrines taught within walls you never enter? Is it a pestilent heresy that Christ died to save the world; that He rose again for our justification; that He sent the Holy Spirit into the world to sanctify and gather together a Church called after His name? That is the doctrine I heard preached today, and methinks it were hard to fall foul of it. If you had heard it yourself from one of our priests, sure you would have found it nothing amiss."

"Silence, boy!" thundered the old man, his fury suddenly changing to a white heat of passion, which was more terrible than the bluster that had gone before. "Silence, lest I strike thee to the ground where thou standest, and plunge this dagger in thine heart sooner than hear thee blaspheme the Holy Church in which thou wast reared! How darest thou talk thus to me? as though yon accursed heretic of a Protestant was a member of the Church of Christ. Thou knowest that there is but one fold under one shepherd, and he the Pope of Rome. A plague upon those accursed ones who have perverted the true faith and led a whole nation astray! But they shall not lead my son after them; Nicholas Trevlyn will look well to that!"

Father and son stood with the table between them, gazing fixedly at one another like combatants who, having tested somewhat the strength each of the other, feel a certain doubt as to the termination of the contest, but are both ready and almost eager for the final struggle which shall leave the victory unequivocally on one side or the other.

"I had thought that the Shepherd was Christ," said Cuthbert, in a low, firm tone, "and that the fold was wide enough to embrace all those baptized into His name."

"Then thou only thinkest what is one more of those damnable heresies which are ruining this land and corrupting the whole world," cried Nicholas between his shut teeth. "Thou hast learned none such vile doctrine from me."

"I have learned no doctrine from you save that the Pope is lord of all——of things temporal and things spiritual—and that all who deny this are in peril of hell fire," answered the young man, with no small bitterness and scorn. "And here, in this realm, those who hold this to be so are in danger of prison and death. Truly this is a happy state of things for one such as I. At home a father who rails upon me night and day for a heretic—albeit I vow I hold not one single doctrine which I cannot stand to and prove from the Word of God."

"Which thou hast no call to have in thine hands!" shouted his father; "a book which, if given to the people, stirs up everywhere the vilest heresies and most loathsome errors.

The Bible is God's gift to the Church. It is not of private interpretation. It is for the priests to give of its treasures to the people as they are able to bear them."

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“Ay, verily, and what are the people to do when the priests deny them their rightful food?” cried Cuthbert, as hotly as his father. “Listen to me, sir. Yes, this once I wilt speak! In years gone by, when, however quietly, secretly, and privately, we were visited by a priest and heard the mass, and received at his hands the Blessed Sacrament, did I revolt against your wish in matters spiritual? Was I not ever willing to please you? Did I not love the Church? Was not I approved of the Father, and taught many things by him, including those arts of reading and penmanship which many in my condition of life never attain unto? Did I ever anger you by disobedience or revolt?”

“What of that, since you are doing so now?” questioned Nicholas in a quieter tone, yet one full of suspicion and resentment. “What use to talk of what is past and gone? Thou knowest well of late years how thou hast been hankering after every vile and villainous heresy that has come in thy way. It is thy mother’s blood within thee belike. I did grievous wrong ever to wed with one reared a Protestant, however she might abjure the errors in which she was brought up. False son of a false mother—”

“Hold, sir! You shall not miscall my mother! No son will stand by and hear that!”

“I will say what I will in mine own house, thou evil, malapert boy!” roared the old man. “I tell thee that thy mother was a false woman, that she deceived me bitterly. After solemnly abjuring the errors in which she had been reared, and being received into the true fold, she, as years went by, lapsed more and more into her foul heretical ways of thought and speech; and though she went to her last reckoning (unshriven and unassoiled, for she would have no priest at her dying bed) before ye twain were old enough to have been corrupted by her precept and example, ye must have sucked in heresy with your mother’s milk, else how could son of mine act in the vile fashion that thou art acting?”

“I am acting in no vile fashion. I am no heretic. I am a true son of the true Church.”

Cuthbert spoke with a forced calmness which gave his words weight, and for a moment even the angry man paused to listen to them, eying the youth keenly all the while, as though measuring his own strength against him. Physically he was far more than a match for the slightly-built stripling of one-and-twenty, being a man of great height and muscular power—power that had in no wise diminished with advancing years, though time had turned his black locks to iron gray, and seamed his face with a multitude of wrinkles. Pride, passion, gloomy defiance, and bitter hatred of his kind seemed written on that face, which in its youth must have been handsome enough. Nicholas Trevlyn was a disappointed, embittered man, who added to all other faults of temperament that of a hopeless bigot of the worst kind. He was the sort of man of whom Inquisitors must surely have been made—without pity, without remorse, without any kind of natural feeling when once their religious convictions were at stake.

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As a young man he had watched heretics burning in Smithfield with a fierce joy and delight; and when with the accession of Elizabeth the tide had turned, he had submitted without a murmur to the fines which had ruined him and driven him, a poverty-stricken dependent, to the old Gate House. He would have died a martyr with the grim constancy that he had seen in others, and never lamented what he suffered for conscience' sake. But he had grown to be a thoroughly soured and embittered man, and had spent the past twenty or more years of his life in a ceaseless savage brooding which had made his abode anything but a happy place for his two children, the offspring of a late and rather peculiar marriage with a woman by birth considerably his inferior.

The firmness without the bitterness of his father's face was reflected in that of the son as Cuthbert fearlessly finished his speech.

"I am a true son of the Church. I am no outcast—no heretic. But I will not suffer my soul to be starved. It is the law of this land that whatever creed men hold in their hearts—whether the tenets of Rome or those of the Puritans of Scotland—that they shall outwardly conform themselves to the forms prescribed by the Establishment, and shall attend the churches of the land; and you know as well as I do that there be many priests of our faith who bid their flocks obey this law, and submit themselves to the powers that be. And yet even with all this I would have restrained myself from such attendance, knowing that it is an abhorrence unto you, had there been any other way open to me of hearing the Word of God or receiving the Blessed Sacrament. But since King James has come to the throne, the penal laws have been more stringently enforced against our priests than in the latter days of the Queen. What has been the result for us? Verily that the priest who did from time to time minister to us is fled. We are left without help, without guidance, without teaching, and this when the clouds of peril and trouble are like to darken more and more about our path."

"And what of that, rash boy? Would you think to lessen the peril by tampering with the things of the Evil One; by casting aside those rules and doctrines in which you both have been reared, and consorting with the subverters of the true faith?"

"But I cannot see that they are subverters of the faith," answered the youth hotly. "That is where the kernel of the matter lies. I have heard their preachings. I have talked with my cousins at the Chase, who know what their doctrine is."

But at these words the old man fairly gnashed his teeth in fury; he made a rush at his son and took him by the collar of his doublet, shaking him in a frenzy of rage.

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“So!” he cried, “so! Now we get at the whole heart of the matter. You have been learning heresy from those false Trevlyns at the Chase—those renegade, treacherous, time-serving Trevlyns, who are a disgrace to their name and their station! Wretched boy! have I not warned you times and again to have no dealings with those evil relatives? Kinsmen they may be, but kinsmen who have disgraced the name they bear. I would I had Richard Trevlyn here beneath my hand now, that I might stuff his false doctrine down his false throat to choke him withal! And to think that he has corrupted my son, as if the rearing of his own heretic brood was not enough!”

Cuthbert was unable to speak; his father’s hand pressed too tightly on his throat. He did not struggle or resist. Those were days when sons—ay, and daughters too—were used to receiving severe chastisement from the parental hand without murmur: and Nicholas Trevlyn had not been one to spare the rod where his son had been concerned. His wrath seemed to rise as he felt the slight form of the lad sway beneath his strong grasp. Surely that slim stripling could be reduced to obedience; but the lesson must be a sharp one, for plainly the poison was working, and had already produced disastrous results.

“Miserable boy!” cried Nicholas, his eyes blazing in their cavernous hollows, “the time has come when this matter must be settled betwixt us twain. Swear that thou wilt go no more to the churches of the Protestant faction, be the laws what they may; swear that thou wilt hold no more converse on matters of religion with thy cousins at the Chase—-swear these things with a solemn and binding oath, and all may yet be well. Refuse, and thou shalt yet learn, as thou hast not learned before, what the wrath of a wronged and outraged father can be!”

Petronella, the dark-eyed girl, who had all this while been crouching back in her high-backed chair in an attitude of shrinking terror, now sprang suddenly towards her brother, crying: “O Cuthbert, Cuthbert! prithee do not anger him more!

“Father, O dear sir, let but him go this once! He does not willingly anger you; he does but—”

“Peace, foolish girl, and begone! This is no time for woman’s whining. Thy brother and I can settle this business betwixt us twain. But stay, go thou to my room and fetch thence the strong whip wherewith I chastise the unruly hounds. Those who disobey like dogs must be beaten like dogs.

“But, an thou wilt swear to do my bidding in the future, and avoid all pestilent controversy with those false scions of thy house, thy chastisement shall be light. Defy me, and thou shalt feel the full weight of my arm as thou hast never felt it before.”

Petronella had never seen her father so angry in all her life before. True, he had always been a harsh, stern man, an unloving father, a captious tyrant in his own house. But

there had been limits to his anger. It had taken more generally the form of sullen brooding than of wild wrath, and the irritation and passion which had lately been increasing visibly in him was something comparatively new.

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Of late, however, there had been growing friction between Cuthbert and his father. The youth, who had remained longer a boy in his secluded life than he would have done had his lot been cast in a wider sphere, was awakening at last to the stirrings of manhood within him, and was chafing against the fetters, both physical and spiritual, laid upon him by the life he was forced to lead through the tyrannical will of his father. He was beginning, in a semi-conscious fashion, to pant for freedom, and to rebel against the harsh paternal yoke.

When a struggle of wills commences, the friction continues a long while before the spark is produced; but when some unwonted contest has ignited this, the flame often bursts out in wonderful fury, and the whole scene is thence forward changed.

If the old man's blood was up today, Cuthbert's was no less so. He shook himself free for a moment from his father's grasp and stood before him, tall, upright, indignant, no fear in his face, but a deep anger and pain; and his words were spoken with great emphasis and deliberation.

"I will swear nothing of all that. I claim for myself the right of a man to judge for myself and act for myself. I am a boy no longer; I have reached man's estate. I will be threatened and intimidated no longer by any man, even though he be my father. I am ready and willing to leave your house this very day. I am weary of the life here. I would fain carve out fortune for myself. It is plain that we cannot be agreed; wherefore it plainly behoves us to part. Let me then go, but let me go in peace. It may be when I return to these doors you may have learned to think more kindly of me."

But the very calmness of these words only stung Nicholas to greater fury. He had in full force that inherent belief, so deeply rooted in the minds of many of the sons of Rome, that conviction as well as submission could be compelled—could be driven into the minds and consciences of recalcitrant sons and daughters by sheer force and might. Gnashing his teeth in fury, he sprang once more upon his son, winding his strong arms about him, and fairly lifting him from the ground in his paroxysm of fury.

"Go! ay, we will see about that. Go, and carry your false stories and falser thoughts out into the world, and pollute others as you yourself have been polluted! we will think of that anon. Here thou art safe in thy father's care, and it will be well to think further ere we let so rabid a heretic stray from these walls. Wretched boy! the devil himself must sure have entered into thee. But fiends have been exorcised before now. It shall not be the fault of Nicholas Trevlyn if this one be not quickly forced to take flight!"

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All this while the infuriated man had been partly dragging, partly carrying his son to a dreary empty room in the rear of the dilapidated old house inhabited by Nicholas and his children. It was a vault-like apartment, and the roof was upheld in the centre by a stout pillar such as one sees in the crypts of churches, and suspended round this pillar were a pair of manacles and a leather belt. Cuthbert had many times been tied up to this pillar before, his hands secured above his head in the manacles, and his body firmly fastened to the pillar by the leather thong. Sometimes he had been left many hours thus secured, till he had been ready to drop with exhaustion. Sometimes he had been cruelly beaten by his stern sire in punishment for some boyish prank or act of disobedience. Even the gentle and timid Petronella had more than once been fastened to the pillar for a time of penance, though the manacles and the whip had been spared to her. The place was even now full of terrors for her—a gruesome spot, always dim and dark, always full of lurking horrors. Her eyes dilated with agony and fear as she beheld her brother fastened up—not before his stout doublet had been removed—and her knees almost gave way beneath her as her father turned sharply upon her and said: "Where is the whip, girl?"

It was seldom that the maiden had the courage to resist her, stern father; but today, love for her brother overcoming every other feeling, she suddenly sank on her knees before him, clasping her hands in piteous supplication, as she cried, with tears streaming down her face: "O father, sweet father, spare him this time! for the love of heaven visit not his misdoings upon him! Let me but talk to him; let me but persuade him! Oh, do not treat him so harshly! Indeed he may better be won by love than driven by blows!"

But Nicholas roughly repulsed the girl, so that she almost fell as he brushed past her.

"Tush, girl! thou knowest not what thou sayest. Disobedience must be flogged out of the heretic spawn. I will have no son of mine sell himself to the devil unchecked. A truce to such tears and vain words! I will none of them. And take heed that thine own turn comes not next. I will spare neither son nor daughter that I find tampering with the pestilent doctrines of heretics!"

So saying, the angry man strode away himself in search of the weapon of chastisement, and whilst Petronella sobbed aloud in her agony of pity, Cuthbert looked round with a strange smile to say: "Do not weep so bitterly, my sister; it will soon be over, and it is the last beating I will ever receive at his hands. This settles it—this decides me. I leave this house this very night, and I return no more until I have won my right to be treated no longer as a slave and a dog."

"Alas, my brother! wilt thou really go?"

"Ay, that will I, and this very night to boot."

"This night! But I fear me he will lock thee in this chamber here."

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“I trust he may; so may I the better effect my purpose. Listen, sister, for he will return right soon, and I must be brief. I have been shut up here before, and dreaming of some such day as this, I have worked my way through one of yon stout bars to the window; and it will fall out now with a touch. Night falls early in these dark November days. When the great clock in the tower of the Chase tolls eight strokes, then steal thou from the house bearing some victuals in a wallet, and my good sword and dagger and belt. Meet me by the ruined chantry where we have sat so oft. I will then tell thee all that is in my heart—for which time lacks me to speak now.

“Hist! there is his returning step. Leave me now, and weep not. I care naught for hard blows; I have received too many in my time. But these shall be the last!”

Petronella, trembling in every limb, shrank silently away in the shadows as her father approached, the sight of his grim, stern face and the cruel-looking weapon in his hands bringing quick thrills of pain and pity to her gentle heart. Petronella was a very tender floweret to have been reared amidst so much hardness and sorrow. It was wonderful that she had lived through the helpless years of infancy (her mother had died ere she had completed her second year) with such a father over her, or that having so lived she had preserved the sweetness and clinging softness of temperament which gave to her such a strange charm—at least in the opinion of one. Doubtless she owed much of her well being to the kindly care of an old deaf and dumb woman, the only servant in that lonely old house, who had entered it to nurse the children’s mother through her last illness, and had stayed on almost as a matter of course, receiving no wage for her untiring service, but only the coarse victuals that all shared alike, and such scanty clothing as was absolutely indispensable.

To this old crone Petronella fled with white face and tearful eyes, as the sound of those terrible blows smote upon her ears with the whistling noise that well betrayed the force with which they were dealt. She quickly made the faithful old creature aware of what was going on, and her sympathy was readily aroused on behalf of the sufferer. The dumb request for food was also understood and complied with. No doubt there had been times before when the girl had crept with bread and meat in her apron to the solitary captive, who was shut up alone without food till he should come to a better mind.

Of Cuthbert’s intended flight she made no attempted revelation. She must act now, and explain later, if she could ever make the old woman understand, that her brother had fled, and had not been done to death by his hard-hearted father.

Supper was over. It had been at the close of that meal that the explosion had taken place. She would not be called upon to meet her father again that day. Fleeing up the broken stone staircase just as his feet were heard returning from the vaulted room, she heard him bang to the door of the living room before she dared to steal into the little

bare chamber where her brother slept, and where all his worldly possessions were stored.

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The old Gate House was a strange habitation. Formerly merely the gateway to the Castle, which had once reared its proud head upon the crest of the hill to the westward, it had but scant accommodation for a family—one living room below, flanked on one side by the kitchen, and on the other by the vaulted chamber, once possibly a guardroom, but so bitterly cold and damp now that it was never used save for such purposes as had been witnessed there that evening. A winding, broken stone stairway led upwards to a few very narrow chambers above of irregular shape, and all lighted by loophole windows deeply splayed. The lowest of these was the place where Nicholas slept, and there was a slight attempt at furniture and comfort; but the upper chambers, where Petronella and Cuthbert retired out of the way of their father's sullen and morose temper, were bare of all but actual necessities, and lacked many things which would be numbered amongst essentials in later days. The stone floors had not even a carpeting of rushes, the pallet beds lay on the hard stone floor, and only the girl possessed a basin and ewer for washing. Cuthbert was supposed to perform his ablutions in the water of the moat without, or at the pump in the yard.

But Petronella had small notion of the hardness of her life. She had known no other, and only of late had she begun to realize that other girls were more gently reared and tended. Since the family had come to live at the Chase—which had only happened within the past year—her ideas had begun to enlarge; but so far this had not taught her discontent with her surroundings.

She knew that her father had fled to the Gate House as a place of retirement in the hour of his danger and need, and that nobody had denied his right to remain there, though the whole property was in the possession of Sir Richard Trevlyn, the nephew of her morose parent. Nicholas, however, as may have been already gathered, bore no goodwill towards his nephew, and would fain have hindered his children from so much as exchanging a word with their kinsfolks. But blood is thicker than water, and the young naturally consort together. Nicholas had married so late in life that his children were much about the same age as those of his nephew—indeed the Trevlyns of the Chase were all older than Petronella. Sir Richard had striven to establish friendly relations with his uncle when he had first brought his family to the Chase, and had only given up the attempt after many rebuffs. He encouraged his children to show kindness to their cousins, as they called each other, and since that day a ray of sunshine had stolen into Petronella's life, though she was almost afraid to cherish it, lest it should only be withdrawn again.

As she hurried to the tryst that evening, this fear was only second to the bitter thought of parting with Cuthbert. Yet she did not wish him to stay. Her father's wrath and suspicion once fully aroused, no peace could be hoped for or looked for. Terribly as she would miss him, anything was better than such scenes as the one of today. Cuthbert was no longer a child; he was beginning to think and reason and act for himself. It was better he should fly before worse had happened; only the girl could not but wonder what

her own life would be like if, after his departing, her stern father should absolutely forbid her seeing or speaking to her cousins again.

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She knew he would gladly do it; knew that he hated and grudged the few meetings and greetings that did pass between them from time to time. Any excuse would gladly be caught at as a pretext for an absolute prohibition of such small overtures, and what would life be like, she wondered with a little sob, if she were to lose Cuthbert, and never to see Philip?

Her brother was at the trysting place first. She could not see his face, but could distinguish the slight figure seated upon the crumbling fragment of the wall. He was very still and quiet, and she paused as she drew near, wondering if he had not heard her light footfall upon the fallen leaves.

“Is that thou, my sister?” asked a familiar voice, though feeble and hollow in its tones. The girl sprang quickly to his side.

“Yes, Cuthbert, it is I; and I have brought all thou biddest me, and as much beside as I could make shift to carry. Alack, Cuthbert are you sorely hurt? I heard that cruel whip!”

“Think no more of that! I will think no more myself once the smart be past. Think of the freedom thy brother will enjoy; would that thou couldst share it, sweet sister! I like not faring thus forth and leaving thee, but for the nonce there be no other way.

“Petronella, I know thou wouldst ask whither I go and what I do. And that I scarce know myself as yet. But sitting here in the dark there has come a new purpose, a new thought to my mind. What if I were to set myself to the discovery of the lost treasure of Trevlyn Chase?”

The girl started in the darkness, and laid her hand on her brother’s arm.

“Ah, Cuthbert, that lost treasure! Would that thou couldst find it! But how canst thou hope to do so when so many besides have failed?”

“That is not the fashion in which men think when they mean to triumph, my sister,” said Cuthbert, and she knew by his voice that he was smiling. “How this thing may be done I know not. Where the long-lost treasure be hid I know not, nor that I may ever be the one to light on it. But this I do know, that it is somewhere; that some hand buried it; that even now some living soul may know the secret of the hiding place. Petronella, hast thou ever thought of it? Hast thou ever wondered if our father may know aught of it?”

“Our father! nay, Cuthbert; but he would be the first to show the place and claim his share of spoil.”

“I know not that. He hates Sir Richard. Methinks he loved not his own brother, the good knight’s father. He was in the house what time the treasure vanished. Might he not have had some hand in the mystery?”

The girl shook her head again doubtfully.

“Nay, how can I say? Yet methinks our father, who sorely laments his poverty and dependence for a home upon Sir Richard’s kindness, would no longer live at the old Gate House had he riches hidden away upon which he might lay his hand. Nay, Cuthbert, methinks thou art not on the right track in thinking of him. But I do not rightly know the story of that lost treasure.”

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“Marry, nor I neither. I have heard our father rave of it. I have heard a word here, a whisper there, but never a full account of the matter. But that there is some great treasure lost or made away with all men who know aught of the Trevlyns know well. And if, as all affirm, this same treasure is but buried in some hiding place, the clue to which none possesses, why should not I find it? Why should not I be the man at last to track and to discover it?”

Why not indeed? Petronella, full of ardent youthful imaginings, fired instantly with the thought. Why should not her brother do this thing? Why not indeed? She looked at him with eyes that shone in the gloom like stars.

“Yes, Cuthbert, be it thine to do what none else has been able. Be it thine to discover this lost treasure. Would that I could help thee in that quest! But I can give thee just this one morsel of counsel. Start not till thou hast been to the Chase and heard all the story from our cousins there. They will tell thee what there is to know, and he is twice armed who has this knowledge.”

“I will follow thy good counsel, my sister, and commend thee to their kindly care. And now, let us say farewell, and be brief; for such moments do but wring the heart and take the manliness from one. Farewell, and farewell, my sweetest sister. Heaven be thy guide and protector; and be sure of one thing, that if I live I will see thee soon again, and that if I have success in my search thou and I will rejoice in it together.”

Chapter 2: The Inmates Of Trevlyn Chase.

Trevlyn Chase was a fine Tudor structure, standing on the site of the more ancient castle that had been destroyed during the tumultuous days of the Wars of the Roses. Instead of the grim pile of gray masonry that had once adorned the crest of the wooded hill, its narrow loopholes and castellated battlements telling of matters offensive and defensive, a fair and home-like mansion of red brick overlooked the peaceful landscape, adorned with innumerable oriel windows, whose latticed casements shone brilliantly in the south sunlight as it fell upon the handsome frontage of the stately house. Great timbers deeply carved adorned the outer walls, and the whole building was rich in those embellishments which grace the buildings of that period. A fine terrace ran the whole length of the south front, and was bounded at either side by a thick hedge of yew. Stone steps led down into a terraced garden upon which much care had been bestowed, and which in summer was bright with all the flowers then known and cultivated in this country. Even in gloomy winter there was more of order and trimness than was often found in such places, and the pleasaunces and shrubberies and gardens of Trevlyn Chase, with the wide fish ponds and terraced paths, formed a pleasant place of resort almost at any season, and were greatly delighted in by the children of the present owner, who had only recently made acquaintance with their ancient family home.

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The setting sun was shining brightly now upon the windows of the house which faced the south, with half a point of west, so that in winter the sunlight shone to the very time of its setting into the lofty and decorated chambers. The glow from blazing fires within likewise shone and twinkled hospitably through the clear glass, and one long window of one of the rooms stood open to the still evening air, and a little group was gathered together just outside.

A tall young man of some five-and-twenty summers, with the regular Trevlyn features and a pair of honest gray eyes, was standing out on the terrace with his face towards the red sky, a couple of sporting dogs frisking joyously about him, as if hoping he was bent upon a stroll in the woods. By his side stood a tall slim maiden, bright faced and laughing eyed, straight as a dart, alert and graceful in her movements, with an expression of courage and resolution on her fair face that stamped it at once with a strong individuality of its own. She was dressed simply, though in soft and rich textures, as became her station, and she held her hood in her hands, leaving her ruffled curly hair to be the sport of the light night breeze. She had very delicate features and an oval face, and from the likeness that existed between them the pair were plainly brother and sister.

Just within the open window were two more girls, dressed in the same fashion as the first, and plainly her sisters, though they were more blonde in type, and whilst very pretty, lacked the piquant originality that was the great characteristic of the dark girl's beauty. They were not quite so tall, and the elder of the blonde pair was not nearly so slim, but had something of womanly deliberation and dignity about her. She was plainly the eldest of the three sisters, as the little maid beside her was the youngest. All three were engrossed in some sort of talk that appeared full of interest for them.

"I wish he would not do it," said Philip, turning his eyes in an easterly direction, towards a hollow in the falling ground, where the ruins of the ancient wall could still be dimly traced. The old Gate House itself could not be seen from this side of the house, but it was plain that the thoughts of all had turned in that direction. "It is brave of him to obey his conscience rather than his father; but yon man is such a veritable tiger, that I fear me there will be dark work there betwixt them if the lad provoke him too far. Nicholas Trevlyn is not one to be defied with impunity. I would that Cuthbert had as much prudence as he has courage."

"So do not I," answered Kate quickly, turning her flashing eyes full upon her brother. "I hate prudence—the prudence of cowardice! I am right glad that Cuthbert thinks first of his conscience and second of his father's wrath. What man who ever lived to do good in the world was deterred from the right by craven fears? I honour him for his single mindedness. He is a bold youth, and I would fain help him an I could see the way."

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“We would all gladly do that,” answered Philip; “the hard thing being to find the way.”

“We shall find it anon, I doubt not,” answered Kate. “Things cannot go on ever as they are now.”

“No; methinks one day we may chance to hear that the old Papist has done his son to death in a fit of blind fury. Then perhaps, my sister, thou wilt join with me in wishing that the lad had shown more regard for his stern sire’s word.”

“Nay, Philip, sure thou fearest too much,” spoke Cecilia from her station beside the window. “Nicholas Trevlyn may be a dark and sour man, but he scarce would lift a hand against his own flesh and blood! I cannot believe it of any father.”

“Fathers of his type have done as bad ere now,” answered Philip, with gravity, “and there is no bigot like the Papist bigot, who is soured and embittered by persecution himself. Cuthbert has told me things ere this which show what an iron soul his father’s is. He believes that he would wring the neck of little Petronella sooner than see her turn out of the path of unreasoning Papistry in which he has brought her up,” and Philip’s face darkened suddenly as he turned it towards his sisters.

“But sure the King would protect them if he knew,” said Bessie, the youngest of the sisters. “Why, the law bids all loyal subjects go to church, and punishes those who stay away. The King would be sorely angry, would he not, were he to hear that any man dared use force to hinder his children from going.”

Kate’s delicate lips curved into a smile of derision, and Philip shrugged his broad shoulders.

“The King, my dear Bessie, is naught but a miserable pedant, who loves nothing so well as hearing himself talk, and prating by the hour together on matters of law and religion, and on the divine right of kings. He is not the King such as England has been wont to know—a King to whom his subjects might gain access to plead his protection and ask his aid. I trow none but a fool would strive to win a smile from the Scottish James. He is scarce a man, by all we hear, let alone a King. I sometimes think scorn of us as a nation that we so gladly and peaceably put our necks beneath the sceptre of such an atomy. Sure had the Lady Arabella but been a man, we should scarce have welcomed so gladly this son of Mary Stuart as our monarch.”

“Have a care, my children, and talk not rank treason in such open fashion,” said a deep voice behind them, and the daughters started to see the tall form of their father in the room behind them. “We Trevlyns are none too safe from suspicion that we need endanger ourselves wilfully. Whatever else James Stuart may be, he has shown that he means to be a monarch as absolute as any who have gone before him. Wherefore it behoves us to be cautious even in the sanctuary of this peaceful home.

“What is the matter, Kate, that thou art thus scornful towards his majesty? In what has he offended thee, my saucy princess?”

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As Kate stepped within the room, followed by her brother, it was plain from the lighting of her father's eyes that she was the favourite daughter with him. He laid his hand lightly on her shoulder, and she stood up close beside him, her bright face upraised, a saucy gleam in her eyes, and both her attitude and bearing bespoke an affectionate confidence between father and child less common in those ceremonious days than it has since become.

"Father, we were talking of Cuthbert. Did you see him at church today? He was there both in the morning and the afternoon."

"I thought I saw him. I was not sure. I am glad his father has had the sense to relent thus far with him."

"But he has not relented," answered Kate quickly. "Cuthbert comes in defiance of his commands; and Philip says he misdoubts if his father may not do him some grievous bodily harm in his rage and fury. Bessie did ask if the King would not interfere to save him;" and then Kate broke off with her rippling, saucy laugh. "I was just answering that question when you came. But sure, father, something might be done for him. It is a cruel thing for a boy to be treated as he is treated, and all for striving to obey the law of the land."

Sir Richard Trevlyn stood in silent thought awhile. He was a fine-looking man, with a thoughtful, benevolent countenance, and eyes that Kate had inherited. He had known something of peril and trouble himself in his day, and could feel for the troubles of others. But he also knew the difficulties of dealing with such a man as his kinsman Nicholas; and without bringing him to the notice of the authorities as a concealed Papist—an idea repugnant to him where one of his own name and blood was concerned—it was difficult to see what could be done for the protection of the hapless Cuthbert and his sister.

Sir Richard Trevlyn did not wish to draw public attention upon himself. It was his desire to live as quietly and privately as possible. The Trevlyns had been for many generations a family stanch to the doctrines and traditions of the Church of Rome, and they had won for themselves that kind of reputation which clings tenaciously to certain families even when it has ceased to be a fact. The present Sir Richard's father had broken through the traditions of his race in marrying a lady of the Reformed faith. It was a love match, and all other considerations went to the winds. The lady was no theologian, and though believing all she had been taught, had no horror of Popery or of her husband's creed. They had lived happily together in spite of their respective opinions; but either through the influence of his wife, or through other causes less well understood, Sir Richard the elder in his later life became gradually weaned from the old faith, and embraced that of his wife. Some said this was done from motives of policy, since Elizabeth was on the throne, and the edicts against Papists, though only rigidly enforced by fits and starts, were always in existence, and had been the ruin of many

ancient families. However that may have been, the only son of this union had been trained up a Protestant, and had brought up his own children as members of the Established Church of the land.

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But still the old tradition remained that all Trevlyns must of necessity be rank Papists, and Nicholas had certainly done all he could to encourage this idea, and had ruined himself by his contumacious resistance to the laws. Both his brother and his nephew had suffered through their close relationship to such an unruly subject, and there had been dark days enough for the family during the Armada scare, when every Papist became a mark for popular hatred, and professions of loyalty and good faith were regarded with distrust.

Now, however, the family seemed to have lived through its darkest days. Peace had been made with men in high places. Sir Richard had done good service to the State on more than one occasion; and latterly he had felt sufficiently safe to retire from the neighbourhood of the Court, where he had been holding some small office, and settle down with his wife and family in his ancestral home. His marriage with Lady Frances de Grey, the daughter of the Earl of Andover, had given him excellent connections; for the Andovers were stanch supporters of the Reformed faith, and had been for several generations, so that they were high in favour, and able to further the fortunes of their less lucky kinsman. It had taken many years to work matters to a safe and happy conclusion, but at the present moment there seemed to be no clouds in the sky.

The new King had been as gracious as it was in his nature to be to Sir Richard, and did not appear to regard him with any suspicion. The knight breathed freely again after a long period of anxiety, for the tenacious memory and uncertain temper of the late Queen had kept him in a constant ferment.

It had been a kindly and courageous thing for Sir Richard to permit his contumacious and inimical kinsman to retain the possession of the old Gate House. Nicholas had no manner of right to it, though he was fond of putting forward a pretended claim; and the close proximity of a rank and bitter Papist of his own name and race was anything but a pleasant thing. But the sense of family feeling, so strongly implanted in the English race, had proved stronger than prudential scruple, and Nicholas had not been ejected, his nephew even striving at the first to establish some kind of friendly relations with the old man, hoping perhaps to draw him out of his morose ways, and lead him to conformity and obedience to the existing law.

Nicholas had refused all overtures; but his lonely son and daughter had been only too thankful for notice, and the whole family at the Chase became keenly interested in them. It was plain from the first that their father's bitterness and rigid rule had done anything but endear his own views to his children. Petronella accepted the creeds and dogmas instilled into her mind with a childlike faith, and dreamed her own devotional dreams over her breviary and her book of saints—the only two volumes she possessed. She was content, in the same fashion that a little child is content, with just so much as was given her. But Cuthbert's mind was of a different stamp, and he had long been panting to break the bonds that held both body and soul in thrall, and find out

for himself the meaning of those questions and controversies that were convulsing the nation and the world.

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Intercourse with his kinsfolk had given him his first real insight into the burning questions of the hour, and his attendance from time to time at the parish church had caused him fresh access of wonder at what his father could object to in the doctrines there set forth. They might not embody everything a popish priest would bid him believe, but at least they appeared to the boy to contain all the integral truths of Christianity. He began dimly to understand that the Papists were not half so much concerned in the matter of cardinal doctrines of the faith as in asserting and upholding the temporal as well as the spiritual power of the Pope; and that this should be made the matter of the chiefest moment filled the boy's soul with a loathing and disgust which were strong enough to make him half a Protestant at once.

Sir Richard had seen almost as much, and was greatly interested in the lad; but it was difficult to know how to help him in days when parental authority was so absolute and so rigidly exercised.

"We must do what we can," said Sir Richard, waking from his reverie and shaking his head. "But we must have patience too; and it will not be well for the boy to irritate his father too greatly. Tomorrow I will go to the Gate House and see my uncle, and speak for the boy. He ought to have the liberty of the law, and the law bids all men attend the services of the Established Church. But it is ill work reasoning with a Papist of his type; and short of reporting the case to the authorities, meaning more persecution for my unlucky kinsman, I know not what may be done."

"We must strive so to win upon him by gentle means that he permits his children free intercourse with ours," said gentle Lady Frances from her seat by the glowing hearth. "It seems to me that that is all we may hope to achieve in the present. Perchance as days and weeks pass by we may find a way to that hard and flinty heart."

"And whilst we wait it may well be that Cuthbert will be goaded to desperation, or be done to death by his remorseless sire," answered impetuous Kate, who loved not counsels of prudence. "Methinks that waiting is an ill game. I would never wait were I a man. I would always aet—ay, even in the teeth of deadly peril. Sure the greatest deeds have been achieved by men of action, not by men of counsel and prudence."

Sir Richard smiled, as he stroked her hair, and told her she should have lived a hundred or so years back, when it was the fashion to do and dare regardless of consequences. And gradually the talk drifted away from the inmates of the old Gate House, though Philip was quite resolved to pay an early visit there on the morrow, and learn how it had fared with his cousin.

Supper followed in due course, and was a somewhat lengthy meal. Then the ladies retired to the stately apartment they had been in before, and the mother read a homily to her daughters, which was listened to with dutiful attention. But Kate's bright eyes were often bent upon the casement of one window, the curtain of which she had drawn

back with her own hand before sitting down; and as the moon rose brighter and brighter in the sky and bathed the world without in its clear white beams, she seemed to grow a little restless, and tapped the floor with the point of her dainty shoe.

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Kate Trevlyn was a veritable sprite for her love of the open air, by night as well as day, in winter cold as well as summer heat. "The night bird" was one of her father's playful names for her, and if ever she was able to slip away on a fine night, nothing delighted her more than to wander about in the park and the woods, listening to the cries of the owls and night jars, watching the erratic flight of the bats, and admiring the grand beauty of the sleeping world as it lay beneath the rays of the peaceful moon.

As the reading ceased, a step on the terrace without told Kate that Philip was out for an evening stroll. Gliding from the room with her swift undulating motion, and quickly donning cloak and clogs, she slipped after him and joined him before he had got many yards from the house.

"Take me with thee, Philip," she said. "It is a lovely night for a stroll. I should love to visit the chantry; it looks most witching at this hour of the night."

They took the path that led thither. The great clock in the tower had boomed the hour of eight some time since. The moon had shaken itself free from the veil of cloud, and was sailing majestically in the sky. As they descended the path, Kate suddenly laid her hand on her brother's arm, and whispered:

"Hist! Methinks I hear the sound of steps. Surely there is some one approaching us from below!"

Philip paused and listened. Yes, Kate's quick ears had not deceived her. There was the sound of a footstep advancing towards them along the lonely tangled path. Philip instinctively felt for the pistol he always carried in his belt, for there were often doubtful and sometimes desperate men in hiding in woods and lonely places; but before he had time to do more than feel if the weapon were safe, Kate had darted suddenly from his side, and was speeding down the path.

"Marry but it is Cuthbert!" she called back to him as he bid her stop, and Philip himself started forward to meet and greet the newcomer.

"We have been talking of you and wondering how it fared with you," he said, as they reached the side of the youth "I am right glad to see you here tonight."

Cuthbert did not answer for a moment. He seemed to pant for breath. A ray of moonlight striking down upon his face showed it to be deadly white. His attitude bespoke the extreme of fatigue and weakness.

"Why, there is something amiss with you!" cried Philip, taking his cousin by the arm. "Some evil hap has befallen you."

"His father has half killed him, I trow!" cried Kate, with sudden energy. "He could not else have received injury in these few hours. Speak, Cuthbert; tell us! is it not so?"

“I have been something rough handled,” answered the lad in a low voice; “but I did not feel it greatly till I began to climb the hill.

“I thank you, good Philip. I will be glad of your arm. But I am better already.”

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“You look like a veritable ghost,” said Kate, still brimming over with pity and indignation. “What did that miserable man do to you?”

“Why, naught that he has not done a score of times before—tied me to the pillar and flogged me like a dog. Only he laid his blows on something more fiercely than is his wont, and doubled the number of them. Perchance he had some sort of inkling that it was his last chance, and used it accordingly.”

The bare trees did not screen the beams of the moon, and both Philip and Kate could see the expression on Cuthbert’s face. What they read there caused Kate to ask suddenly and eagerly:

“What meanest thou by that, Cuthbert? What plan hast thou in thine head?”

“Why, a mighty simple one—so simple that I marvel I have not carried it out before. I could not live worse were I to beg my bread from door to door, and I should at least have my liberty; and if whipped for a vagabond, should scarce be so badly used as my father uses me. Moreover, I have a pair of strong arms and some book learning; and I trow I need never sink to beggary. I mind not what I do. I will dig the fields sooner than be worse treated than a dog. My mind is made up. I have left my father’s house never to return. I am going forth into the world to see what may befall me there, certain that nothing can be worse than what I have left behind.”

“Thou hast run away from thy cruel father? Marry, that is good hearing!” cried Kate, with sparkling eyes. “I marvel we had none of us thought of that plan ourselves; it is excellent.”

“It seemed the one thing left—the only thing possible. I could not endure such thralldom longer,” answered Cuthbert, speaking wearily, for he was in truth well nigh worn out with the tumult of his own feelings and the savage treatment he had received. “But I know not if I shall accomplish it even now. My father may discover my flight, pursue and bring me back. This very day I asked to leave his house, and he refused to let me go. If he overtakes me I shall be shut up in strait confinement; I shall be punished sorely for this night’s work. I must make shift to put as many miles as may be betwixt myself and the Gate House tonight.”

“Nay, thou shalt do no such thing!” answered Kate, quickly and warmly. “I have a better plan than that. Thou shalt come home with us. My good father will gladly give thee shelter and protection. Thou shalt remain in hiding with us till the hue and cry (if there be any) shall be over past, and till thy wounds be healed and thou hast regained thy strength and spirit; and then thou shalt start forth reasonably equipped to seek thy fortune in the world; and if thou wilt go to merry London, as I would were I a man with mine own fortune to carve out, methinks I can give thee a letter to one there that will

secure thee all that thou needest in the present, and may lead to advancement and good luck."

Kate's thoughts always worked like magic. No sooner was an idea formed in her busy brain than she saw the whole story unwinding itself in glowing colours; and to hear her bright chatter as the three pursued their way to the house, one would have thought her cousin's fortune already made. A soft red glow had stolen into her cheeks as she had spoken of the missive she could furnish, and Philip gave her a quick glance, a smile crossing his face.

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Cuthbert was too faint and bewildered to take in all the sense of Kate's words, but he understood that for the moment he was to be cared for and concealed, and that was enough. Philip echoed his sister's invitation to his father's house as his first stage on his journey, and all that the lad remembered of the next few hours was the dancing of lights before his dazzled eyes, the sound of friendly voices in his ears, and the gentle ministrations of kindly hands, as he was helped to bed and cosseted up, and speedily made so comfortable that he fell off almost immediately into a calm refreshing sleep that was like to be the best medicine he could have.

When Sir Richard rejoined his family, it was with a stern expression on his face.

"The boy has been grossly maltreated," he said. "It is no mere paternal chastisement he has received this day, but such a flogging as none but the lowest vagabond would receive at the hands of the law. The very bone is in one place laid bare, and there be many traces of savage handling before this. Were he not mine own uncle, bearing mine own name, I would not let so gross an outrage pass. But at least we can do this much —shelter the lad and send him forth, when he is fit for the saddle, in such sort that he may reach London in easy fashion, as becomes one of his race. The lad has brains and many excellent qualities. There is no reason why he should not make his way in life."

"If he can be cured of his Papist beliefs," said Lady Frances; "but no man holding them gets on in these days, and Cuthbert has been bred up in the very worst of such tenets."

"So bad that he is half disgusted with them before he can rightly say why," answered Sir Richard with a smile. "There is too much hatred and bitterness in Nicholas Trevlyn's religion to endear it to his children. The boy has had the wit to see that the Established Church of the land uses the same creeds and holds the same cardinal doctrines as he has been bred up in. For the Pope he cares no whit; his British blood causes him to think scorn of any foreign potentate, temporal or spiritual. He has the making of a good churchman in him. He only wants training and teaching. Methinks it were no bad thing to send him to his mother's kindred for that. They are as stanch to the one party as old Nicholas to the other. The lad will learn all he needs there of argument and controversy, and will be able to weigh the new notions against the old.

"Verily, the more I think of it the better I like the plan. He is scarce fit for a battle with the world on his own account. Food and shelter and a home of some sort will be welcome to him whilst he tries the strength of his wings and fits them for a wider flight."

"His mother's kindred," repeated Kate quickly, and with a shade of hauteur in her manner. "Why, father, I have ever thought that on their mother's side our cousins had little cause to be proud of their parentage. Was not their mother—"

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“The daughter of a wool stapler, one Martin Holt, foster brother to my venerated father, the third Earl of Andover,” said Lady Frances, quietly. “Truly, my daughter, these good folks are not in birth our equal, and would be the first to say so; nevertheless they are worthy and honest people, and I can remember that Bridget, my mother’s maid, who astonished us and deeply offended her relations by a sudden and ill-judged marriage with Nicholas Trevlyn, was a wonderfully well-looking woman. How and why such a marriage was made none may rightly know now. I can remember that the dark-browed Nicholas, who was but little loved at our house, took some heed to this girl, greatly younger than himself, though herself of ripening age when she let herself be persuaded into that loveless wedlock. It was whispered that he had made a convert of her; the Jesuits and seminary priests were hard at work, striving to win back their lost power by increasing the number of their flock and recruiting from all classes of the people. Nicholas was then a blind tool in the hands of these men, and I always suspected that this was one of his chief motives for so ill judged a step. At any rate, Bridget pronounced herself a Romanist, and was married by a priest of that Church according to its laws. Her family cast her off, and Nicholas would let us have no dealings with her. Poor Bridget! I trow she lived to rue the day; and the change of her faith was but a passing thing, for I know she returned to her old beliefs when time had allowed her to see things more clearly.

“But to return to the beginning. If Bridget’s brother, Martin Holt, yet lives and carries on his father’s business, as is most like, on London Bridge, his house would be no bad shelter for this poor lad, who will scarce have means or breeding as yet to take his place with those of higher quality.”

“That is very true,” said Sir Richard. “The lad is a right honest lad, and his gentle blood shows in a thousand little ways; but his upbringing has not fitted him for mingling with the high ones of the world, and it would be well for him to rub off something of his rustic shyness and awkwardness ere he tries to cut a fine figure. I doubt not that Martin Holt would receive his sister’s son.”

“A wool stapler!” muttered Kate, with a slight pout of her pretty lips. “I was going to have sent him to Culverhouse with a letter, to see what he would do for my cousin.”

“Lord Culverhouse could not do much,” answered her father, with a smile. “He is but a stripling himself, and has his own way yet to make. And remember too, dear Lady Disdain, that in these times of change and upheaval it boots not to speak thus scornfully of honest city folks, be they wool staplers or what you will, who gain their wealth by trading on the high seas and with foreign lands. Bethink you that even the King himself, despite his fine phrases on divine right, has to sue something humbly to his good citizens of London and

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his lowlier subjects for those very supplies that insure his kingly pomp. So, saucy girl, put not into young Cuthbert's head notions that ill befit one who has naught to call his own save the clothes upon his back. If he goes to these kinsfolk, as I believe it will be well for him to do, it will behove him to go right humbly and reverently. Remember this in talking with him. It were an ill thing to do to teach him to despise the home where his mother first saw light, and the kinsfolks who are called by her name."

Kate's sound sense and good feeling showed her the truth of her father's words, and she dutifully promised not to transgress; but she did not altogether relish the thought of the prospect in store for her cousin, and as she went upstairs with Bessie to the comfortable bed chamber they shared together, she whispered, with a mischievous light dancing in her eyes:

"Ah, it is one thing for the grave and reverend elders to plan, but it is another for the young to obey. Methinks Cuthbert will need no hint from me to despise the home of the honest wool stapler. He has been bred in woods and forests. He has the blood of the Trevlyns in his veins. I trow the shop on London Bridge will have small charms for him. Were it me, I would sooner—tenfold sooner—join myself to one of those bands of freebooters who ravage the roads, and fatten upon sleek and well-fed travellers, than content myself with the pottering life of a trader! Ah, we shall see, we shall see! I will keep my word to my father. But for all that I scarce think that when Cuthbert starts forth again it will be for London Bridge that he will be bound!"

Chapter 3: The Lost Treasure.

"And so it is to London thou wilt go—to the worthy wool stapler on the Bridge?" and Kate, mindful of her promise to her parents, strove to suppress the little grimace with which she was disposed to accompany her words—"at least so my father saith."

"Yes: he has been giving me good counsel, and methinks that were a good beginning. I would gladly see London. Men talk of its wonders, and I can but sit and gape. I am aweary of the life of the forest—the dreary life of the Gate House. In London I shall see men—books—all the things my heart yearns after. And my mother's kindred will scarce deny me a home with them till I can find somewhat to do; albeit I barely know so much as their name, and my father has held no manner of communication with them these many years."

"Perchance they will not receive thee," suggested Kate, with a laughing look in her eyes. "Then, good Cuthbert, thou wilt be forced to trust to thine own mother wit for a livelihood. Then perchance thou wilt not despise my poor little letter to my good cousin Lord Culverhouse."

“Despise aught of yours, sweet Kate! Who has dared to say such a thing?” asked Cuthbert hotly. “Any missive delivered to my keeping by your hands shall be doubly precious. I will deliver it without fail, be it to mine own advancement or no.”

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“Belike I shall claim your good offices yet, Master Letter Carrier,” answered Kate, with a laugh and a blush; “and I trow my cousin will like you none the less for being bearer of my epistle. But I am not to commend you to his good graces, as once I meant. It is to your relatives you are first to look for help. It is like rubbing the bloom off a ripe peach—all the romance is gone in a moment! I had hoped that a career of adventure and glory lay before you, and behold the goal is a home beneath a wool stapler’s roof!”

But there Kate caught herself up and blushed, bethinking what her parents would say could they hear her words.

But Cuthbert did not read the underlying scorn in merry Kate’s tones. He was a very simple-minded youth, and his life and training had not been such as to teach him much about the various grades in the world, or how greatly these grades differed one from the other. He was looking at his cousin’s bright face with thoughtful, questioning eyes, so much so that the girl asked him of what he was thinking.

“Marry of thee, Mistress Kate,” he answered; for though encouraged to speak on terms of equality with his kinsfolk, he found some difficulty in remembering to do so, and they certainly appeared to him in the light of beings from another and a higher sphere than his own. “I was longing to ask of thee a question.”

“Ask on, good Master Cuthbert,” was the ready reply; “I will answer to the best of my humble ability.”

“I have heard of this Lord Culverhouse from many beneath this roof since I have been here. I would fain know who he is.”

“That is easy told. He is the eldest son of mine uncle, my mother’s brother, the fourth Earl of Andover. His eldest son bears the title of Viscount Culverhouse, and he is, of course, our cousin. When we were in London we saw much of these relatives of ours, and were grieved to part from them when we left. Now, is it understood?”

“Yes, verily. And tell me this one thing more, fair cousin, if it be not a malapert question. Is it not true that thou art to wed with this Lord Culverhouse one day?”

Kate’s face was dyed by a most becoming blush. Her eyes sparkled in a charming fashion. Her expression, half arch, half grave, was bewitching to see, but she laid her fingers on her lips as she whispered:

“Hush, hush! who told thee that, good Cuthbert? Methinks thou hast over-sharp eyes and ears.”

“I prithee pardon me if I have seen and heard too much,” answered Cuthbert; “but I had a fancy—”

He stopped, stammering, blushing, and Kate took pity on his confusion.

“I am not vexed,” she said, smiling; “and in very sooth thou hast divined what is in part the truth. But we do not dare talk of it yet. There be so many weighty matters against us.”

Cuthbert looked keenly interested. He was very fond of this sprightly cousin of his, who was so amusing, so kindly, and so sisterly in her ways. She had more ease of manner, as well as brightness of temperament, than her sisters, and her company had been a source of great pleasure to him. The girl saw the look of sympathetic curiosity upon his face, and she drew her chair a little nearer to that which he occupied, stirring up the logs upon the glowing hearth into a brighter blaze.

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“I’ faith, Cuthbert, I will gladly tell thee all there is to know, it is not much; and I like thee well, and trust thee to boot. Nor is it such a mighty secret that Culverhouse would fain make me his bride, and that I would give myself to him tomorrow an I might. I am not ashamed of loving him,” cried the girl, her dark eyes flashing as she threw hack her dainty head with a gesture of pride and womanly dignity, “for he is a right noble gentleman, and worthy of any maiden’s love; but whether we shall ever be united in wedlock—ah, that is a vastly different matter!” and she heaved a quick little sigh.

“But wherefore not?” asked Cuthbert quickly. “Where could he find a more beauteous or worthy wife?”

Kate gave him a little bow of acknowledgment for his compliment, but her face was slightly more grave as she made answer:

“It is not, alack! a question of dislike to me. Were that all, I might hope to win the favour of stern hearts, and bring the matter to a happy conclusion. But no; mine uncle of Andover likes me well. He openly says as much, and he has been a kind friend to us. And yet I may not wed his son; and his kindness makes it the harder for Culverhouse to do aught to vex or defy him.”

“But why may you not?” asked Cuthbert quickly.

“There be more reasons than one, but I will tell you all in brief. My own father mislikes the thought of the match, for that we are cousins of the first degree; and though we Trevlyns of the older branch no longer call ourselves the servants and followers of Rome, yet old traditions linger long in the blood, and my father has always set his face against a marriage betwixt cousins nearest akin.”

Cuthbert looked thoughtful. That certainly was a difficulty hard to be got over. He made no comment, but merely asked:

“And my Lord of Andover—is that the objection with him?”

“Not near so much. He would easily overlook that. There are no such strict rules with Protestants, and his family have been for many generations of the Reformed faith. But there is just as weighty an argument on his side—namely, that my father can give me but a scanty dower, and it is a very needful thing for Culverhouse to wed with one who will fill his coffers with broad gold pieces. The Trevlyns, as thou doubtless knowest, have been sorely impoverished ever since the loss of the treasure. My father can give no rich dower with his daughters; wherefore they be no match for the nobles of the land. Oh, why was that treasure lost? Why could no man be wise enough to trace and find it, when sure there must have been many in the secret? Now that a generation has gone by, what hope is there left? But for that loss my Lord of Andover would have welcomed me gladly. The lost treasure of Trevlyn has much to answer for.”

Kate spoke half laughingly, half impatiently, and tapped the rush-strewn floor with the point of her shoe. Into Cuthbert's eyes a sudden light had sprung, and leaning forward in the firelight, he laid his hand upon his cousin's.

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“Kate,” he said, in a low voice, “I have said naught of it before—I feared it would sound but an idle boast, an idle dream; but I am pledged to the search after the lost treasure. If it yet lies hid, as men say it does, Cuthbert Trevlyn will find it.”

Kate gazed at him with wide-open eyes; but there was no trace of mockery in them, rather an eager delight and excitement that was in itself encouragement and stimulus.

“Cuthbert, what meanest thou?”

“Verily no more and no less than I say. Listen, Kate. I too am a like sufferer with others of the race of Trevlyn. I have nor wealth, nor hope, nor future, save what I may carve out for myself; and my heritage, as well as yours, lies buried somewhere in these great woods, no man may say where. It came upon me as I sat in pain and darkness, the last hour I passed beneath my father’s roof, that this might be the work given to me to do—-to restore to the house of Trevlyn the treasure whose loss has been so sore a blow. I said as much to my sister when we bid each other adieu in the moonlit chantry; and she bid me, ere I started on the quest, come hither to you and ask the story of that loss. We know but little ourselves; our father tells us naught, and it is but a word here and a word there we have gathered. But you know—”

“We know well. We have been told the story by our mother from the days of our childhood. I trow we know all there is to know. Why hast thou not asked before, Cuthbert?”

The lad blushed a little at the question.

“Methought it would sound but folly in your ears,” he said. “It was easier to speak to Petronella in the dark chantry. Kate, wilt thou tell me all thou knowest of this lost treasure? How and wherefore was it lost, and why has no man since been able to find it?”

“Ay, wherefore? that is what we all ask,” answered Kate, with eyes that flashed and glowed. “When we were children and stayed once a few months here, we spent days together scouring the woods and digging after it. We were sure we should succeed where others had failed; but the forest yet keeps its secret, and the treasure has never seen the light. Again and yet again have I said to Philip that were I a man I would never rest till it was found. But he shakes his wise head and says that our grandfather and father and many another have wasted time and expended large sums of money on the work of discovery, and without success. All of our name begin to give credence to the story that the concealed treasure was found and spirited away by the gipsy folks, who hated our house, and that it has long since been carried beyond the seas and melted into coin there. Father and Philip alike believe that the Trevlyns will see it again no more.”

“Dost thou believe that, too?”

“Nay, not I. I believe it will yet come back to us, albeit not without due search and travail and labour. O Cuthbert, thy words rejoice me. Would I were a man, to fare forth with thee on the quest! What wilt thou do? How wilt thou begin? And how canst thou search for the lost treasure an thou goest to thine uncle’s house in London?”

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“I must fain do that for a while,” answered Cuthbert; “I dare not linger so close to my father’s home at this time. Moreover, the winter is fast coming upon us, when the ground will be deep in snow, and no man not bred to it could make shift to live in the forest. To London must I go first. I trow the time will not be wasted; for I will earn money in honest fashion, that I may have the wherewithal to live when I go to seek this lost treasure.

“And now, my cousin, tell me all the tale. I know not rightly how the treasure was lost, and I have never heard of the gipsy folks or their hatred to our house. It behoves me to know all ere I embark on the quest.”

“Yea, verily; and I will tell thee all I know. Thou knowest well that of old the Trevlyns were stanch sons to the Church of Rome, and that in the days of Bloody Mary, as men call her now (and well she merits the name), the Trevlyns helped might and main in hunting down wretched Protestants and sending them to prison and the stake?”

“I have heard my father speak of these things,” answered Cuthbert, with a light shudder, calling to mind his father’s fierce and terrible descriptions of the scenes he had witnessed and taken part in during those short but fearful years of Mary’s reign, “but I knew not it had aught to do with the loss of the treasure.”

“It had this much to do,” answered Kate, “that my grandfather and your father, who of course were brothers, were so vehemently hated by the Protestant families, many of whose members had been betrayed to death by their means—your father in particular was relentless in his efforts to hunt down and spy out miserable victims—that when the Queen was known to be dead, and her successor and Protestant sister had been proclaimed in London, the Trevlyns felt that they had cause to tremble for their own safety. They had stirred up relentless enmity by their own relentless conduct, and the sudden turn in fortune’s wheel had given these enemies the upper hand.”

“Ah!” breathed Cuthbert, “I begin to see.”

“The Trevlyns had not served the Bloody Queen and her minions without reward,” continued Kate, with flashing eyes; “they had heaped together no small treasure whilst this traffic in treachery had been going on, and in many cases the valuables of the victims they had betrayed to death had passed into the keeping of the betrayer.

“Oh, it is a detestable thing to think of!” cried the girl, stamping her foot. “No wonder the judgment of God fell upon that unhallowed treasure, and that it was taken from its possessors! No wonder it was doomed to lie hidden away till those who had gotten it had passed to their last account, and could never enjoy the ill-gotten gain. And they were punished too—ay, they were well punished. They were fined terrible sums; they had to give back sums equal to the spoil they had filched from others. Thy father, as thou knowest, was ruined; and we still feel that pinch of poverty that will be slow to

depart altogether from our house. Yet it serves us right—it serves us right! It is meet that the children should suffer for the sins of their parents. I have not complained, and I will not complain;" and Kate threw back her head, whilst her eyes flashed with the stress of her feeling.

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“But the treasure?” questioned Cuthbert, eager to know more; “I have not yet heard how it was lost.”

Thus recalled to her subject, Kate took up her narrative again.

“You doubtless know that Queen Mary died in November of the year of grace fifteen hundred and fifty-eight. In that year, some months earlier, my father was born, and at the time of the proclamation of the new Queen he was a tender infant. My grandfather was in London about the Court, and his wife and child were here in this house—the sumptuous mansion he and his father had built—not dreaming of harm or ill. They had not heard of the death of one Queen or the proclamation of the other till one dark winter’s night when, just as the household were about to retire to bed, my grandfather and your father, Cuthbert, arrived at the house, their faces pale with anxiety and apprehension, their clothes stained with travel; the state of both riders and horses showing the speed with which they had travelled, and betraying plainly that something urgent had happened. The news was quickly told. Queen Mary was dead. Bonfires in London streets were blazing in honour of Elizabeth. The Protestants were everywhere in a transport of joy and triumph. The Papists were trembling for their lives and for their fortunes. No one knew the policy of the new Queen. All felt that it was like enough she would inflict bloody chastisement on those who had been the enemies of herself and of her Protestant subjects. Even as the Trevlyn brothers had passed through the streets of the city on their way out, they had been hissed and hooted and even pelted by the crowd, some amongst which knew well the part they had played in the recent persecutions. They had been not a little alarmed by threats and menaces hurled at them even in the precincts of St. James’s, and it had become very plain to them that they would speedily become the objects of private if not of public vengeance. That being so, my grandfather was eager and anxious to return to the Chase, to place his wife and child in some place of safety; whilst your father’s fear was all for the treasure in gold and plate and valuables stored up in the house, which might well fall an easy prey to the rapacious hands of spoilers, should such (as was but too likely) swoop down upon the house to strive to recover the jewels and gold taken from them when they were helpless to oppose or resent such spoliation.”

“Then it was all laid by at the Chase—all the money and precious things taken from others?”

“Yes, and a vast quantity of silver and gold plate which had come into the possession of former Trevlyns ever since the rise of the family in the early days of the Tudors. The seventh Henry and the eighth alike enriched our forefathers, and I know not what wealth was stored up in the treasure room of this house now so drearily void. But I mind well the story our grandam told us when we were little children, standing at her knee in the ruddy firelight,

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of that night when all this treasure was packed up in great chests and boxes, and carried at dead of night by trusty servants into the heart of the forest, and buried beneath a certain giant oak many times pointed out to us, and well-nigh killed in after years by the diggings around it in search of the missing hoard. To secure this treasure, and bury it out of the reach of rapacious and covetous hands, was the aim and object of that hurried journey taken on the evening of the Queen's decease. None were in the secret save three old servants, whose faithful loyalty to the family had been tested in a thousand different ways. Those three, together with my grandfather and your father, packed and transported with their own hands this great treasure into the wood, and there entombed it. None else knew of that night's work. No other eye saw what was done. They worked the whole night through, and by the tardy dawn all was done, and even the soil of the forest so cleverly arranged that none could guess at the existence of that deep grave. And who would guess the secret of that tangled forest? Even were it thought that the gold and silver had been hid, who would have such skill as to guess the spot, and go and filch it thence? And yet it must have been carried away full soon. For Nicholas Trevlyn, in his anxious greed, visited the spot not many weeks later—visited it by stealth, for he and his brother were alike in hiding, waiting for the first burst of vengeful fury to be over—and he found it gone! He thought on the first survey that all was well; but on more closely examining the ground his heart misgave him, for it appeared to him as if the soil had been moved. With anxious haste he began to dig, and soon his spade struck the lid of one of the chests. For a moment he breathed again; but he was impelled to carry his search farther. He uncovered the chest and raised the lid—it was empty! In a wild fear and fury he dug again and again, and with the same result. Every chest or box was in its place, but every one was empty! The treasure had been spirited away by some spoiler's hand; the treasure of Trevlyn was lost from that night forward!"

Cuthbert was leaning forward drinking all in with eager curiosity.

"My father discovered the loss—my father?"

Kate nodded her head, and seemed to divine the thought in his mind, for she answered as if he had spoken it aloud.

"We have all thought of that. I know it is sometimes in my father's mind as he looks at his kinsman's grim face; but our grand sire never suspected him for a moment—nay, he vowed he was certain he had had no part nor lot in the matter. For there was nothing but accord between the brothers; they shared good and evil hap alike. It was with his son, my father, who abjured the old faith and became a Protestant, that your father picked a quarrel. He hated his brother's wife, it is true; but he never appeared to hate his brother. And he suffered more than any in the years that followed. He lost his all,

and has been a ruined man since. If he had a secret hoard, sure he would scarce live the life he does now."

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“I know not. It seems scarce like; and yet I can never answer for my father’s moods, they are so wild and strange. But there is yet one thing more I would ask. You spoke awhile ago of gipsies—of a hatred they bore to our house. Tell me of that, I pray. Might it have somewhat to do with the stealing of the treasure?”

“That is what some have thought, though with what truth none can say. The story of that is soon told. Many long years agone now, the Trevlyn whose portrait hangs below in the hall—our great grandfather—gave sentence upon an old gipsy woman that she should be burnt as a witch. Men said of her that she had overlooked their children and their cattle: that the former had become sick or silly, and that the latter had incontinently died of diseases none had heard of before. There was such a hue and cry about her, and so many witnesses to testify the harm she had done, that all men held the case proven, and she was burnt in the sight of all the village out upon the common yonder by order of our forefather, whose office it was to see the law enforced. There were then many of these gipsy folk scattered about the common and forest, and this old witch belonged to them. They mustered strong upon the heath, and it was said that if the villagers had not been too strong for them they would have rescued the witch as she was led out to die. But the Trevlyns, when a thing has to be done, are wont to carry it through; and your grandfather, Cuthbert, was prepared against any such attempt, and the thing was done as had been decreed. The old woman went bravely to her death, but she turned as she passed Sir Richard and cursed him with a terrible curse. Later on some rude verses were found fastened to the wall of the church, and it was said by those who had heard the curse that these verses contained the same words. The paper was burnt by the haughty knight; but my grandam remembered some of the lines—she had got a sight of the paper—and used to tell them to us. I cannot recall them to memory now, but there was something about loss of gold and coming woe, years of strife and vengeful foe. And when years after the Trevlyn treasure was lost, there were many who vowed that it had been the work of the gipsy tribe, who had never forgotten or forgiven, and who had been waiting their turn to take vengeance upon the descendants of their old enemy.”

“It seems not unlike,” said Cuthbert, thoughtfully; “and if that be so, the treasure will most like be dissipated to the four winds by now. It would be divided amongst the tribe, and never be seen within the walls of Trevlyn again.”

“That I know not,” answered Kate, and she drew a little nearer to her cousin. “Cuthbert, dost thou believe in old saws? Dost thou believe those predictions which run in old families, and which men say work themselves out sometimes—in after generations?”

“I scarce know,” answered Cuthbert, “I hear so little and see so little. I know not why they should not be true. Men of old used to look into the future, and why not now? But why speakest thou thus, sweet cousin?”

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“Marry that will I tell thee, Cuthbert; but my mother chides me for such talk, and says it befits not a discreet and godly maiden. Yet I had it from mine own grandam, my father’s mother, and she was a godly woman, too.”

“And what did she tell thee?”

“My grandam was a Wyvern,” said Kate, “as perchance thou knowest, since the match pleased not thy father. And she was not the first Wyvern who had married a Trevlyn. It was Isabel Wyvern, her aunt, who had wedded with the redoubtable Sir Richard who had burnt the old witch, and I trow had he been married when the old beldam was brought before him he would have dealt more mercifully with her; for the Wyverns ever protected and helped the gipsy folk, and thought better of them than the rest of the world. Well, be that as it may, my grandam had many stories about them and their strange ways, their fashion of fortune telling and divining, and the wonderful things they could foretell. Many a time had a Wyvern been saved from danger and perhaps from death by a timely warning from one of the gipsy folk; and from a child she went fearlessly amongst them, though all men else shunned and hated them.”

“But the prediction—the prediction?” demanded Cuthbert eagerly.

“I am coming to that,” answered Kate. “It is a prediction about the descendants of the Wyverns. My grandam knew it by heart—she had a wondrous memory—but my mother would never let me write down such things. She loved them not, and said they had better be forgotten. But though I cannot recall the words, the meaning stays still with me. It was that though death might thin the ranks of the Wyverns, and their name even die out amongst men, yet in the future they should bring good hap to those who wed with them, and that some great treasure trove should come to the descendants in another generation. Now, Cuthbert, though the name of Wyvern has died out—for the sons went to the Spanish main, and were killed fighting for the honour of England and the Queen in the days of Elizabeth; and the daughters are married, and have lost their title to the old name—yet thou and I have their blood in our veins. Your grandam and mine were alike of the house of Wyvern. Wherefore it seems to me that if this treasure is to be the treasure trove of the old saw, it behoves some of us to find it, and why not thou as well as another? Philip is like to our mother, who loves not and believes not such saws. Our father says that if stolen the treasure must long since have been scattered and lost. Of all our house methinks I am the only one who believes it will yet be found, as I know my grandam did. And so I say to thee, ’Go forth, and good hap attend thee.’ Thou art as much a Wyvern as I, and we will have faith that all will be yet restored.”

Cuthbert rose to his feet and shook back his hair. His dark eyes flashed with the fixity of his purpose.

“I will never despair till the treasure is found. Prithee, good cousin, show me the spot where it was buried first.”

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Cuthbert never stirred outside the house till after dark. He was still in hiding from his father, who knew not his whereabouts, and was still on the watch for the truant, believing him to be lurking about in the forest around his home. Philip had once contrived to see Petronella and soothe her fears, telling her that her brother was safe, and would be sent forth to their kinsfolk in London so soon as he was fit for the long ride. But many evening rambles had been taken by the youth, who panted for the freedom of the forest, to which he was so well used; and Kate delighted in any excuse for a moonlight stroll.

The place was soon found. Kate had visited it so often that the tangled path which led thither was as familiar to her as if it had been a well-beaten road. It lay right away in the very heart of the forest, and save for the majestic size of the oak beneath which the chests had been buried, had nothing to mark the spot. Now there were traces of much digging. The ground all around had been disturbed again and yet again by eager searchers, each hopeful to come upon some clue missed by all the rest. But nothing, save the remains of a few iron-bound chests, served to show that anything had once been secreted there; and the moonlight shone steadily and peacefully down upon the scene of so many heart-burnings and grievous disappointments, as though such things did not and could not exist in such a still and lovely place.

“Ah, if she would but tell us all she has seen!” said Kate, looking up towards the silver Queen of Night. But the moon kept her own secret, and presently the pair turned away.

“Shall we go back by the chantry?” asked Cuthbert, with some hesitation; “I should like to see it once again.”

“Let us,” answered Kate; “we are not like to meet thy father. He has given up by now his watch around the house. Moreover, I have eyes and ears like a wildcat. None can approach unawares upon us. I can feel a human presence ere I see it.”

Cuthbert did not lack courage, and was quite willing to chance the small risk there was of an encounter with his father. He felt that he could slip away unseen were that stern man to be on the watch. Each day that had passed beneath his uncle’s roof had helped him to realize more of the freedom of the subject; and very soon he would be beyond the reach of pursuit, and on his way to London.

As they approached the chantry Kate laid a hand upon his arm.

“Hist!” she said softly. “Pause a moment; I hear voices!”

He stopped instantly; and making a sign of caution to him, Kate glided a few steps onward. Then she paused again, and made a sign to him to come.

“It is all well—there is no fear. It is Philip and Petronella.”

“Petronella, my sister! Nay, but this is a happy chance!” cried Cuthbert, springing eagerly forward; and the next moment Petronella, with a little cry of mingled joy and fear, had flung herself into her brother’s arms.

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“Cuthbert, dear Cuthbert! How I have longed to see thee once again! Hast thou come to say farewell?”

“In truth, methinks it must be farewell,” answered Cuthbert, holding her tenderly to him, whilst he caressed her hair and her soft cheek with his hand. “I may not linger too long in my kind uncle’s house, lest the matter should come to my father’s ears, and a worse breach be made that might cause thee to suffer more, sweet sister. And now, since I may be faring forth tomorrow, tell me of thyself. How go matters at the Gate House? What said our father to my flight?”

“He is right furious thereat, and raged for two days like a madman, so that I durst not venture near him.”

“He laid no hand on thee?” asked Cuthbert quickly clinching his hand in the darkness.

“Nay, he did but threaten; but as I told him all I knew, he could do no more. I said that thou hadst fled—that thou couldst brook such a life no longer, and had told him so many times thyself. I did not know myself where thou hadst gone when first he spoke, and he has asked me no question since. Tell me not too much, lest I have to tell it to him.”

“Nay, once in London and I fear him not,” answered Cuthbert. “There the law would protect me, since my father’s only complaint against me is that I conform to that. I go first to our mother’s relatives, sweet sister, They will give me food and shelter and a home, I trow, during the inclement months of the winter now before us. Later on “—he bent his head and whispered in her ear—“later on, if kind fortune befriend me, I shall return to these parts and commence that search of which we have spoken before now. My sister, if thou canst glean anything from our father anent the treasure, when his less gloomy moods be upon him, store up in thine heart every word, for some think even yet that he knows more than others. I am sad at heart to leave thee in such a home! I would fain take thee with me.”

“Nay, that may not be. I should be but a stay and a burden; and I can help thee better here at home by my prayers. I will pray each hour of the day that the Holy Virgin will watch over thee and bless thee, and give us a happy meeting in the days to come.”

“And I will charge myself to watch over Petronella,” said Philip, stepping forward out of the shadow. “I will be a protector—a brother—to her whilst thou art away. She shall not feel too heavily her harsh father’s rule. Amongst us we will find a way to ease her of a part of that burden.”

The glance turned upon Philip by those big shadowy eyes told a tale of trustful confidence that set the young man’s heart beating in glad response. He took in his the little hand trustingly held out, and drew Petronella towards him.

“You will trust her to me, good Cuthbert?”

“Gladly, thankfully, confidently!” answered the lad, with great earnestness; and he thought within himself that if he had the whole of the Trevlyn treasure to lay at the feet of these kinsmen, it could hardly be enough to express his gratitude to them for their timely and generous help in his hour of sore need.

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“I will win it back—I will, I will!” he said in his heart, as he walked up the hill with Kate tripping lightly beside him, Philip having lingered to watch Petronella safely within the shelter of the gloomy walls of the Gate House. “She shall have her dower, that she may wed this gay Lord Culverhouse. My sweet sister shall be dowered, too, and in no danger of spending all her youth and sweetness shut up between those gloomy walls. Fortune will smile once more upon all those who have the blood of the Trevlyns and Wyverns in their veins. I believe in the old prediction. I believe that the treasure trove will come, and that it will prove to be the lost treasure of the house of Trevlyn!”

Chapter 4: A Night On Hammerton Heath.

“Farewell, Cuthbert, farewell, farewell! Heaven speed you on your way! We shall look for tidings of you some day. And when the long summer days come upon the green world, perchance you may even make shift to ride or walk the twenty miles that separates us from London to tell of your own well being and ask of ours.”

These and many like words were showered on Cuthbert as he sat his steed at the door of Trevlyn Chase, as the dusk was beginning to gather, and his uncle and cousins stood clustered together on the steps to see him ride forth to seek his fortune, as Kate insisted on calling it, though her father spoke of it rather as a visit to his mother’s kinsfolks.

Cuthbert had been very loath to go. He had found himself happier beneath his uncle’s roof than ever he had been before (Sir Richard was in point of fact his cousin, but the lad had given him the title of uncle out of respect, and now never thought of him as anything else), but he knew that to linger long would be neither safe nor possible.

Only his strange and savage life had prevented the news of his son’s present quarters from coming to the knowledge of the angry Nicholas, and all were feeling it better for the young man to take his departure. Now the moment of parting had really come, and already the hope of a flying visit to the Chase in the summer next to follow was the brightest thought to lighten the regrets of the present.

“Ay, that will I gladly do!” cried the lad, with kindling eyes. “Why, twenty miles is naught of a journey when one can rise with the midsummer sun. I trow I shall pine after the forest tracks again. I shall have had enough and to spare of houses and cities by the time the summer solstice is upon us.”

“We shall look for you, we shall wait for you!” cried Kate, waving her hand; and as it was fast growing dark, Sir Richard made a sign of dismissal and farewell, and Cuthbert moved slowly along the dark avenue, Philip walking beside his bridle rein for a few last words.

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Cuthbert would have liked his sister to have seen him go forth, but that was not thought advisable. He wore an old riding suit of Philip's, which had fitted the latter before his shoulders had grown so broad and his figure assumed its present manly proportions. It suited Cuthbert well, and in spite of its having seen some service from its former owner, was a far better and handsomer dress than anything he had ever worn before, His own meagre wardrobe and few possessions were packed in the saddlebag across the saddle. His uncle had made no attempt to send him out equipped as a relative of the house of Trevlyn, and Cuthbert was glad that there should be no false seeming as to his condition when he appeared at Martin Holt's door. Sir Richard had given him at parting a small purse containing a couple of gold pieces and a few silver crowns, and had told him that he might in London sell the nag he bestrode and keep the price himself. He was not an animal of any value, and had already seen his best days, but he would carry Cuthbert soberly and safely to London town; and as the lad was still somewhat weak from his father's savage treatment, he was not sorry to be spared the long tramp over the deep mud of winter roads.

"I would not have you travel far tonight," said Philip, as he paced beside the sure-footed beast, who leisurely picked his way along the familiar road. "The moon will be up, to be sure, ere long; but it is ill travelling in the night. It is well to get clear of this neighbourhood in the dark, for fear your father might chance to espy you and make your going difficult. Yet I would have you ask shelter for your steed and yourself tonight at the little hostelry you will find just this side Hammerton Heath. The heath is an ill place for travellers, as you doubtless know. If you should lose the road, as is like enough, it being as evil and rough a track as well may be, you will like enough plunge into some bog or morass from which you may think yourself lucky to escape with life. And if you do contrive to keep to the track, the light-heeled gentlemen of the road may swoop down upon you like birds of prey, and rob you of the little worldly wealth that you possess. Wherefore I counsel you to pause ere you reach that ill-omened waste, and pass the night at the hostel there. The beds may be something poor, but they will be better than the wet bog, and you will be less like to be robbed there than on the road."

"I will take your good counsel, cousin," said Cuthbert. "I have not much to lose, but that little is my all. I will stop at the place you bid me, and only journey forth across the heath when the morrow's sun be up."

"You will do well. And now farewell, for I must return. I will do all that in me lies to watch over and guard Petronella. She shall be to me as a sister, and I will act a brother's part by her, until I may have won a right to call her something more. Have no fears for her. I will die sooner than she shall suffer. Her father shall not visit on her his wrath at your escape."

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The cousins parted on excellent terms, and Cuthbert turned, with a strange smile on his brave young face, for a last look at the old Gate House, the gray masonry of which gleamed out between the dark masses of the leafless trees, a single light flickering faintly in an upper casement.

“Petronella’s light!” murmured Cuthbert to himself. “I trow well she is thinking of me and praying for me before the little shrine in the turret. May the Holy Saints and Blessed Virgin watch over and protect her! I trust the day may come ere long when I may have power to rescue her from that evil home, and give to her a dower that shall make her not unworthy of being Philip’s wife.”

By which it may be seen that Cuthbert’s thoughts were still running on the lost treasure, and that he had by no means relinquished his dream of discovery through hearing how others had sought and failed.

“If I may but win a little gold in these winter days when the forest is too inhospitable to be scoured and searched, I can give the whole of the summer to the quest. I will find these gipsies or their descendants and live amongst them as one of them. I will learn their ways, win their trust, and gradually discover all that they themselves know. Who dare say that I may not yet be the one to bring back the lost luck to the house of Trevlyn? Has it always been the prosperous and rich that have won the greatest prize? A humble youth such as I may do far more in the wild forest than those who have been bred to ease and luxury, and have to keep state and dignity.”

Thus musing, Cuthbert rode slowly along in the light of the rising moon, his thoughts less occupied with the things he was leaving behind than with thoughts of the future and what it was to bring forth. The lad had all the pride of his house latent within him, and it delighted him to picture the day when he might return all Sir Richard’s benefits a thousandfold by coming to him with the news of the lost treasure, and bidding him take the elder brother’s share before ever his own father even knew that it had been found at last. His heart beat high as he pictured that day, and thought how he should watch the light coming into Kate’s bright eyes, as the obstacle to her nuptials should be thus removed. Sure she could coax her father to remove his veto and overlook the cousinship if she had dower to satisfy Lord Andover. And if the Trevlyn treasure were but half what men believed, there would be ample to dower all three daughters and fill the family coffers, too.

“In truth it is a thing well worth living for!” cried the eager lad, as he pushed his way out of the wood and upon the highroad, where for a time travelling was somewhat better. “And why should I not succeed even though others have failed? My proud kinsmen have never lived in the forest themselves, learning its every secret winding track, making friends of its wild sons and daughters, learning the strange

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lore that only the children of the forest gather. What chance had they of learning secrets which but few may know? I trow none. I will not believe that great treasure has been cast away to the four winds. I verily believe it is still hidden away beneath the earth in some strange resting place known but to a few living souls. What do these wild gipsy folks want with gold and silver and jewels? They have all they need with the heavens above them and the earth beneath. They may love to have a buried hoard; they may love to feel that they have treasure at command if they desire it; but I can better believe they would keep it safe hidden in their forest or moorland home than that they would scatter it abroad by dividing it amongst their tribe. Moreover, any such sudden wealth would draw upon them suspicion and contumely. They would be hunted down and persecuted like the Jews in old days. No: they may well have stolen it out of revenge, but I believe they have hidden it away as they took it. It shall be my part to learn where it lies; and may the Holy Saints aid and bless me in the search!"

Cuthbert crossed himself as he invoked the Saints, for at heart he was a Romanist still, albeit he had had the wit to see that the same cardinal doctrines were taught by the Established Church of the land, whose services he had several times attended. And even as he made the gesture he became suddenly aware that he was not alone on the road. A solitary traveller mounted on a strong horse was standing beneath the shadow of a tree hard by, and regarding his approach with some curiosity, though the lad had not been aware of his close proximity until his horse paused and snorted.

"Good even, young man," said this traveller, in a pleasant voice that bespoke gentle birth. "I was waiting to see if I had an enemy to deal with in the shape of one of those rogues of the road, cutpurses or highwaymen, of whom one bears so many a long tale. But these travel in companies, and it behoves wise travellers to do likewise. How comes it that a stripling like you are out alone in this lone place? Is it a hardy courage or stern necessity?"

"I know not that it is one or the other," answered Cuthbert. "But I have not far to go this night, and I have not much to lose, though as that little is my all I shall make a fight ere I part with it. But by what I hear there is little danger of molestation till one reaches Hammerton Heath. And I propose to halt on the edge of that place, and sleep at the hostelry there."

"If you follow my counsel, my young friend," said the stranger as he paced along beside Cuthbert, "you will not adventure yourself in that den of thieves. Not long ago it was a safe place for a traveller, but now it is more perilous to enter those doors than to spend the darkest night upon the road. The new landlord is in league with the worst of the rogues and foot pads who frequent the heath, and no traveller who dares to ask a night's shelter there is allowed to depart without suffering injury either in person or pocket. Whither are you bound, my young friend, if I may ask the question?"

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“For London, sir. I have an uncle there whom I am about to seek. But the way is something strange to me when the heath be passed, and I know not if I can find it in the dark.”

“I also am bound for London,” answered the stranger, “and in these days it is better to travel two than one, and four than two. But being no more than two, we must e’en hope for the best if we fall not in with other belated travellers. My business brooked not delay; wherefore I came alone. I mislike the fetter of a retinue of servants, and I have had wonderful good hap on the roads; but there be others who tell a different tale, and I often join company when I find a traveller to my liking going my way.”

Cuthbert was glad enough to have a companion. This man was many years his senior, so that he was somewhat flattered by the proposition of riding in his company; moreover, he was plainly a gentleman of some condition, whose fancy it was (not his necessity) to travel thus unattended. Also he was speedily conscious of a strange sense of fascination which this stranger exercised upon him, for which he could not in the least account; and he quickly found himself answering the questions carelessly addressed to him with a freedom that surprised himself; for why should there be such pleasure in talking of himself and his prospects to one whose name he did not even know?

When first he had pronounced his name, he observed that the stranger gave him a quick, keen glance; and after they had been some time in conversation, he spoke with a sudden gravity and earnestness that was decidedly impressive.

“Young man, I trust that you are loyal and true to the faith of those forefathers of yours who have been one of England’s brightest ornaments. In these latter days there has been a falling away. Men have let slip the ancient truths. Love of the world has been stronger within them than love of the truth. They have let themselves be corrupted by heresy; they have lost their first love. I trust it is not so with you. I trust you are one of the faithful who are yet looking for brighter days for England, when she shall be gathered again to the arms of the true Church. But a few minutes ago I saw you make the holy sign, and my heart went out to you as to a brother. These Protestants deny and contemn that symbol, as they despise and contemn in their wantonness the ordinances of God and the authority of His Vicar. I trust you have not fallen into like error; I trust that you are a true son of the old stock of Trevlyn?”

“I know little of such disputed matters,” answered Cuthbert, made a little nervous by the ardent glance bent upon him from the bright eyes of the speaker. He had a dark, narrow face, pale and eager, a small, pointed beard trimmed after the fashion of the times, and the wide-brimmed sugar-loaf hat drawn down upon his brows cast a deep shadow over his features. But his voice was peculiarly melodious and persuasive, and there was a nameless attraction about him that Cuthbert was quick to feel. Others in

the days to follow felt it to their own undoing, but of that the lad knew nothing. He only wished to retain the good opinion this stranger seemed to have formed of him.

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“I have led but a hermit’s life, as I have told you. I have been bred up in the faith of my forefathers, and that faith I believe. What perplexes me is that those who hold the Established or Reformed faith, as men term it, have the same creeds, the same doctrines as we ourselves. I have from time to time conformed to the law, and gone to the services, and I have not heard aught spoken within their walls that our good priest in old days used not to tell me was sound doctrine. There be things he taught me that these men say naught about; but no man may in one discourse touch upon every point of doctrine. I freely own that I have been sorely perplexed to know whence comes all this strife, all these heart burnings.”

“Thou wilt know and understand full soon, when once thou hast seen the life of the great city and the strife of faction there,” answered his companion, lapsing into the familiar “thou” as he spoke with increased earnestness. “In thy hermit’s life thou hast had no knowledge of the robbery, the desecration, the pollution which our Holy Mother Church has undergone from these pestilent heretics, who have thought to denude her of her beauty and her glory, whilst striving to retain such things as jump with their crabbed humours, and may be pared down to please their poisoned and vicious minds. Ah! it makes the blood boil in the veins of the true sons of the Church, as thou wilt find, my youthful friend, when thou gettest amongst them. But it will not always last. The day of reckoning will come—nay, is already coming when men shall find that the Blessed and Holy Church may not be defiled and downtrodden with impunity for ever. Ah yes! the day will come—it is even at the door—when God shall arise and his enemies be scattered. Scattered—scattered! verily that is the word. And the sons of the true faith throughout the length and breadth of the land shall arise and rejoice, and the heretics shall stand amazed and confounded!”

As he spoke these words his figure seemed to expand, and he raised his right hand to heaven with a peculiar gesture of mingled menace and appeal. Cuthbert was silent and amazed. He did not understand in the least the tenor of these wild words, but he was awed and impressed, and felt at once that the strife and stress of the great world into which he was faring was something very different from anything he had conceived of before.

By this time the travellers had reached the dreary waste called by the inhabitants Hammerton Heath. At some seasons of the year it was golden with gorse or purple with ling, but in this drear winter season it was bare and colourless, and utterly desolate. The outline of dark forests could be seen all around on the horizon; but the road led over the exposed ground, where not a tree broke the monotony of the way. Cuthbert was glad enough to have a companion to ride by his side over the lonely waste, which looked its loneliest in the cold radiance of the moon.

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He did not reply to the strange words he had just heard, and his companion, after a brief pause, resumed his discourse in a different tone, telling the lad more about London and the life there than ever he had heard in his life before. But the moral of his discourse was always the sufferings, the wrongs, the troubles of the Roman Catholics, who had looked for better times under Mary Stuart's son; and gradually raising within the breast of the youth a feeling of warm sympathy with those of his own faith, and a distrust and abhorrence of the laws that made life well nigh impossible for the true sons of the Church.

"Ruined in estate, too often injured in body, hated, despised, hunted to death like beasts of the earth, what is left for us but some great struggle after our lives and liberties?" concluded the speaker, in his half melancholy, half ardent way. "Verily, when things be so bad that they cannot well be worse, then truly men begin to think that the hour of action is at hand. Be the night never so long, the dawn comes at last. And so will our day dawn for us—though it may dawn in clouds of smoke and vapour, and with a terrible sound of destruction."

But these last words were hardly heard by Cuthbert, whose attention had been attracted by the regular beat of horse hoofs upon the road behind. Although the track was but a sandy path full of ruts and holes, the sound travelled clearly through the still night air. Whoever these new travellers were, they were coming along at a brisk pace, and Cuthbert drew rein to look behind him.

"There be horsemen coming this way!" he said.

"Ay, verily there be; and moreover I mislike their looks. Honest folks do not gallop over these bad roads in yon headlong fashion. I doubt not they be robbers, eager to overtake and despoil us. We must make shift to press on at the top of our speed. This is an ill place to be overtaken. We have no chance against such numbers. Luckily our steeds are not way worn; they have but jogged comfortably along these many miles. Push your beast to a gallop, my lad; there is no time to lose."

Cuthbert essayed to do this; but honest old Dobbin had no notion of a pace faster than a leisurely amble. Most of his work had been done in the plough, and he had no liking for the rapid gallop demanded by his rider.

The lad soon saw how it stood with him, and called out to his well-mounted companion not to tarry for him, but to leave him to chance and kind fortune.

"I have so little to lose that they may not think me worth the robbing, belike. But you, sir, must not linger. Your good steed is equal to theirs, I doubt not, and will carry you safe across the heath."

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“Ay, verily he will. I purchased him for that same speed, and it has never failed me yet. I fear not pursuit. My only peril lies in the chance of meeting a second band watching the road farther on. I like not thus to leave you, boy; but I have no choice. I may not risk being robbed of my papers. There be more in them than must be suffered to be scanned by any eyes for which they were not meant. My gold might go, and welcome, but I must save my papers. And if thou hast any small valuables about thee, I will charge myself with the care of them, and thou canst call at my lodging in London when thou gettest there to claim thine own again. ’Twill be the better chance than leaving yon gentlemen to rid thee of them.”

The smile with which the stranger uttered these words was so winning and frank, that Cuthbert placed his purse in the outstretched hand without a qualm.

“When thou wantest thine own again, go to the Cat and Fiddle in the thoroughfare of Holborn, and ask news there of Master Robert Catesby. It is an eating house and tavern where I am constantly to be met with. If I be not lodging there at that very time, thou wilt have news of me there. Farewell; and keep up a brave heart. These fellows are less harsh with poor travellers than rich. Let them see you have small fear, and it will be the better for all.”

These last words were faintly borne back to Cuthbert on the wings of the wind, as his companion galloped with long easy strides across the heath. A little dip in the ground hid for a moment their pursuers from sight, and before they emerged upon the crest of the undulation, Master Robert Catesby was practically out of sight; for a cloud had obscured the brightness of the moon, and only a short distance off objects became invisible.

Cuthbert rode slowly on his way, trying to compose himself to the state of coolness and courage that he would like to show in the hour of danger. He felt the beatings of his heart, but they were due as much to excitement as to fear. In truth he was more excited than afraid; for he had absolutely nothing to lose save a suit of old clothes and his horse, and both of these were in sorry enough plight to be little tempting to those hardy ruffians, who were accustomed to have travellers to rob of a far superior stamp.

Nearer and nearer came the galloping horse hoofs, and a loud, rough voice ordered him to stop.

Cuthbert obeyed, and wheeled round on his placid steed, who showed no sign of disquietude or excitement, but at once commenced to nibble the short grass that grew beside the sandy track.

“And what do you want of me, gentlemen?” asked Cuthbert, as he found himself confronted by half-a-dozen stalwart fellows, with swarthy faces and vigorous frames.

They were all armed and well mounted, and would have been formidable enough to a wealthy traveller with his stuff or valuables about him.

“Your money—or your life!” was the concise reply and Cuthbert was able to smile as he replied:

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“Marry then, it must be my life, for money I have none. I have naught but an old suit of clothes and a breviary in yon bag. You are welcome to both an ye will condescend to wear such habiliments; but I trow ye would find them sorry garments after those ye now display.”

“Tut, tut! we will see to that. There be many cunning fashions of hiding money, and we are used to such tales as yours. Where is your companion, young man?”

“Nay, I have no companion,” answered Cuthbert, who was sufficiently imbued with the spirit of his father’s creed not to hesitate for a moment to utter an untruth in a good cause, and think no shame of it; “I am journeying forth to London alone, to seek a relative there, who methinks will help me to earn an honest livelihood. I would I were the rich man you take me for. But even the dress I wear is mine through the charity of a kinsman, as is also the nag I ride. And I misdoubt me if you would find him of much use to you in your occupation.”

One or two of the men laughed. They looked at Dobbin and then at his rider, and seemed to give credence to this tale. Cuthbert’s boyish face and fearless manner seemed to work in his favour, and one of the band remarked that he was a bold young blade, and if in search of a fortune, might do worse than cast in his lot with them.

“Yet I verily thought there had been two,” grumbled another of the band; “I wonder if he speaks sooth.”

“I warrant me he does, else where should the other be? It was a trick of the moonlight; it often deceives us so.

“Come now, my young cockerel; you can crow lustily, it seems, and keep a bold face where others shrink and tremble and flee. How say you? will you follow us to our lodging place for the night? And if we find no money concealed about you, and if your story of your poverty be true, you can think well whether you will choose to cast in your lot with us. Many a poor man has done so and become rich, and the life is a better one than many.”

All this was spoken in a careless, mocking way, and Cuthbert did not know if the proposal were made in good faith or no. But it was plain that no harm was meant to his life or person, and as he was in no fear from any search of his clothes and bag, he was ready and willing to accept the invitation offered, and by no means sorry to think he should be relieved from spending the night in the saddle.

“I will gladly go with you,” he answered. “I have spoken naught but sooth, and I have no fear. My person and my goods are in your hands. Do as you will with them; I have too little to lose to make a moan were you to rob me of all.”

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“We rob not the poor; we only rob the rich—those arrogant, purse-proud rogues who batten and fatten on what they wring from the poor,” answered, in quick, scornful accents, the man who appeared to be the leader of this little band. “On them we have scant pity. They have but stolen, in cunning though lawful fashion, what we wrest from them, lawlessly it may be, yet with as good a right in the sight of the free heavens as any they practise. But we filch not gold nor goods from the poor, the thrifty, the sons of toil; nay, there be times when we restore to these what has been drained from them by injustice and tyranny. We be not the common freebooters of the road, who set on all alike, and take human life for pure love of killing. We have our own laws, our own ways, our own code of right and wrong; and we recruit our ranks from bold lads like you, upon whom fortune has not smiled, and who come to us to see if we can help them to better things.”

Cuthbert was greatly interested in this adventure. He looked into the dark, handsome face of the man who rode beside him, and wondered if some gipsy blood might not run in his veins. The gipsy people of whom Kate had spoken were well known in all this region, and despite the roving life they led, appeared to be rooted to a certain extent to this wild and wooded tract. He had seen dark faces like this before in the woods; he had often heard stories of the doings of the gipsies around. Before, he had not thought much of this; but now, his interest was keenly excited, and he was delighted to have this opportunity of studying them at close quarters.

“Where are we going, Tyrrel?” asked one of the followers. “It is a bitter cold night, now the wind has shifted, and we are far enough away from Dead Man’s Hole.”

“I am not bound for Dead Man’s Hole. We will to the ruined mill, and ask Miriam to give us shelter for the night. We have ridden far, and our steeds are weary. I trow she will give us a welcome.”

This proposition seemed to give general satisfaction. The men plodded on after their leader, who kept Cuthbert close beside him, and they all moved across the heath in an irregular fashion, following some path known only to themselves, until they reached the wooded track to the left, and plunged into the brushwood again, picking their way carefully as they went, and all the while descending lower and lower into the hollow, till the rush of water became more and more distinctly audible, and Cuthbert knew by the sound that they must be approaching a waterfall of some kind.

One of the men had ridden forward to give notice of their approach, and soon in the flickering moonlight the gray walls of an ancient mill, now greatly fallen to decay, became visible to the travellers’ eyes. From the open door streamed out a flood of ruddy light, cheering indeed to cold and weary men; whilst framed in this ruddy glow was a tall and picturesque figure—the figure of an old woman, a scarlet kerchief tied over her white hair, whilst her dress displayed that picturesque medley of colours that has always been the prevailing characteristic of the gipsy race.

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“You are welcome, son Tyrrel,” quoth the mistress of this lone dwelling, as the little cavalcade drew up at the door. “It is long since you favoured old Miriam with a visit. Yet you come at no ill time, since Red Ronald brought us in a fat buck but yesternight, and I have made oaten cakes today, and pies of the best. But who is that with you! I like not new faces in my dwelling place. It were well you should remember this ere you bring a stranger with you.”

The old woman’s face suddenly darkened as she spoke these last words, and her wonderful eyes, so large and dark as to resemble rather those of a deer than a human being, flashed fiercely, whilst she seemed about to close the door in Tyrrel’s face. But he pushed in with a light laugh, leading Cuthbert with him, and saying as he did so:

“Nay, nay, mother, be not so fierce. He is an honest lad enough, I trow; if not, ’twill be the worse for him anon. We have brought him hither to search him if he carries gold concealed. If not, and he proves to have spoken sooth, he may go his way or join with us, whichever likes him best. We could do with a few more bold lads, since death has been something busy of late; and he seems to have the grit in him one looks for in those who join with us. Moreover, he has the dark eyes, and would soon have the swarth skin, that distinguish our merry men all.

“How now, mother! Thou hast eyes for none but the lad! Why lookst thou at him so?”

Cuthbert, too, gazed wonderingly at the handsome old gipsy, who continued to keep her eyes fixed upon him, as if by a species of fascination. He could no more withdraw his gaze than can the bird whom the snake is luring to destruction.

“Boy, what is thy name?” she asked, in a quick, harsh whisper.

“Cuthbert Trevlyn,” he answered, without hesitation, and at the name a wild laugh rang out through the vaulted room, illumined by the glow of a huge fire of logs, whilst all present started and looked at one another.

“I knew it—I knew it!” cried the old woman, with a wild gesture of her withered arms, which were bare to the elbow, as though she had been engaged in culinary tasks. “I knew it—I knew it! I knew it the moment the light fell upon his face. Trevlyn—Trevlyn! one of that accursed brood! Heaven be praised, the hour of vengeance has come! We will do unto one of them even as they did unto us;” and she waved her arms again in the air, and glanced towards the glowing fire on the hearth with a look in her wild eyes that for a moment caused Cuthbert’s heart to stand still. For he remembered the story of the witch burned by his grand sire’s mandate, and he felt he was not mistaken in the interpretation he had put upon the old woman’s words.

But Tyrrel roughly interposed.

“No more of that, mother,” he said. “We have wiped out that old score long ago. The lad is a bold lad, Trevlyn or no. Let us to supper now, and forget those accursed beldam’s tales. Where is Long Robin, and what is he doing? and where is Joanna tonight?”

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“Here,” answered a clear, full voice from the shadows of the inglenook, and forth there stepped a very queenly-looking woman, in the prime of life, when youth’s bloom has not been altogether left behind, and yet all the grace of womanhood, with its dignity and ease, has come to give an added charm. One glance from the old woman’s face to that of the young one showed them to be mother and daughter, and it did not take a sharp eye to see that Tyrrel, as he was always called, was deeply enamoured of the beautiful Joanna, though treated by her with scant notice, and as though he were yet a boy, scarce worthy of being looked at or spoken to.

She stood in the glow of the fire, a tall, graceful presence, to the full as picturesque as her gipsy mother, and far more attractive. Cuthbert’s eyes turned upon her with an unconscious appeal in them; for it suddenly dawned upon him that for a Trevlyn to adventure himself amongst these wild gipsy folks was like putting the head into a lion’s mouth.

It almost seemed as though Joanna read this doubt and this fear; for a flashing smile crossed her dark face, and she held out a shapely hand to lead the guest to the table.

“Thou art welcome to our board, Cuthbert Trevlyn,” she said, “as is any hapless stranger in these wilds, be he Trevlyn or no. Thou shalt eat our salt this night, and then woe betide the man who dares to lay hand on thee;” and such a glance was flashed around from her magnificent dark eyes as caused each one that met it to resolve to take good heed to his ways. “Thou shalt come and go unmolested; Joanna the Gipsy Queen has so decreed it!”

Every one present, the old woman included, bent the head at these words, and Cuthbert felt by some instinct that his life was now safe.

Chapter 5: The House On The Bridge.

“Keren Happuch.”

“Yes, aunt.”

The reply came only after a brief pause, as though the rosy-cheeked maiden at the casement would fain have declined to answer to that abhorred name had she dared—-which was indeed pretty much the case; for though it was undeniably her own, and she could not gainsay the unpalatable fact, nobody in the world but Aunt Susan ever aggrieved her by using it. Even her grave father had adopted the “Cherry” that was universal alike with relatives and friends, and the girl never heard the clumsy and odious appellation without a natural longing to box the offender’s ears.

“What art doing, child?” questioned the voice from below.

Now Cherry was undeniably idling away the morning hours by looking out of her window at the lively scene below; and perhaps it was scarce wonderful that the sights and sounds without attracted her. It was a sunny November morning, and the sun was shining quite hotly; for the soft wind from the south was blowing—it had suddenly veered round in the night—and all nature seemed to be rejoicing in the change.

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The river ran sparkling on its way to the sea; the barges and wherries, and larger craft that anchored in the stream or plied their way up and down, gave animation and brightness to the great water way; whilst the old bridge, with its quaint-timbered houses with their projecting upper stories, its shops with their swinging signs, and noisy apprentices crying their masters' wares or playing or quarrelling in the open street, and its throngs of passers by, from the blind beggar to the gay court gallant, provided a shifting and endless panorama of entertainment to the onlooker, which pretty Mistress Cherry certainly appreciated, if no one else in that grave Puritan household did the like. But possibly she thought that her aunt's question must not be too literally answered, for she hastily skipped across the panelled chamber, seized her distaff, and answered meekly;

"I am about to spin, aunt."

"Humph!" the answer sounded more like a grunt than anything else, and warned Cherry that Mistress Susan, her father's sister, who had ruled his household for the past ten years, since the death of his wife, was in no very amiable temper.

"I know what that means. Thy spinning is a fine excuse for idling away thy time in the parlour, when thou mightest be learning housewifery below. Much flax thou spinnest when I am not by to watch! It is a pity thou wert not a fine lady born!"

Cherry certainly was decidedly of this opinion herself, albeit she would not have dared to say as much. She liked soft raiment, bright colours, dainty ways, and pretty speeches. Looking down from her window upon the passers by, it was her favourite pastime to fancy herself one of the hooped and powdered and gorgeously-apparelled ladies, with their monstrous farthingales, their stiff petticoats, their fans, their patches, and their saucy, coquettish ways to the gentlemen in their train. All this bedizenment, which had by no means died out with the death of a Queen who had loved and encouraged it, was dear to the eyes of the little maiden, whose own sad-coloured garments and severe simplicity of attire was a constant source of annoyance to her. Not that she wished to ape the fine dames in her small person. She knew her place better than that. She was a tradesman's daughter, and it would ill have beseemed her to attire herself in silk and velvet, even though the sumptuary laws had been repealed. But she did not see why she might not have a scarlet under-petticoat like Rachel Dyson, her own cousin, or a gay bird's wing to adorn her hat on holiday occasions. The utmost she had ever achieved for herself was a fine soft coverchief for her head, instead of the close unyielding coif which all her relatives wore, which quite concealed their hair, and gave a quaint severity to their square and homely faces. Cherry's face was not square, but a little pointed, piquant countenance, from which a pair of long-lashed gray eyes looked forth with saucy, mischievous brightness. Her skin was very fair, with a peach-like bloom upon it, and her pretty hair hung round it in a mass of red gold curls.

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Cherry, it must be confessed, would have liked to leave her hair uncovered, but this was altogether against the traditions of her family. But she had contrived to assume the softly-flowing coverchief, more like a veil than a cap, which was infinitely becoming to the sweet childish face, and allowed the pretty curls to be seen flowing down on either side till they reached the shoulders. For the rest, her dress was severely plain in its simplicity: the snow-white kerchief, crossed in front and made fast behind; the under-petticoat of gray homespun, just showing the black hose and buckled shoes beneath; and the over-dress of sombre black or dark brown, puffed out a little over the hips in the pannier fashion, but without any pretence at following the extravagances of the day. The sleeves buttoned tightly to the lower arm, though wider at the cuff, and rose high upon the shoulder with something of a puff. It was a simple and by no means an unbecoming style of costume; but Cherry secretly repined at the monotony of always dressing in precisely the same fashion. Other friends of her own standing had plenty of pretty things suited to their station, and why not she? If she asked the question of any, the answer she always got was that her father followed the Puritan fashions of dressing and thinking and speaking, and that he held fine clothes in abhorrence. Cherry would pout a little, and think it a hard thing that she had been born a Puritan's daughter; but on the whole she was happy and contented enough, only she did reckon the rule of Aunt Susan in her father's house as something of a hardship.

But it did not do to offend that worthy dame, who was the very model of all housewives, and whose careful management and excellent cookery caused Martin Holt's house to be something of a proverb and a pattern to other folks' wives. So now the girl replied submissively:

"I need not spin, an it please thee not, aunt. Hast thou aught for me to do below?"

"Ay, plenty, child, if thou canst give thy mind to work. Abraham Dyson and Anthony Cole sup with us tonight, and I am making a herring pie."

A herring pie was a serious undertaking in the domestic economy of the house on the bridge, and Mistress Susan prided herself on her skill in the concoction of this delicate dish above almost any other achievement. She had a mysterious receipt of her own for it, into the secret of which she would let no other living soul, not even the dutiful nieces who assisted at the manufacture of the component parts. Cherry heaved a sigh when she heard what was in prospect, but laid aside her distaff and proceeded to don a great coarse apron, and to unbutton and turn back her sleeves, leaving her pretty round white arms bare for her culinary task. But there was a little pucker of perplexity and vexation on her forehead, which was not caused by any distaste of cookery.

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“If Uncle Abraham comes, sure he will bring Jacob with him; he always does. If it were Rachel I would not mind; but I cannot abear Jacob, with his great hairy hands and fat cheeks. And if I be pert to him, my father chides; and if I be kind, he makes me past all patience with his rolling eyes and foolish ways and words. I know what they all think; but I’ll none of him! He had better try for Kezzie, who would jump down his throat as soon as look at him. She fair rails on me for not treating him well. Let her take him herself, the loutish loon!”

And tossing her head so that her coverchief required readjusting, Cherry slipped down the narrow wooden staircase into the rooms that lay below.

Kitchen and dining parlour occupied the whole of this floor, which was not the ground floor of the house. That was taken up by the shop, in which Martin Holt’s samples of wools and stuffs were exposed. He was more (to borrow a modern expression) in the wholesale than the retail line of business, and his shop was nothing very great to look at, and did not at all indicate the scope of his real trade and substance; but it was a convenient place for customers to come to, to examine samples and talk over their orders. Martin Holt sat all day long in a parlour behind the shop, pretty well filled with bales and sacks and other impedimenta of his trade, and received those who came to him in the way of business. He had warehouses, too, along the wharves of Thames Street, and visited them regularly; but he preferred to transact business in his own house, and this dull-looking shop was quite a small centre for wool merchants, wool manufacturers, and even for the farmers who grew the wool on the backs of the sheep they bred in the green pastures. No more upright and fair-dealing man than Martin Holt was to be found in all London town; and though he had not made haste to be rich, like some, nor had his father before him, having a wholesome horror of those tricks and shifts which have grown more and more common as the world has grown older, yet honest dealing and equitable trading had had its own substantial reward, and wealth was now steadily flowing into Martin’s coffers, albeit he remained just the same simple, unassuming man of business as he had ever been when the golden stream of prosperity had not reached his doors.

But the ground floor of the bridge house being occupied in business purposes, the first floor had of necessity been given up to cookery and feeding. The front room was the eating parlour, and was only furnished by a long table and benches, with one high-backed armchair at either end. It overlooked the street and the river, like the living parlour above; and behind lay the kitchen, with a back kitchen or scullery beyond. From the windows of either of these back rooms the busy cooks could fling their refuse into the river, and exceedingly handy did they find this, as did likewise their neighbours. Nor did the

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fact that the river water was drunk by themselves and a large number of the inhabitants of the city in any way interfere with their satisfaction at the convenience of these domestic arrangements. The beat, beat of the great water wheel was always in their ears to remind them; but no misgivings had yet assailed our forefathers as to the desirability of drinking water polluted by sewage and other abominations. True, the plague was constantly desolating the city, and had been raging so violently but a single year back that the King's coronation had well nigh had to be postponed, and he dared not adventure himself into London itself, nor summon his Parliament to meet him there. But it was for another generation to put together cause and effect, and wonder how far tainted water was responsible for the spread of the fatal malady.

As Cherry entered the eating parlour, her two sisters looked up from their tasks, as if with a smile of welcome. Jemima was busy with the almond paste, which was an important ingredient of the herring pie; Keziah was stoning the dates, grating the manchet, and preparing the numerous other ingredients—currants, gooseberries, barberries—which, being preserved in bottles in the spring and summer, were always ready to hand in Mistress Susan's cookery. From the open door of the kitchen proceeded a villainous smell of herrings, which caused Cherry to turn up her pretty nose in a grimace that set Keziah laughing. Both these elder damsels, who were neither blooming nor pretty nor graceful, like their youngest sister, though they bid fair to be excellent housewives and docile and tractable spouses, delighted in the beauty and wit and freshness of Cherry. They had never envied her her pretty ways and charming face, but had taken the same pleasure in both that a mother or affectionate aunt might do. They spoke of her and thought of her as "the child," and if any hard or disagreeable piece of work had to be done, they both vied with each other in contriving that it should not fall to Cherry's lot.

Cherry, although she dearly loved her homely sisters, as well she might, never could quite realize that they were her sisters, and not her aunts. Although Keziah was only six years her senior, it seemed more like ten, and Jemima had three years' start of Keziah. They treated her with an indulgence rare between sisters, and from the fact of their being so staid and grave for their years, Cherry could scarcely be blamed for feeling as though she was the only young thing in the house. Her father talked of grave matters with her aunt and sisters, whilst she sat gaping in weariness or got a book in which to lose herself. They understood those mysterious theological and political discussions which were a constant source of perplexity and irritation to Cherry.

"As if it mattered one way or another," she would say to herself. "I can't see that one way is a bit better than another! I wonder folks can care to make such a coil about it."

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“Hast come to help us with the pie, Cherry?” asked Jemima kindly. “There, then, take my place with the paste; ’tis almost ready, but would do with a trifle more beating. And there be fowls to draw and get ready for the oven, and I know thou lovest not such a task.”

Cherry shuddered at the thought, and gladly took Jemima’s place, tasting the almond with an air of relish, and going about her tasks with a dainty air that would have angered Aunt Susan, but which honest Keziah regarded with admiration.

“How many be coming to supper tonight?” asked Cherry. “Is it to be a gathering?”

“Nay, I scarce know. I have only heard what aunt said to thee. Father spoke of guests without saying the number, and she said our uncle would be there, and Master Anthony Cole and his son. Whether there be any others I know not; belike Rachel and Jacob may come too.”

“Now I am sore puzzled anent this Anthony Cole,” said Cherry, as she beat her paste and leaned towards Keziah, so that her voice might not carry as far as the kitchen.

“And wherefore art thou puzzled, child?”

“Marry, because it was but a short while ago that we were forbid even to speak with him or any in his house, neighbours though we be; and now he comes oft, and father gives him good welcome, and bids him to sup with us. It fairly perplexes me to know why.”

Keziah also lowered her voice as she replied:

“We were forbid his house because that he and his household be all Papists.”

“Ay, verily, that I know. But they be none the less Papists now, and yet we give them good day when we meet, and sit at the same board with them in all amity. Are they turning Protestant then, or what?”

Keziah shook her head.

“It is not that,” she said.

Nay, then, what is it?”

“Marry, methinks it is that we are companions in distress, and that a common trouble draws us the closer together. Thou must have heard—”

“Oh, I hear words, words, words! but I heed them not. It is like eating dust and ashes.”

“Nay, thou art but a child, and these things are not for children,” answered Keziah, indulgently. “And, indeed, they are hard to be understood, save by the wise and learned. But this much I gather: When the King came to the throne, all men hoped for better days—liberty to think each according to his conscience, liberty each to follow his own priest or pastor, and join without fear in his own form of worship. The Papists believed that the son of Mary Stuart would scarce show severity to them. The Puritans were assured that one bred up by the Presbyterians of Scotland would surely incline to their ways of worship and thought. But the King has disappointed both, and has allied himself heart and soul with the Episcopal faction and the Church of the Establishment; and, not content with that, is striving to enforce the penal statutes against all who do not conform as they were never enforced in the Queen’s time. Wherefore, as thou mayest understand, the Papists and the Puritans alike suffer, and so suffering are something drawn together as friends, albeit in doctrine they are wide asunder—wider than we from the Establishment or they from it. But trouble drives even foes to make common cause sometimes.”

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Cherry sighed impatiently.

“I would that men would e’en forget all these vexed doctrines and dry dogmas, and learn to enjoy life as it might be enjoyed. Why are we for ever lamenting evils which none may put right? What does it matter whether we pray to God in a fine church or a homely room? I would fain go to church with the fine folk, since the King will have it so, and strive to find God there as well as in the bare barn where Master Baker holds his meeting. They bid us read our Bibles, but they will not let us obey the commands laid down—”

“Nay, hush, Cherry! hush, hush! What and if Aunt Susan heard?”

“Let her hear!” cried the defiant Cherry, though she lowered her voice instinctively at the warning; “I am saying naught to be ashamed of. I know naught about these matters of disputing; I only know that the Bible bids folks submit themselves to the powers that be, whether they be kings, or rulers, or magistrates, because the powers that be are of God. So that I see not why we go not to church as the King bids us. And again I read that wherever two or three are gathered together in Christ’s name, there will He be in the midst of them. So why we cannot go peacefully to church, since He will be there with us, I for one cannot see. I trow even the boldest Papist or Puritan would not dare deny that He was as much in the midst of those congregations as in ours. If they do they be worse than Pagans, for every one that goes to church goes to pray to God and to Jesus Christ.”

Keziah looked flustered and scared. Cherry’s words, though spoken in some temper and despite, contained certain elements of shrewd insight and sound common sense, which she had doubtless inherited from her father. She had something of the boldness and independence of mind that a spoiled child not unfrequently acquires, and she was not accustomed to mince her words when speaking with her sisters.

Hush! oh hush, child! Father would not list to hear such words from a daughter of his. It is for women to learn, and not to teach; to listen, but not to speak.”

“Oh yes, well do I know that. Have I not listened, and listened, and listened, till I have well nigh fallen asleep; and what sense is there in all the wranglings and disputations? Why cannot men think as they like, and let other folks alone? What harm does it do any that another should have a different opinion of his own?”

“I trow that is what father really thinks,” said Keziah, thoughtfully; “but all men declare that it is needful for there to be outward uniformity of worship. And I trow that father would be willing to conform if they would but let our preachers and teachers alone to hold private meetings in peace. But so long as they badger and persecute and imprison them, he will have naught to do with the bishops and clergy who set them on, nor will he

attend their churches, be the law what it may. He says it is like turning back in the hour of peril: that is not his way."

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“I like that feeling,” answered Cherry, with kindling eyes. “If that be so, I mind it less. Father is a good man, and full of courage; but I grow full weary of these never-ending talks. Kezzie, thinkest thou that he will be put in prison for keeping from church with his whole house? Some men have been sent to prison for less.”

“I know not how that may be,” answered Keziah, gravely. “He is a useful citizen, and a man of substance; and by what I hear, such as these are left alone so long as they abide quiet and peaceable. Just now the Papists are being worse treated than we. Methinks that is why father is so sorry for them.”

“Too much talk! too much talk!” cried Aunt Susan’s voice from the adjoining kitchen. “Hands lag when tongues wag; wherefore do your work in silence. Is that almond paste ready, Keren Happuch? Then bring it quickly hither; and your manchet and sugar, Keziah, for the skins are ready to be stuffed.”

And as the girls obediently brought the required ingredients, they found themselves in a long, low room, at the end of which a huge fire burned in a somewhat primitive stove, whilst a tall, angular, and powerful-looking dame, with her long upper robe well tucked up, and her gray hair pushed tightly away beneath a severe-looking coif, was superintending a number of culinary tasks, Jemima and a serving wench obeying the glance of her eye and the turn of her hand with the precision of long practice.

Certainly it was plain that Martin Holt’s guests would not starve that night. The herring pie was only the crowning delicacy of the board, which was to groan beneath a variety of appetizing dishes. The Puritans were a temperate race, and the baneful habit of sack drinking at all hours, of perpetual pledgings and toastings, and the large consumption of fiery liquors, was at a discount in their houses; but they nevertheless liked a good table as well as the rest of their kind, and saw no hurt in sitting down to a generously supplied board, whilst they made up for their abstemiousness in the matter of liquor by the healthy and voracious appetite which speedily caused the good cheer to melt away.

Mistress Susan was so intent on her preparations that she scarcely let her nieces pause to eat their frugal midday dinner. Martin himself was out on business, and would dine abroad that day, and nothing better pleased the careful housewife than to dispense with any formal dinner when there was a company supper to be cooked, and thus save the attendant labour of washing up as well as the time wasted in the consumption of the meal.

Jemima and Keziah never dreamed of disputing their aunt’s will; but Cherry pouted and complained that it was hard to work all day without even the dinner hour as a relief. Mistress Susan gave her a sharp rebuke that silenced without subduing her; and she kept throwing wistful glances out of the window, watching the play of sunshine on the water, and longing to be out in the fresh air—for such a day as this was too good to be

wasted indoors. Tomorrow belike the sun would not shine, and the wind would be cold and nipping.

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Jemima and Keziah saw the wistful glances, and longed to interpose on behalf of their favourite; but Mistress Susan was not one it was well to interfere with, and Cherry was not in favour that day. But an inspiration came over Jemima at last, and she suddenly exclaimed:

“Sure, but how badly we need some fresh rushes for the parlour floor! There be not enough to cover it, and they all brown and old. There has been scarce any frost as yet. I trow the river rushes will be yet green, and at least they will be fresh. Could not the child be spared to run out to try and get some? She is a better hand at that than at her cooking. I will finish her pastry if thou wilt spare her to get the reeds. I love not a floor like you, and methinks father will chide an he sees.”

Mistress Susan cast a quick glance at the rush-strewn floor, and could not but agree with her niece. She had all the true housewife’s instinct of neatness and cleanliness in every detail. The filthy habit of letting rushes rot on the floor, and only piling fresh ones on the top as occasion demanded, found no favour in this house. It was part of Cherry’s work and delight to cut them fresh as often as there was need, but a spell of wet weather had hindered her from her river-side rambles of late, with the consequence that the supply was unwontedly low.

“Oh, any one can do Keren Happuch’s work and feel nothing added to her toil,” was the sharp response. “Small use are her hands in any kitchen. We had better make up our minds to wed her to a fine gentleman, who wants naught of his wife but to dress up in grand gowns, and smirk and simper over her fan; for no useful work will he get out of her. If rushes are wanted, she had better go quickly and cut them—

“And mind, do not stray too far along the banks, child; and watch the sky, and be in before the sun is down. The evenings draw in so quick now; and I would not have you abroad after nightfall for all the gold of Ophir.”

Cherry had no desire for such a thing to happen either. London in the darkness of the night was a terrible place. Out from all the dens of Whitefriars and other like places swarmed the ruffian and criminal population that by day slunk away like evil beasts of night into hiding. The streets were made absolutely perilous by the bands of cutthroats and cutpurses who prowled about, setting upon belated pedestrians or unwary travellers, and robbing, insulting, and maltreating them—not unfrequently leaving the wretched victim dead or dying, to be found later by the cowardly watchman, who generally took good care not to be near the spot at the time of the affray. Ladies of quality never went abroad unattended even by day; but Cherry was no fine lady, and Martin Holt had no notion of encouraging the child’s native vanity by making any difference betwixt her and her sisters. Jemima and Keziah had been always accustomed to go about in the neighbourhood of their home unmolested,

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and thought nothing of it; and though Cherry's rosy cheeks, slim, graceful figure, and bright, laughing eyes might chance to take the fancy of some bold roisterer or dandy, and lead to an address which might frighten or annoy the maid, her father considered this the less danger than bringing her up to think herself too captivating to go about unguarded; and up till now she had met with no unwelcome admiration or annoyance of any kind in her limited rovings.

So she set forth blithely this afternoon, her cloak and hood muffling well both face and figure, her clogs on her feet, since the river bank would be muddy and treacherous at this time of year, and a long, open basket on her arm, thinking of nothing but the delights of escaping from the weary monotony of pastry making and herb shredding, and from the overpowering odour of that mysterious herring pie. Cherry liked well enough to eat of it when it was placed upon the board, but she always wished she had not known anything of the process; she thought she should enjoy it so much the more.

Crossing the bridge, and exchanging many greetings as she tripped along, for every neighbour was in some sort a friend, and bright-eyed Cherry was a favourite with all—-she turned to the right as she quitted the bridge, and walked in a westerly direction along the river bank, towards the great beds of reeds and rushes that stretched away in endless succession so soon as the few houses and gardens springing up on this side the river had been passed by.

Certainly there was no lack of green rushes. The autumn had been mild, and though the past few days had been chill and biting, it had not told to any great extent upon the rushes yet. Cherry plunged eagerly amongst them, selecting and cutting with a precision and rapidity that told of long practice. She was resolved to take home as many as ever she could carry, and these all of the best, since the supply would soon cease, and she knew the difference in the lasting power of the full, thick rushes and the little flimsy ones.

But it was later than she had known when she left home. The brightness of the sunshine had deceived her, and she had been detained a few minutes upon the bridge, first by one and then by another, all asking kindly questions of her. Then her fastidious selection of her rushes caused her to wander further and further along the banks in search of prizes; and when at last her big basket was quite full, and correspondingly heavy, she looked round her with a start almost of dismay; for the gray twilight was already settling down over the dark river, and she was full a mile away from home, with a heavy load to carry.

Cherry's heart fluttered a little, but it was rather in fear of her aunt's displeasure than of any mischance likely to happen to herself. She had been often to these osier beds, and had never encountered a living soul there, and she would soon reach the region of walls

and gardens that adjoined the southern end of the bridge. So taking her basket on her arm, she pushed her way upwards from the river to the path along which lay her road, and turning her face homeward, made all the haste she could to get back.

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But how dark it looked to the eastward! Did ever evening close in so fast? And how black and cold the river looked! She never remembered to have seen it quite so cheerless and gloomy before. A thick white fog was rising from the marshy lands, and she could not see the friendly twinkling lights upon the bridge. Despite her exertions, which were great, she felt chill and shivery; and when at last she heard the sound of a lusty shout behind her, her heart seemed to stand still with terror, and she stopped short and gazed wildly back, to see whence the noise came.

What she saw by no means reassured her. Some fifty yards behind, but mounted on fine horses, were two young gentlemen, plainly in a state of tipsy merriment, and by no means disposed to allow any prey, in the shape of a woman old or young, to escape them without some sort of pleasantry on their part. Cherry heard their laughter and their coarse words without understanding what it all meant; but a great terror took hold of her, and leaving her basket in the middle of the path, in the vain hope of tripping up the tipsy riders, she fled wildly along in the direction of home. Her hood falling back, disclosed her pretty floating curls beneath, and so gave greater zest to the pursuit. Fleet of foot she might be, but what availed that against the speed of the two fine horses? She heard their galloping hoofs closer and closer behind her. She knew that they were almost up with her now. Even the osier beds would afford her no protection from horsemen, and she feared to trust herself to the slippery ooze when the daylight had fled. With a short, sharp cry she sank upon the ground, exhausted and half dead with terror, and she heard the brutal shout of triumph with which the roisterers hailed this sight.

In another moment they would be upon her. She heard them shouting to their horses as they pulled them up. But was there not another sound, too? What was the meaning of that fierce demand in a very different voice? She lifted her head to see a third rider spurring up at a hand gallop, and before she had time to make up her mind whether or not this was a third foe, or a defender suddenly arisen as it were from the very heart of the earth, she felt herself covered as by some protecting presence, and heard a firm voice above her saying:

“The first man who dares attempt to touch her I shoot dead!”

There was a great deal of blustering and swearing and hectoring. Cherry, still crouched upon the ground, shivered at the hideous imprecations levelled at her protector, and feared every moment to see him struck to the ground. But he held his position unflinchingly, and the tipsy gallants contented themselves with vituperation and hard words. Perhaps they thought the game not worth the candle. Perhaps they deemed a simple city maid not worth the trouble of an encounter. Perhaps they were too unsteady on their legs to desire to provoke the hostile overtures

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of this tall, dark-faced stripling, who appeared ready to do battle with the pair of them, and that without the least fear. At any rate, after much hard swearing, the estimable comrades mounted their horses again, and rode on in the gathering darkness; whilst Cherry felt herself lifted up with all courtesy and reverence, and a pleasant voice asked in bashful accents, very unlike the firm, defiant tones addressed to her persecutors, whether she were hurt.

“Not hurt, only frightened, fair sir,” answered Cherry, beginning to recover her breath and her self possession, as she divined that her protector was now more embarrassed at the situation than she was herself. “How can I thank you for your timely help? I was well nigh dead with terror till I heard your voice holding them at bay. Right bold it was of you to come to my assistance when you had two foes against you.”

“Nay, fair lady, I were less than a man had I stayed for twenty.”

“I like you none the less for your brave words, sir, and I believe that you have courage to face an army. But I may not linger here even to speak my thanks. I shall be in sore disgrace at home for tarrying out thus long in the dark.”

“But you will grant to me to see you safe to your door, lady?”

“Ay, truly will I, an you will,” answered Cherry, as much from real nervous fear as from the coquetry which made such companionship pleasant. “But I would fain go back a few paces for my poor reeds, that I go not home empty handed. And you must catch your steed, Sir Knight; he seems disposed to wander away at his own will.”

“My steed will come at a call. He is a faithful beast, and not addicted to errant moods. Let us fetch your basket, lady, and then to your home.

“Is this it? Prithee, let me carry it; its weight is too much for you. See, I will place it so on Dobbin’s broad back, and then we can jog along easily together.”

Cherry, her fears allayed, and her imaginative fancy pleased by the termination to this adventure, chatted gaily to her tall companion; and as they neared the bridge with its many twinkling lights, she pointed out one of the houses in the middle, and told her companion that she dwelt there. His face turned eagerly upon her at hearing that.

“I am right glad to hear it, for perchance you can then direct me to the dwelling of Master Martin Holt, the wool stapler, if he yet plies his trade there as his father did before him.”

“Martin Holt!” cried Cherry, eagerly interrupting. “Why, good sir, Martin Holt is my father.”

The young man stopped short in amaze, and then said slowly, “Verily, this is a wondrous hap, for Martin Holt is mine own uncle. I am Cuthbert Trevlyn, the son of his sister Bridget.”

Chapter 6: Martin Holt’s Supper Party.

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Six o'clock was the almost universal hour for supper amongst the well-to-do classes, both gentle and simple, and Martin Holt's family sat down to the well-spread board punctually to the minute every day of their lives. But though there was no eating before that hour, the invited guests who were intimate at the house generally arrived about dusk, and were served with hot ginger wine with lumps of butter floating in it, or some similar concoction accounted a delicacy in those days of coarse feeding, and indulged in discussion and conversation which was the preliminary to the serious business of supper.

At four o'clock, then, Mistress Susan's table was set, the homespun cloth of excellent texture and whiteness spread upon the board, which was further adorned by plates and tankards, knives and even forks, though these last-named articles were quite a novelty, and rather lightly esteemed by Mistress Susan, who was a rigid conservative in all domestic matters. All the cold provisions had been laid upon the table. The serving woman in the kitchen had received full instruction as to those that remained in or about the stove. The ladies had doffed their big aprons, and had donned their Sunday coifs and kerchiefs and better gowns, and were now assembled in the upper parlour, where the spinning wheels stood, ready to receive the guests when they should come.

Cherry's absence had not yet excited any uneasiness, although her aunt had made one or two severe remarks as to her love for junketing abroad, and frivolity in general. Her sisters had laid out her dress in readiness for her, and had taken her part with their accustomed warmth and goodwill. They were not at all afraid of her not turning up safe and sound. Cherry had many friends, and it was just as likely as not that she would stop and gossip all along the bridge as she came home. She took something of the privilege of a spoiled child, despite her aunt's rigid training. She knew her sisters never looked askance at her; that her father found it hard to scold severely, however grave he might try to look to please Aunt Susan; and it was perfectly well known in the house that she had no liking for those grave debates that formed the prelude to the supper downstairs. It was like enough she would linger without as long as she dared, and then spend as much time as possible strewing her rushes and dressing herself, so that she should not have long to listen to the talk of the elders.

Jemima and Keziah had long since trained themselves to that perfect stillness and decorous silence that was deemed fitting for women, and especially young women, in presence of their elders, They had even begun to take a certain interest in the questions discussed. But to Cherry it was simple penance to have to sit for one hour or more, her tongue and her active limbs alike chained, and her sisters were quite prepared for the absence of the younger girl when the guests dropped in one by one.

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Their uncle, Abraham Dyson, was the first arrival, and behind him followed his son and daughter, Jacob and Rachel. Rachel was a buxom young woman of five-and-twenty, shortly to be advanced to the dignity of a wedded wife. She would have been married before but for the feeble health of her mother; but the ceremony was not to be postponed much longer on that account, for fear the bridegroom, a silk mercer in thriving way of business, should grow weary of delay, and seek another partner for his hand and home. But Abraham Dyson saw another way of getting his sick wife properly looked to, and had whispered his notion in the ear of his brother-in-law. The Dysons and the Holts had had intimate business dealing with each other for generations, and there had been many matrimonial connections between them in times past. Martin himself had married Abraham's sister, and he listened with equanimity and pleasure to the proposal to ally one of his daughters with the solid and stolid Jacob.

Jacob was not much to look at, but he would be a man of considerable substance in time, and he had a shrewd head enough for business. As it had not pleased Providence to bless Martin Holt with sons, the best he could do was to find suitable husbands for his daughters, and seek amongst his sons-in-law for one into whose hands his business might worthily be intrusted. Daughters were still, and for many generations later, looked upon very much in the light of chattels to be disposed of at will by their parents and guardians, and it had not entered honest Martin's head that his wilful little Cherry would dare to set up her will in opposition to his.

Jacob, who had been taken into the confidence of his elders, had expressed his preference for the youngest of his three cousins; and though not a word had been spoken to the girl upon the subject as yet, Martin looked upon the matter as settled.

Scarcely had the bustle of the first arrivals died down before the remaining two guests arrived—a tall, bent man with the face of a student and book lover, followed by his son, also a man of rather distinguished appearance for his station in life. The two Coles, father and son, were amongst those many Roman Catholic sufferers who had been ruined on account of their religion during the last reign; and now they gained a somewhat scanty livelihood by keeping a second-hand book shop on the bridge, selling paper and parchment and such like goods, and acting as scriveners to any who should desire to avail themselves of their skill in penmanship.

They were both reputed to be men of considerable learning, and as they had fallen from a different position, they were looked up to with a certain amount of respect. Some were disposed to sneer at and flout them, but they were on the whole well liked amongst their neighbours. They were very quiet people, and never spoke one word of the matters which came to their knowledge through the letters they were from time to time called upon to write. Almost every surrounding family had in some sort or another intrusted them with some family secret or testamentary deposition, and would on this account alone have been averse to quarrelling with them, for fear they might let out the secret.

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Martin found his neighbour Anthony by far the most interesting of his acquaintances, and the fact of this common disappointment in the new King, and the common persecution instituted against both Romanists and Puritans, had drawn them more together of late than ever before. Both were men of considerable enlightenment of mind; both desired to see toleration extended to all (though each might have regarded with more complacency an act of uniformity that strove to bring all men to his own particular way of thinking and worship), and both agreed in a hearty contempt for the mean and paltry King, who had made such lavish promises in the days of his adversity, only to cancel them the moment he had the power, and fling himself blindly into the arms of the dominant faction of the Episcopacy.

All the guests were cordially welcomed by the family of Martin Holt. The three elder men sat round the fire, and plunged into animated discussion almost at once. Jacob Dyson got into a chair somehow beside Keziah, and stared uneasily round the room; whilst Walter Cole took up his position beside Jemima, and strove to entertain her by the account of some tilting and artillery practice (as archery was still called) that he had been witnessing in Spital Fields. He spoke of the courage and prowess of the young Prince of Wales, and how great a contrast he presented to his father. The contempt that was beginning to manifest itself towards the luckless James in his English subjects was no more plainly manifested than in the London citizens. Elizabeth, with all her follies and her faults, had been the idol of London, as her father before her. Now a reaction had set in, and no scorn could be too great for her undignified and presumptuous successor. This contempt was well shown by the dry reply of the Lord Mayor some few years later, when the King, in a rage at being refused a loan he desired of the citizens, threatened to remove his Court and all records and jewels from the Tower and Westminster Hall to another place, as a mark of his displeasure. The Lord Mayor listened calmly to this terrible threat, and then made submissive answer.

“Your Majesty hath power to do what you please,” he said, “and your city of London will obey accordingly; but she humbly desires that when your Majesty shall remove your Courts, you would graciously please to leave the Thames behind you.”

But to return to the house on the bridge and the occupants of Martin Holt’s parlour. Whilst Jemima and Keziah listened eagerly to the stories of the student’s son, with the delight natural to Puritan maidens denied any participation in such scenes of merriment, Jacob was looking rather dismally round the room, and presently broke in with the question:

“But where, all this time, is Cherry?”

“Strewing rushes in the eating parlour, I doubt not,” answered Keziah. “She went out a while back to cut them. She loveth not dry disputings and learned talk. Belike she will linger below till nigh on the supper hour an Aunt Susan call her not.”

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“I love not such disputings neither,” said Jacob, with unwonted energy. “Good Kezzie, let us twain slip below to help Cherry over her task.”

Keziah gave a quick glance at the face of her stern aunt, who loved not this sort of slipping away during times of ceremony; but she had her back to them and to the door, and was engrossed in the talk as well as in the stocking fabric upon her needles. Jemima and Walter were still talking unrebuked in a low key. Perchance this flitting could be accomplished without drawing down either notice or remark. To please Jacob, Keziah would have done much, even to running the risk of a scolding from her aunt. She had none of saucy Cherry’s scorn of the big boorish fellow with the red face and hairy hands. She looked below the surface, and knew that a kindly heart beat beneath the ungainly habit; and being but plain herself, Keziah would have taken shame to herself for thinking scorn of another for a like defect.

Putting her finger on her lip in token of caution, she effected a quiet retreat, and the next moment the two cousins stood flushed but elated in the eating parlour below. But though it was now past five o’clock, there was no sign of Cherry or her rushes, and Keziah looked both surprised and uneasy.

“Belike she came in with dirty clogs and skirt, and has gone up to her bed chamber to change them, for fear of Aunt Susan telling her she was cluttering up the parlour,” said the sister, anxiously. “I will run and see. Sure she can never have lingered so late beside the river! The sun has been long down, and the fog is rising.”

Keziah tripped upstairs lightly enough, but speedily came down with a grave face.

“She is not there,” was her answer to Jacob’s glance of inquiry. “What must we do? If we make a coil about it, and she comes in, having only gossiped awhile with the neighbours along the bridge, aunt will surely chide her sharply, and send her to bed supperless. But if she should have met some mischance—” and Keziah broke off, looking frightened enough, for it was no light matter to meet mischance alone and unprotected in the dark.

“I will go forth to seek her,” cried Jacob, with unwonted animation. “It boots not for a man to be abroad after dark, but for a maid it is an ill tiding indeed. Which way went she? to the osier beds! Sure I must find her ere long. Were it not well for me to go, good Kezzie?”

“I would that some would go, but I trow thou hadst better not adventure thyself alone. Belike Master Walter would be thy companion. If there be peril abroad, it is better there should be twain than one. And you will want lanterns and stout staffs, too.”

“Run thou and light the lanterns, good coz, and I will to Walter and ask his company. It grows thicker and darker every moment. If Cherry be not within, it behoves us to make search for her.”

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Keziah's face was pale with terror as she flew to do Jacob's bidding. She had a terrible fear of London streets, at night, as well she might, and the open country beyond was even worse to her excited imagination. And Cherry was so pretty, so simple, so credulous, and withal so utterly defenceless should there be any sort of attack made upon her. Keziah's hands shook as she lighted the lantern; and as minutes were fast slipping away and still there was no sign of the truant, she was rather relieved than terrified to hear the sharp accents of her aunt's voice mingling with her father's deeper tones as the whole party came tramping down the stairs. It was plain that Jacob had let the secret ooze out, and that all the company had become alarmed. Cherry's name was on all lips, and Martin was asking his sister somewhat sternly why she had overlooked the non-return of the girl at dusk.

Miss Susan was sharply defending herself on the score of her manifold duties and Cherry's well-known gadding propensities. She never looked to see her home before dusk, as she was certain to stay out as long as she dared, and since then she had taken it for granted that the little hussy had come in, and was doing over the floor with her rushes.

Martin paid small heed to this shrill torrent of words, but with anxious face was pulling on his long outer hoots, and selecting the stoutest oaken staff of the number stacked in the corner, inviting his guests to arm themselves in like fashion.

Jemima and Keziah, feeling as though some blame attached to them, looked on with pale faces, whilst Rachel chattered volubly of the horrors she had often heard of as being perpetrated in the streets. Her brother turned upon her roughly at last, and bid her cease her ill-omened croaking; whereat she tossed her head and muttered a good many scornful interjections, and "could not see why she need be called to task like that."

The whole party descended to the door when the preparations for the start were complete. It was striking half after five on many of the city clocks as Martin threw open his door. But he had scarcely stepped across the threshold before he heard a familiar little shriek; there was a rush of steps from somewhere in the darkness without, and Cherry, with an abandon very foreign to the times and her training, and indicative of much agitation and emotion, flung herself upon his breast, and threw her arms about his neck.

"Here I am, father; there has no hurt befallen me!" she cried in broken gasps. "But I know not what fearful thing was like to have happened had it not been for the help of this gallant gentleman, who came in the very nick of time to drive off my assailants and bring me safe home. And oh, my father, such a wonderful thing! I can scarce believe it myself! This gentleman is no stranger; leastways he may not so be treated, for he is our very own flesh and blood—my cousin, thy nephew. He is Cuthbert Trevlyn, son to that sister Bridget of thine of whom we have sometimes heard thee speak!"

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A strange dead silence fell on the group clustered in the doorway with lanterns and staffs. All looked out into the darkness in a mist of perplexity and doubt, to see, as their eyes grew used to the obscurity, the tall figure of a slim, dark-faced youth standing beside a tired-looking horse, and steadying upon the saddle a large basket of rushes.

Martin Holt, after one minute of utter silence, released the clinging arms from about his neck, pushed Cherry not ungently towards her sisters, and stepped forward towards her preserver.

“This is a strange thing my daughter tells me, young sir,” he said, as he scanned the horseman’s face narrowly by the light of his lantern. “I find it hard to credit my senses. Art sure that she has understood thee aright? Is Cuthbert Trevlyn truly thy name?”

“Ay, truly it is; and my mother’s was Bridget Holt, and she left her home long years ago as waiting maid to my Lady Adelaide de Grey, and led a happy life till some evil hap threw her across the path of Nicholas Trevlyn, who made her his wife. I trow she many a time rued the day when she was thus persuaded; but repentance came too late, and death soon relieved her of her load of misery. That she bequeathed to her children; and here am I this day a wanderer from my father’s house, constrained to seek shelter from her kindred, since flesh and blood can no longer endure the misery of dwelling beneath his roof.”

“Jacob,” said Martin Holt, “take yon steed to the stables of Master Miller, and ask him for fodder and tendance for the beast for this night.

“Young sir, thou hast a strange story to tell, and I would hear it anon. If thou hadst not succoured my daughter in her hour of need, I must have bid thee welcome to my house and my table. Since thou hast done this also, I do it the more readily. I scarce knew that my misguided sister had borne a son. Whether he lived or died I had no means of knowing. But if thou art he, come in, and be welcome. I will hear thy tale anon. Meantime stand no longer without in the cold.”

If this welcome were something coldly given, Cuthbert was not aware of it. Used as he was to his father’s fierce sullenness and taciturnity, any other manner seemed warm and pleasant. He followed this new uncle up the dark staircase without any misgiving, and found himself quickly in the well-warmed and well-lighted eating parlour, where Mistress Susan was already bustling about in a very noisy fashion, getting the viands ready for serving. A dark frown was on her face, and her whole aspect was thundery.

The sisters and Rachel had all vanished upstairs to hear Cherry’s story as they got her ready for the supper table, excitement in this new arrival of an unknown kinsman having saved the girl from any chiding or questioning from father or aunt. The Coles, father and son, had returned to the upper parlour with the discretion and refinement of feeling

natural to them; so that only Abraham Dyson witnessed the next scene in the little domestic drama, for Jacob had obediently gone off with the horse.

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Martin Holt pushed his nephew before him into the lighted room, and looked him well over from head to foot.

“There is little of thy mother about thee, boy,” he said, with some stern bitterness of tone. “I fear me thou art all thy father’s son.”

“My father says not so,” answered Cuthbert, facing his uncle fearlessly. “He has flung it again and yet again in my teeth that I am the heretic son of my heretic mother.”

Martin Holt uttered an inarticulate exclamation and came a step nearer.

“Say that again, boy—say that again! Can it be true that thy unhappy and deluded mother repented of her Popish errors ere she died, and turned back to the pure faith of her childhood? If that be so, it is like a mill stone rolled from off my heart. I have wept for her all these years as for one of the lost.”

“I was too young when she died to remember aught of her teaching, but I have seen those who tell me she was fearfully unhappy with my father, and abjured his faith ere she died. I know that he reviles her memory, and he forbids even her children to speak of her. He would scarce have branded her with the hateful name of heretic had she adhered to his faith till her death.”

“Susan, dost hear that?” cried Martin Holt, turning exultantly to his sister. “It was as our mother fondly said. She was not lost for ever; she returned to her former faith. Nay, I doubt not that in some sort she died for it—died through the harshness and sternness of her husband. Susan, dost hear—dost understand?”

But Susan only turned a sour face towards her brother.

“I hear,” she answered ungraciously. “But the boy has doubtless been bred a Papist. Who can believe a word he says? Doubtless he has been sent here to corrupt your daughters, as Bridget was corrupted by his father. I would liefer put my hand in the maw of a mad dog than my faith in the word of a Papist.”

Cuthbert did not wince beneath this harsh speech, he was too well inured to such; he only looked at his aunt with grave curiosity as he answered thoughtfully:

“Methinks it is something hard to believe them, always. Yet I have known them speak sooth as well as other men. But I myself would sooner put confidence in the word of one of the other faith. They hold not with falsehood in a good cause as our father confessors do. Wherefore, if it were for that alone, I would sooner be a heretic, albeit there be many things about my father’s faith that I love and cling to.”

This answer caused Martin to look more closely at his nephew, discerning in him something of the fearless Puritan spirit, as well as that instinctive desire to weigh and

judge for himself that was one of his own characteristics. Papist the lad might be by training and inheritance, but it was plain that at present he was no bigot. He would not strive to corrupt his cousins; rather were they likely to influence and draw him.

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Susan flounced back to the kitchen without another word, only muttering to herself prognostications of evil if such a popinjay were admitted into the household. Not that Cuthbert's sober riding suit merited such a criticism, for there was nothing fine about it at all; yet it had been fashionably cut in its day, and still had the nameless air that always clings to a thoroughly well-made garment, even when it has seen its best days; and the Puritans were already beginning to show, by their plain and severe dress, their contempt for frivolity and extravagance, though the difference between their clothes and those of other men was not so marked as it became in the next reign.

However, there was not much more time for conversation on private themes. Jacob returned from stabling the horse; the girls from above descended, full of curiosity about this new cousin. The Coles, father and son, joined the party assembled round the table, and were introduced to Cuthbert, whom, as a Trevlyn, they regarded with considerable interest, and then the guests and the family were all placed—Mistress Susan and the two elder nieces only seating themselves at the last, when they had finished putting all the savoury dishes on the table. Cuthbert's eyes grew round with amaze at the sight of all the good cheer before him. Even at Trevlyn Chase he had never seen quite such an array of dishes and meats; and as he was the greatest stranger and a traveller to boot, he was helped with the greatest liberality, and pressed to partake of every dish.

Cherry was called upon for an account of her adventures, and was chidden sharply by her aunt for her folly and carelessness after being warned not to be overtaken by the darkness. But her father was too thankful to have her safe home to say much; and Rachel, who sat on Cuthbert's other side, plied him with questions about his own share in the adventure, and praised him in warm terms for his heroism, till the lad grew shamefaced and abashed, and was glad when the talk drifted away from private to public matters, and he could listen without being called upon to speak.

Moreover, he was all eagerness to hear what he could of such topics. He knew so little what was stirring in the country, and was eager to learn more. He kept hearing the words "Bye" and "Main" bandied about amongst the speakers, and at last he asked his neighbour in a whisper what was meant by the terms.

"Marry, two villainous Popish plots," answered Rachel, who was glib enough with her tongue. "And many heads have fallen already, and perhaps more will yet fall; for Sir Walter Raleigh is still in the Tower, and my Lord Grey, too. Confusion to all traitors and plotters, say I! Why cannot men live pleasantly and easily? They might well do so, an they would cease from their evil practices, and from making such a coil about what hurts none. If they would but go to church like sensible Christians, nobody would have a word against them; but they are like mules and pigs, and they can neither be led nor driven straight. I go to church every Sunday of my life, and what there is to fall foul of I never can guess. But men be such blind, obstinate fools, they must always be putting a rope round their necks. They say London is seething now with plots, and no man can feel safe for a day nor an hour."

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Cuthbert gave one swift backward thought to his companion of the road and the strange words he had uttered; and he asked with increasing interest of his lively neighbour:

“But what do men think to gain by such plots? What is the object of them?”

“Beshrew me if I know or care! My father says they be all mad together, the moonstruck knaves! They say that the ‘Bye’ was an attempt to make prisoner of the King’s Majesty, and to keep him in captivity till he had sworn to change his laws and his ministers—as they say was done once in Scotland, when he was trying to rule his turbulent subjects there. As for the ‘Main,’ that was worse; nothing better than the murder of the King and Royal family, so that the Lady Arabella might be Queen in his stead. But neither came to good; it seemeth to me that these villainous plots never do, And all that results from them is that the laws are made harsher and harsher, and men groan and writhe under them, and curse the King and his ministers, when they had better be cursing their own folly and wickedness in trying to overthrow the government of their lawful rulers.”

“That is one side of the question, Mistress Rachel,” said Walter Cole, in his quiet voice; “but if none had ever revolted against tyranny, we had all been slaves this day instead of a free nation of subjects, imposing our just will upon a sovereign in return for the privileges he grants us. There be limits to endurance. There be times when those limits are over past, and to submit becomes weakness and coward folly. Thou speakest as one swimming easily with the stream. Thou knowest little of the perils of the shoals and quicksands.”

Rachel tossed her head, but was too wary to be drawn into an argument with the man of books. She could air her father’s opinions second hand with an assumption of great assurance, but she was no hand at argument or fence, and had no desire for an encounter of wits.

But Cuthbert stepped eagerly into the breach, and the two men became engrossed in talk. Cuthbert heard of acts of tyranny and oppression, cruel punishments and ruinous fines imposed upon hapless Romanists, guiltless of any other offence than of growing up in the faith of their forefathers. He heard, on the other hand, of Puritan preachers deprived of their cures and hunted about like criminals, though nothing save the crime of unlicensed preaching could be adduced against them. Cuthbert’s blood was young and hot, and easily stirred within him. He began to understand how it was that the nation and this great city were never at rest. It seemed to him as though he had stepped down out of a region of snow and ice into the very crater of some smouldering volcano which might at any moment burst out into flames. The sensation was strange and a little intoxicating. He marvelled how he had been content so long to know so little of the great world in which he lived.

The party broke up all too soon for him; but after the guests had gone he had yet another interview to go through with his uncle, after the womenkind had been dismissed to bed.

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Firstly, Martin questioned the boy closely as to the circumstances of his past life—his relations with his father, his training, intellectual and religious, and his final resolve to escape, carried out by the help of Sir Richard and his family. Next, he went on to ask the youth of his wishes concerning his future; and finding these as vague as might be expected from his vast inexperience, he smiled, and said that question could stand over for the present. There was no difficulty about employing talent and energy in this city of London; and if his nephew developed capacity in any direction, it could doubtless be turned to good account. Meantime he had better dwell beneath this roof, and accustom himself to new ways and new sights, after which they would talk of his future again.

Nothing could be more to Cuthbert's mind than such a decision; but when he tried to express his gratitude, he was speedily silenced.

"Not a word, boy; not a word! Thou art a near kinsman. Thou hast had a hard life with thy father, and having claimed the protection of thy mother's brother, shalt have it, and welcome. But now to another matter. How art thou off for money? I trow by what thou sayest of thy father that he had little to give or spend."

"He never gave me aught in his life save the poor clothes and food that were needful. My uncle gave me a few gold pieces ere I left—I mean my good cousin, Sir Richard."

"Ay, boy, ay. But I trow that thine own uncle can do better by thee than that. Didst ever know that thy mother once looked to have a fortune of her own, albeit a modest one?"

Cuthbert shook his head, and Martin rose from his seat and disappeared from the room for a few minutes. When he came back he had a coffer in his hands that seemed to be heavy. He placed it on the table, and went on with his speech as though he had not been interrupted.

"Yes. Our father was a man of substance, and he had but three children—myself, Susan, and Bridget. To me he willed his house, his business, and all the money locked up in that. To Susan and Bridget he divided the savings of his lifetime that had not been used in enlarging the business. There was two thousand pounds apiece for them when he died."

Cuthbert's eyes dilated with astonishment, but he said nothing, and his uncle continued speaking.

"You doubtless marvel why you have received none of this before. I will tell you why. When Bridget married a Papist, our father was in a great rage, and vowed she should never have a penny of his money. He scratched her name out of his will, and bid us never speak her name again. But as he lay a-dying, other thoughts came into his mind, and he was unhappy in this thing. He bid me get together the two thousand pounds that

had once been Bridget's portion, and when I did so—with some trouble at a short notice—he counted it all over, and with his own hands locked it away

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in this chest "—laying his hand on the weighty iron-bound box. "Then he turned to me and said, 'Martin, I verily believe that thy sister is dead. Something tells me that I shall see her before I see any of you. The dead are ever forgiven. Take this coffer and keep it for thy sister's children, if she have had the misfortune to bring children into this world of sorrow. Keep it for them till they be grown. Let not their evil father know aught of it. And even then be cautious. Prove and see if they be worthy of wealth—if they will make good use of it. It is thine in trust for them. Keep or withhold as thou thinkest right; but be honest and be true, so shall my blessing follow thee even after death.' Those were amongst the last words he spoke. I took the chest, and I have kept it until now. I have thought often of it; but no word reached me of my sister, and time has failed me to seek her abroad. I knew her children, if any lived, could but just have reached man or woman's estate, and I have waited to see what would chance.

"Cuthbert Trevlyn, this chest and all it contains may one day be thine. I give it not yet into thy keeping, for I must prove thee first; but I tell thee what is within it and what was thy grand sire's charge, that thou mayest know I have no desire save to do what is right by thee and thy sister, and that I trust and hope the day may come when I may deliver the chest to thee, to divide with her the portion bequeathed to your hapless mother."

Cuthbert's astonishment was so great he hardly knew what to say. For himself he cared but little. He was a man, and could fight his own way in the world. But those golden coins would make a dowry for his sister that many a high-born dame might envy. A flush came into his cheek as he thought of Philip's eager words overheard by him. If Petronella was the mistress of a fair fortune, why should any forbid them to be wed?

Martin liked the lad none the less that his first thought was for his sister. But for the present Petronella was beneath her father's roof, and could not be benefited thereby. Still, it would be something for Cuthbert to know, and to look forward to in the future, and therein he rejoiced.

The chest was carefully restored to its hiding place and securely locked away, and then the kindly uncle took from his own pocket a small purse and put it into the reluctant hands of the lad.

"Nay, nay, thou must not be proud, boy; though I like thee none the less for thy pride and thine independence of spirit. But thou must not be penniless as thou goest about this city; and if one uncle gave thee gold, why not another? So no more words about it. Take it, and begone to thy chamber; for we are simple folks that keep early hours, and I am generally abed an hour ere this."

So Cuthbert went to his queer little attic chamber beneath the high-pitched gable, with a mind confused yet happy, and limbs very weary with travel. Yet sleep fell upon him

almost before his head touched the pillow, for he had slept but brokenly since leaving his father's house, and nature, in spite of all obstacles, was claiming her due at last.

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Chapter 7: The Life Of A Great City.

And so a new life began for Cuthbert beneath the roof of his uncle.

He found favour in the sight of Martin Holt because of his unpretending ways, his willingness, nay, his eagerness to learn, his ready submission to the authority exercised by the master of the house upon all beneath his roof, and the absence of anything like presumption or superciliousness on his nephew's part on the score of his patrician birth on his father's side. Trevlyn though he was, the lad conformed to all the ways and usages of the humbler Holts; and even Mistress Susan soon ceased to look sourly at him, for she found him as amenable to her authority as to that of Martin, and handy and helpful in a thousand little nameless ways.

He was immensely interested in everything about him. He would as willingly sit and baste a capon on the spit as ramble abroad in the streets, if she would but answer his host of inquiries about London, its ways and its sights. Mistress Susan was not above being open to the insidious flattery of being questioned and listened to; and to find herself regarded as an oracle of wisdom and a mine of information could not but be soothing to her vanity, little as she knew that she possessed her share of that common feminine failing.

Then Cuthbert was a warm appreciator of her culinary talents. The poor boy, who had lived at the Gate House on the scantiest of commons, and had been kept to oaten bread and water sometimes for a week together for a trifling offence, felt indeed that he had come to a land of plenty when he sat down day after day to his uncle's well-spread table, and was urged to partake of all manner of dishes, the very name of which was unknown to him. His keen relish of her dainties, combined with what seemed to her a very modest consumption of them, pleased Mistress Susan not a little; whilst for his own part Cuthbert began to look heartier and stronger than he had ever done before. The slimness of attenuation was merged in that of wiry strength and muscle. His dark eyes no longer looked out from hollow caverns, and the colour which gradually stole into his brown cheek bespoke increase of health and well being.

Martin and Susan looked on well pleased by the change. They liked the lad, and found his Popery of such a mild kind that they felt no misgiving as to its influence upon the girls. Cuthbert was as willing to go to a privately conducted Puritan service as to mass, and liked the appointed service of the Establishment rather better than either. Martin did not hinder his attending the parish church, though he but rarely put in an appearance himself. He was not one of the bitter opponents of the Establishment, but he was a bitter opponent of persecution for conscience' sake, and he was naturally embittered by the new rigour with which the old laws of conformity were enforced. However, he was true to his principles in that he

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let Cuthbert go his own way freely, and did not forbid Cherry to accompany him sometimes to church, where she found much entertainment and pleasure in watching the fashionable people come and go; and perhaps her father divined that she would give more attention to the mode of the ladies' headgears and hair dressing and the cut of their farthingales than to any matters of doctrine that might be aired in the pulpit.

As for Cuthbert, he drank in voraciously all that he heard and all that he saw in this strange place, which seemed to him like the Babylon of old that the Puritan pastors raved over in their pulpits. He was to be allowed his full liberty for some weeks, to see the sights of the city and learn his way about it. Perhaps after Christmastide his uncle would employ him in his shop or warehouse, but Martin wished to take the measure of the lad before he put him to any task.

So Cuthbert roamed the London streets wondering and amazed. He saw many a street fight waged between the Templars and 'prentices, and got a broken head himself from being swept along the tide of mimic battle. He saw the rude and rabble mob indulging in their favourite pastime of upsetting coaches (hell carts as they chose to dub them), and roaring with laughter as the frightened occupants strove to free themselves from the clumsy vehicles. Cuthbert got several hard knocks as a reward for striving to assist these unlucky wights when they chanced to be ladies; but he was too well used to blows to heed them over much, and could generally give as good as he got.

The fighting instinct often got him into tight places, as when he suddenly found himself surrounded by a hooting mob of ruffians in one of the slums of "Alsatia," as Whitefriars was called, where he had imprudently adventured himself. And this adventure might have well had a fatal termination for him, as this was a veritable den of murderers and villains of the deepest dye, and even the authorities dared not venture within its purlieus to hunt out a missing criminal without a guard of soldiers with them. The abuse of "Sanctuary" was well exemplified by the existing state of things here; and though Cuthbert was doing no ill to any soul, but merely gratifying his curiosity by prowling about the narrow dens and alleys, the cry of "A spy! a spy!" soon brought a mob about him, whilst his readiness to engage in battle caused the tumult to redouble itself in an instant.

The lad had just realized his danger, and faced the fact that the chances of escaping alive were greatly against him, when a window in a neighbouring house was thrown open, and a stern, musical voice exclaimed:

"For shame, my children, for shame! Is it to be one against a hundred? Is that Alsatia's honour? What has the lad done?"

Cuthbert raised his eyes and beheld the tonsured head of a priest clad in a rusty black cassock, who was standing at the only window to be seen in a blank wall somewhat higher than that of the other houses surrounding it. The effect of those words on the angry multitude was wonderful. The hands raised to strike were lowered, and voices on all sides exclaimed:

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“It is Father Urban; we may not withstand him.”

Still the anger of the mob was not calmed in a moment, and fierce voices exclaimed in threatening accents:

“A spy! he is a spy!”

“Then bring him hither to me; I will judge him,” said the priest, in the same tones of calm assurance. “If I find him worthy of death, I will give him over to your hands again.”

“That will do; Father Urban shall judge him!” cried a brawny fellow who seemed to be something of a leader with his fellows. “The Father never lied to us yet. He will give him back if he finds him a spy.”

Cuthbert was now jostled and hustled, but not in the same angry fashion, to a small narrow door in a deep embrasure, and when this door presently swung back on its hinges, the crowd surged quickly backwards as though in some sort afraid. Within the narrow doorway stood the priest, a small, slim man in rusty black, with a crucifix suspended from his rosary, which he held up before the crowd, who most of them crossed themselves with apparent devotion.

“Peace be with you, my children!” was his somewhat incongruous salutation to the blood-thirsty mob; and then turning his bright but benignant eyes upon Cuthbert, he said:

“This is a leper house, my son. Yet methinks thou wilt be safer here a while than in the street. Dost thou fear to enter? If thou dost, we must e’en talk where we are.”

“I have no fear,” answered Cuthbert, who indeed only experienced a lively curiosity.

The priest seemed pleased with the answer, and drew him within the sheltering door; and Cuthbert followed his guide into a long, low room, where a table was spread with trenchers and pitchers, whilst an appetizing odour arose from a saucepan simmering on the fire and stirred by one of the patients, upon whom Cuthbert gazed with fascinated interest.

“He is well nigh cured,” answered the priest. “Our sick abide on the floor above; but there be not many here now. The plague carried off above half our number last year.

“But now of thine own matters, boy: how comest thou hither? Thou art a bold lad to venture a stranger into these haunts, unless thou be fleeing a worse peril from the arm of the law; and neither thy face nor thy dress looks like that. Hast thou not heard of Whitefriars and its perils? or art thou a rustic knave, unversed in the ways of the town?”

Cuthbert told his story frankly enough. He had lost himself in the streets, and was in the forbidden region before he well knew. A few kindly and dexterous questions from Father Urban led him to tell all that there was to know about himself, his parentage and his past; and the priest listened with great attention, scanning the face of the youth narrowly the while.

“Trevlyn—the name is known to us. It was a good old name once, and may be still again. I have seen thy father, Nicholas Trevlyn. It may be I shall see him again one day. Be true to thy father’s faith, boy; be not led away by hireling shepherds. The day is coming on England when the true faith shall spread from end to end of the land, and all heretics shall be confounded! See that thou art in thy place in that day! See that thou art found by thy father’s side in the hour of victory!”

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Cuthbert hung his head a little, and a flush crept into his cheek; but the priest did not appear to heed these slight indications of embarrassment, as he moved slowly up the stairs to the window above to tell the expectant crowd to disperse, as their victim was no spy, but an honest country lad, whose father was known to the priest, and who had lost his way in London, and strayed inadvertently into their midst.

Then the crowd having dispersed to seek fresh amusement, the priest, at Cuthbert's desire, showed him all over this leper house, and told him much respecting the condition of the miserable inmates before they had been admitted to this place of refuge; and Cuthbert gazed with awe-stricken eyes at the scarred and emaciated sufferers, filled with compassion and not loathing, and at last drew forth one of his golden pieces from his purse and asked the priest to expend it for the benefit of the poor lepers.

"That will I gladly do, my son. But I must not let thee linger longer here; for although I myself hold that the whole and sound are not affected by the taint, there be leeches of repute who swear 'tis death to abide long beside the leper."

"Thou hast not found it so, Father. Dost thou live here?"

"Nay, I have no home. I go hither and thither as duty calls me. But I am often here with these sick folks of mine, whom so few men will dare approach unto. But I myself have never been the worse for my ministrations here, and I have no fears for thee, though I would not have thee linger. We will be going now, and I will be thy guide out of these dens of the earth, else might some more untoward thing befall thee when none might be nigh to succour thee."

The priest and the youth passed out together. The early dusk was beginning to fall, and Cuthbert was glad enough of the protection of Father Urban's companionship. All saluted the priest as he passed by, and few even looked askance at his comrade. The influence of these Roman Catholics over the hearts and feelings of the masses has always been very great—something of an enigma and a grievance to those who would fain see naught but evil within the fold of Rome. But facts are stubborn things, and the facts have been in this matter in their favour. England as a nation was slowly but surely throwing off the Papal yoke, and emerging from a region of darkness and superstition. Nevertheless, the influence of the priest was a living and often a beneficent influence amongst the most degraded of the people, and he could and did obtain a reverent hearing when no man else coming in the name of Christ would have been listened to for a single moment.

As the pair moved along the dark, noisome streets, Father Urban spoke again in his quick, imperious way.

“Thou spakest awhile ago of one Master Robert Catesby; hast thou seen aught of him since thy arrival in London?”

“No,” answered Cuthbert; “I have had much else to do and to think of. But I must to him one day, and demand my purse again, else may he think I have been left for dead on the highway.”

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“He is a good man and a true,” said the priest. “Thou wilt do well to keep his friendship an thou mayest. Catesby and Trevlyn come of a good stock; it were well they should consort together.”

Cuthbert recalled some of the strange words spoken by Master Robert on the road, and wondered if he recalled them aright. They seemed to partake of the character of fierce threats. He was not certain that he altogether relished the thought of such friendship.

“Mine uncle might not wish me to consort with him,” said the lad, with a little hesitation. “He is but a wool stapler, as I have told thee, and his friends are simple folks like himself. He meddles not in matters that gentlefolks love. He has no fine company to his house. Since it be my lot to abide beneath his roof—”

“Thou must needs conform to his ways; is that so, boy?” asked the Father, interrupting the rather lame and confused speech, and smiling as he did so. “Ay, conform, conform! Conformity is the way of the world today! I would not bid thee do otherwise. Yet one bit of counsel will I give thee ere we part. Think not that thou canst not conform and yet do thy duty by the true faith, too. Be a careful, watchful inmate of thine uncle’s house; yet fear not to consort with good men, too, when thy chance comes. Thou needst not tell thine uncle all. Thou hast reached man’s estate, and it is ordained of God that men should shake off the fetters that bind them in youth, and act and judge for themselves. My counsel is this: be wary, be prudent, be watchful, and lose no opportunity of gaining the trust of all men. So wilt thou one day live to do service to many; and thou wilt better understand my words the longer thou livest in this great city, and learnest more of what is seething below the surface of men’s lives.”

And with a few words of dismissal and blessing the Father sent Cuthbert on his way, standing still and looking after him till the slight figure was lost to sight in the darkness.

“There goes a man who by his face might have a great future before him,” mused the priest. “It is with such faces as that that men have gone to prison and to death.”

Cuthbert bent his steps towards the bridge, interested and excited by his recent adventure, his thoughts directed into a new channel, his memory recalling the first companion of his lonely journey, and the charm of that companion’s personality and address. So many other things had passed since, impressions had jostled so quickly one upon the other, that he had scarce thought again of Master Robert Catesby or the purse he had to claim from him. His new uncle’s liberality had made him rich, and a certain natural reserve had held him silent in his Puritan relative’s house about any person not likely to find favour in Martin Holt’s estimation. He had been equally reticent about his strange adventure with the gipsies, though he scarce knew why he should not speak of that. But, as a matter of fact, every day brought with it such a crowd of new impressions that the earlier ones had already partially faded from his mind.

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But the words of the priest had awakened a new train of thought. Cuthbert resolved not to delay longer the reclamation of his own property. He spoke to Cherry that same evening about his lost purse, giving her a brief account of his ride across Hammerton Heath, and she was eager for him to ask his own, lest he should lose it altogether.

“For gay gallants are not always to be trusted, for all that they look so fine and speak so fair,” she said, nodding her pretty curly head, an arch smile in her big gray eyes. “I have heard my father say so a hundred times. I would go quickly and claim mine own again. But tell me the rest of the adventure. What didst thou, left thus alone upon the lone heath? I trow it was an unmanly and unmannerly act to leave thee thus. What befell thee then?”

Cuthbert looked round cautiously; but there was no one listening to the chatter of this pair of idlers in the window. Mistress Susan’s voice was heard below scolding the serving wench, and Martin Holt was poring over some big ledger whilst Jemima called over the figures of a heap of bills. Keziah was at her spinning wheel, which hummed merrily in the red firelight; and Cherry was seizing advantage of her aunt’s absence to chatter instead of work.

Cherry had from the first been Cuthbert’s confidante and friend. It was taken for granted by this time that this should be so. Nobody was surprised to see them often together, and Cherry had never found the house on the bridge so little dull as when Cuthbert came in night by night to give her the most charming and exciting accounts of his doings and adventures. Once, too, she had gone with him to see some sights. They had paraded Paul’s Walk together, and Cuthbert had been half scandalized and wholly astonished to see a fine church desecrated to a mere fashionable promenade and lounging place and mart. They had watched some gallants at their tennis playing another day, and had even been present at the baiting of a bear, when they had come unawares upon the spectacle in their wanderings. But Cuthbert’s ire had been excited through his humanity and love for dumb animals, and Cherry had been frightened and sickened by the brutality of the spectacle. And when Martin Holt had inveighed against the practice with all a Puritan’s vehemence, Cuthbert had cordially agreed, and had thus drawn as it were one step nearer the side of the great coming controversy which his uncle had embraced.

These expeditions together had naturally drawn the cousins into closer bonds of intimacy. Cherry felt privileged to ask questions of Cuthbert almost at will, and he had no wish to hide anything from her.

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“I will tell thee that adventure some day when we are alone,” he answered. “I have often longed to share the tale with thee, but we have had so much else to speak of. I was taken prisoner by the robbers, and conveyed to a ruined mill, where some of their comrades and some wild gipsies dwell, as I take it, for the greater part of the inclement winter. I thought my end had surely come when first I saw the fierce faces round me; but there was one who called herself their queen, and who made them quit their evil purpose. She put me to sit beside her at the board, and when the morning came she fed me again and bid me ride forth without fear. She told me certain things to boot, which I must not forget: but those I will not speak of till you know the whole strange story. I may not tell it here. I would not that any should know it but thee, Cherry. But some day when we can get into some lonely place together I will tell thee all, and we will think together how the thing on which my mind is set may be accomplished.”

Cherry’s eyes were dilated with wonder and curiosity. Her cousin all at once took rank as a hero and knight of romance. He had already experienced a wonderful adventure, and there was plainly some mystery behind which was to be made known to her later.

What a proud thing it was to have such a cousin! How she despised honest Jacob now, with his large hands and heavy ways! She had laughed at him ever since she could remember, and had ordered him about much as though he were a faithful dog always ready to do her bidding; but she had never quite realized what a clumsy boor he was till their handsome, dark-faced Trevlyn cousin had come amongst them, with his earnest eyes, his graceful movements, and his slim, attractive person. Cuthbert’s manners, that in fine society would have been called rustic and unformed, were a great advance on anything Cherry had seen in her own home, save in the person of Anthony Cole and his son. She admired him immensely, and he was rapidly becoming the sun and centre of her life; whilst Cuthbert, who had always been used to the companionship of a sister, and who found several fanciful resemblances as well as so many points of contrast between the lively Cherry and the pensive Petronella, was glad enough of her sisterly friendship and counsel, and did not lose in favour with his uncle that he succeeded in pleasing and brightening the life of his youngest born, who was in truth the idol of his heart, though he would sooner have cut off his right hand than have let her know as much too plainly.

As Cherry also was of opinion that Cuthbert ought to reclaim his money, he resolved to do so upon the morrow without any further loss of time. Cherry advised him not to speak openly of his visit to the tavern, for her father held all such places in abhorrence, and would likely speak in slighting terms of any person who could frequent them. He had better prosecute his errand secretly, and tell her the result at the end. Cherry dearly loved a little bit of mystery, and was very anxious that Cuthbert should continue to occupy his present position in her father’s good graces.

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The Cat and Fiddle was none too well looking a place when Cuthbert succeeded at last in finding it. It had one door in the thoroughfare of Holborn, but it ran back some way, and its other doors opened into a narrow alley turning off from the main street under a low archway. As Cuthbert pushed open the door of the public room, he saw several men with faces of decidedly unprepossessing type sitting together at a table engrossed in talk, and these all looked quickly up as he entered, and gazed at him with undisguised suspicion.

A burly man, who had the look of a host, came forward, and asked his business rather roughly. Strangers did not appear to meet any warmth of welcome at this place. Cuthbert answered that he sought news of Master Robert Catesby, who had bidden him inquire at that place for him. As that name passed his lips he saw a change pass over the face of his questioner, and the answer was given with a decided access of friendliness.

“He is not here now, but he will be here anon. He comes to dine shortly after noon, and will spend some hours here today on business. If it please you, you can wait for him.”

“I thank you, but I will come again later,” answered Cuthbert, who was by no means enamoured of the place or the company.

He was surprised that his travelling companion, who appeared a man of refined speech and habits, should frequent such an evil-looking place as this. But the habits of the dwellers in cities were as yet strange to him, and it might be his ignorance, he thought, which made it appear suspicious to him.

“And if he asks who has inquired for him, what shall I say?” asked the host, whilst the men at the table continued to stare and listen with every appearance of interest.

“My name is Trevlyn,” answered Cuthbert shortly, disliking, he hardly knew why, the aspect and ways of the place.

He fancied that a slight sensation followed this announcement. Certainly the landlord bowed lower than there was occasion for as he held open the door for his visitor to pass out. Cuthbert was puzzled, and a little annoyed. He was half inclined not to go there again; but curiosity got the better of his resolve as the afternoon hours drew on. After all, what did it matter what manner of man this was, since he need never see him again after today? It would be foolish not to reclaim his money, and might lead Master Robert Catesby to inquire for him at his uncle’s house, and that he did not wish. The thing had better be done, and be done quickly. How foolish it would be to go back to Cherry and say he had not accomplished his errand because some odd-looking men had stared at him, and because the tavern was ill smelling and dirty!

It was three o'clock, however, before the youth again entered the unsavoury abode. As December had already come, the days were approaching their shortest limit; and as heavy clouds hung in the sky, the streets already began to look dark. Within the ill-lighted tavern the obscurity was still greater. Cuthbert pushed his way through the door, and found himself amongst the afternoon drinkers, who were making the room ring with ribald songs and loud laughter. But the host quickly singled him out, and approached with an air of deference.

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“The gentleman you asked for is upstairs. He directed that you should be sent to him on your arrival. I am too busy to go up the stairs with you, but you cannot miss the way. He is in the room upon the first floor; the first door to the right hand will lead you to him. He has one or two gentlemen with him, but he will be glad to see you, too.”

Cuthbert was glad to get out of the noisy room below, and, shutting the door behind him, mounted the dark stairs. He opened the first door to the right, after knocking once or twice in vain, and found himself in a very small apartment, very ill lighted by a tiny window, and altogether empty.

He looked round in surprise. Dim as was the twilight, he could not be mistaken in the emptiness of the room. He wondered if the man had misled him purposely, and a little vague uneasiness stole over him. The noises from below had hitherto drowned any other sound; but as for some cause unknown to himself these suddenly and entirely ceased for the space of some half minute, he became aware of voices close at hand; and almost before he realized his position, he had caught several quickly and eagerly spoken sentences.

“They show no mercy; let no mercy be shown to them!” said one voice, in low, menacing accents. “Six saintly priests have died in cruel agonies by the bloody hangman’s hands but a few weeks past; and look ye, what has been the fate of that godly, courageous old man of Lancashire who has dared to raise his voice in reprobation of these barbarities? Fined, imprisoned, despoiled of all; and all but condemned to be nailed to the pillory, that his ears might be sliced off! Even that fate was all but inflicted by yon infamous Star Chamber, who respect neither virtue nor gray hairs, so they may fill the King’s coffers and destroy all godliness in the land! It was but by two votes he escaped that last anguish and degradation. How say ye, friends? Can any scheme be too desperate if it rids us of such tyrants and rulers at one blow?”

An eager murmur arose at that—assent, indignation, wrath—and again the same voice spoke in the same low, eager tones:

“And the way is open; the house is ours. But a few feet of masonry to tunnel through, and the thing is done. Shall we shrink? shall we hesitate? I trow not. Strong arms, silent tongues, a high courage—that is all we want.”

“And a few more strong arms to help us at the work, for it will be a labour of Hercules to get it done.”

At that moment the noise from below burst out anew, and Cuthbert heard no more of this mysterious colloquy. He had not time to think over the meaning of the words he had heard, or indeed to attach any particular significance to them. He was always hearing fierce threats bandied about between ardent partisans of Romanist and Puritan, and was beginning to pay small heed to such matters. He did not realize now that he

had surprised any conspirators at their work. He knocked boldly at the door of the room, to which the place where he stood was plainly the antechamber, and a loud voice bid him enter.

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There was no light in the apartment, save that which filtered in through the dirty window, and it was plain that the meeting, whatever its nature, was breaking up. Several men were standing about in their cloaks and hats, the latter slouched down upon their brows, so that their faces could not be distinguished in the gloom. Two or three passed Cuthbert hastily as he entered, before he had time even to see if one of them was the companion of his journey; but though he found some trouble in distinguishing features, his own were visible enough as he stood facing the window, and out of the shadows stepped a tall man, who greeted him with extended hand.

“Good e’en to you, Cuthbert Trevlyn, and a fair welcome to London town! I trust you have not been in dangers and difficulties, and that you but now come to claim your own again? How fared it with you on the heath that night? Were you in any wise maltreated or rough handled by the gentlemen of the road?”

“Nay; I was rather treated to a good supper and a night’s lodging, and not so much as deprived of my steed. I trow had he shown something more of mettle I might not have so preserved him; but one or two of them who mounted him pronounced him of no use even as a pack horse.”

Catesby laughed pleasantly, and putting his hand into his doublet drew forth the purse intrusted to him, and placed it in Cuthbert’s hands.

“They would not have been so obliging, I fear, had you chanced to have this upon your person. Take it, boy, and look within and see that all is safe. I have not parted with it since the night of our journey. I trow you will find your treasure as it left your hand.”

“I am sure of it,” answered Cuthbert gratefully; “and I return you many thanks for your goodwill and sound counsel in the matter. But for your good offices I should have lost all. I trust you yourself escaped without misadventure?”

Cuthbert was now anxious to be gone. His errand was accomplished. The atmosphere of this place was offensive to him, and he was uneasy without well knowing why. His companion seemed to divine this; and the room being now cleared of all other guests, he put his hat on his head and said, “We will go out into the fresh air. The Cat and Fiddle is better as a resort by day than by night. I would fain know something of your whereabouts and fortunes, boy. I have taken a liking for you, and the name of Trevlyn sounds pleasantly in mine ears.”

The old sense of fascination began to fall upon Cuthbert, as Catesby, taking him familiarly by the arm, led him out into the street, and walked along with him in the direction of his home, drawing him out by questions, and throwing in bits of anecdote, jest, and apt remark, that made his conversation a pleasure and an education. Cuthbert forgot his anxieties and vague suspicions in his enjoyment of the conversation of an accomplished man of the world; and there was a subtle flattery in the sense that this

man, scholar and gentleman as he was, had condescended to a liking for and an interest in his insignificant self, and was of his own accord inviting confidence and friendship.

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“I once had a young brother; thou something favourest him,” was the only explanation he gave of the sudden fancy formed when Cuthbert spoke gratefully of his kindness. “I am growing out of youth myself, but I like the companionship of youth when I can get it. I would fain see more of thee, boy, an thou art thine own master, and can come and visit me at the place I may appoint.”

Cuthbert was pleased and flattered, and said he should be proud to come, but hoped it would not be at the tavern, as his uncle misliked such places of entertainment.

“It is an ill-smelling spot; I mislike it myself,” answered Catesby. “Nay, we can do better than that now. There is a house at Lambeth where I often frequent with my friends. It is something lonely; but thou art a brave lad, and wilt not fear that.”

He turned and looked Cuthbert keenly over as he spoke, and heaved a short sigh.

“Thou art marvellous like the brother I lost,” he said. “I would that I might have thee for my servant; but thou art too gently born for that, I trow.”

Cuthbert had well-nigh promised lifelong service on the spot, so peculiar was the influence and fascination exercised upon him by this man; but he remembered his uncle and his duty to him, and pulled himself up as he replied soberly:

“I am poor enow—poorer than many a servant—having naught but what is given me by others. But I have mine uncle’s will to do. I may take no step without asking counsel of him.”

“Ay, verily; and this secret of our friendship thou must hide from him. Thou knowest that I am of the forbidden faith, and my presence in London must be hid. I may trust thee thus far with my secret? Thou wilt not reveal my name to others?”

“Never, since thou hast told me not.”

“Good lad; I knew thou mightest be trusted. And thou wilt come to see me as I shall ask?”

“If I can make shift to do so I will very willingly.”

“I shall remind thee of thy promise. And now, farewell. I have business in another quarter. We shall meet again anon.”

Chapter 8: Cuthbert And Cherry Go Visiting.

All this while Kate’s letter to her cousin Lord Culverhouse had lain stowed away in the safe leathern pocket of Cuthbert’s riding dress, into which her deft white hands had

sewed it for safety, and he had made no attempt to deliver it to its owner, nor to see whether the young Viscount would have will or power to further his own success in life.

The reason for this delay was no lack of goodwill on the part of the youth, but was simply due to the fact that Lord Andover and his family were not in London at this season, but were in their family place in Hampshire, and not expected to reach London much before the Christmas season.

This much Cuthbert had discovered early on in his stay in town; for Kate had described to him the situation of her uncle's house in the Strand, and he had made inquiry at the porter's lodge the very first time he had passed by. But hearing this, and not wishing to entrust the letter into any hands but those of Lord Culverhouse himself, he had gone away again, and the excitements of the new life had speedily driven the thought of Kate's commission out of his mind.

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But now the merry Christmas season was close at hand. Mistress Susan was thrice as busy and as sharp tongued as usual, getting forward her preparations for that time of jollity and good cheer, and making the bridge house fairly reek with the mixed flavours of her numerous concoctions and savoury dishes.

Martin Holt's Puritanism, which would prevent his countenancing anything like drunkenness, revelling, or the gross sports and amusements which still held full sway over the people at festive seasons, did not withhold him from keeping a well-spread table at which to ask his friends to sit, still less from sending out to his poorer neighbours portions of the good cheer which has always seemed appropriate to the Christmas season. So he raised no protest against the lavish expenditure in meats and spices, rose water, ambergris, sugar and herbs, nor complained that his sister and daughters seemed transformed for the nonce into scullions, and had scarce time to sit down to take a meal in peace, for fear that some mishap occurred to one of the many stew pans crowding each other upon the stove.

He was used to it, and it appeared the inevitable preliminary to Yuletide; though Cuthbert looked on in amaze, and marvelled how any household could consume the quantities of victuals under preparation, be their hospitality and generosity what it might.

As he walked abroad in the streets he saw much the same sort of thing everywhere going on. Cooks and scullions were scouring the streets and markets for all manner of dainties. Farmers were driving through the streets flocks of young porkers, squealing lustily and jostling the passers by; and cooks and housewives would come rushing out from the houses to secure a pig and carry it off in triumph; whilst here and there a servant in livery might be seen with a basket from which a peacock's tail floated, carrying off this costly prize to adorn the table of some nobleman or wealthy merchant.

Passing by Lord Andover's house in the Strand on the day before the eve of Christmas, Cuthbert saw, by the stir and bustle and liveliness of the courtyard, that the family had plainly returned. On making inquiry he discovered that his surmise was correct, and he walked home resolving to lose no more time in delivering his letter, and wondering if he could contrive to take Cherry with him when he paid the visit, to secure for her a sight of the gay streets and a peep into Lord Andover's big house. The poor child had been regularly mewed up at home the whole of the past week helping her sharp-tongued aunt. It was nothing but fair that she should taste a little enjoyment now; and he determined to try to get his uncle's consent before speaking a word to Cherry herself. Susan Holt never opposed her brother, though she often disapproved of his lenience towards his youngest child, whose love of pleasure she looked upon as a peril and a snare.

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When Cuthbert made his modest request to take Cherry out on the morrow to see the sights of the streets, and the houses all decked with holly, the father smiled an indulgent smile and gave a ready assent. If Cuthbert would be careful where he took her, and not let her be witness of any of the vile pastimes of cock fighting, bull or bear baiting, or the hearer of scurrilous or blasphemous language, he might have her companionship and welcome; and it would doubtless amuse her to go into Lord Andover's kitchen, where messengers generally waited who had brought notes or messages for members of the family, being treated to cups of sack and other hospitality; and as he was a good man, his household would be well ordered, and the maid would be treated with due civility and respect.

"The child is kept something strait by her good aunt," said Martin, a smile hovering round the corner of his lips. "We are not all cut to the same pattern, and Cherry takes not as kindly to the gravity of life as did her sisters. A little change will do her no harm. It boots not too far to resist the promptings of nature."

How Cherry's eyes laughed and sparkled, and how her pretty face flushed and dimpled when Cuthbert whispered to her of the pleasure in store for her. She had been looking a little harassed and weary after her long seclusion from the fresh air, striving to please Aunt Susan, who never would be pleased; but this made amends for all. Worthy Susan sniffed and snorted when Martin told her to give the child a holiday on the morrow; but as all her preparations were well-nigh complete, she did not really want the girl, and contented herself with hoping that her indulgent father would not live to rue the day when he thought fit to indulge her wanton love for unhallowed sights and amusements.

Martin did not reply. Perhaps he felt that his sister was more consistent and stanch to the Puritan principles than he was himself in this matter; but he did not rescind his decision. And after a surreptitious meal behind the pantry door together on the morrow, whilst Mistress Susan was engaged upstairs over the weighty matter of the linen to adorn the festal board that evening and on Christmas Day itself, the pair stole quietly off about eleven o'clock, leaving word with Martin in passing out that they would be back before dark.

Cherry danced along as though she had wings to her feet, as they quitted the bridge and plunged into the narrow but bustling and busy streets. She had always been kept rigorously at home on all occasions of public rejoicing and merriment, and it was a perfect delight to her to see the holiday look about the passers by, and exchange friendly good wishes with such acquaintances as she met by the way. She had put on her best gown, and a little ruff round her neck: her aunt would not let her wear such "gewgaws" in a general way, but the girl loved to fabricate them out of odds and ends, in imitation of the ladies she saw passing in the street. She wore the gray cloak and hood she had had on when first Cuthbert had come to her assistance by the river, and her rosy laughing face peeped roguishly out from the warm and becoming head gear. But

suddenly, as they were passing a house in East Cheape, she paused and glanced up at Cuthbert with a bewitching little look of pleading.

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“Wait but here for me a little five minutes,” she said; “I have an errand to my cousin Rachel.”

She was gone in a moment, slipping through the open door and leaving Cuthbert outside in the street. He knew the house for her uncle Dyson’s, and was in no way alarmed about her. Nor was she long in rejoining him again. But when she came out, laughing, blushing, and dimpling, he scarce knew her for the moment, so transformed was she; and he stood perfectly mute before the radiant young vision his eyes encountered.

The sober black under-petticoat had been replaced by one of vivid scarlet taffeta, quilted with elaboration, and further adorned with embroidery in white silk. The gray upper robe was the same as before, the soft stuff and quiet tone harmonizing and contrasting well with the bright hue of the petticoat. The little feet were encased in the daintiest of strong buckled shoes, and in scarlet hose to match the quilted skirt; whilst the cloak and hood were now of soft white lamb’s-wool cloth, such as Abraham Dyson made a specialty of in his business; and the vivid delicate colour upon the girl’s laughing face as it peeped out of the snowy hood was set off to the greatest possible advantage by the pure white frame, so suited to the child’s infantile style of beauty.

“Why, Cherry, I scarce know thee!” cried Cuthbert, amazed.

“I scarce know myself,” answered the laughing girl, blushing and dimpling with mischievous pleasure; “and I trust none else will know me neither if we meet more friends by the way. I will pull my hood well over my face, for I would not have this frolic reach Aunt Susan’s ears. She would make a mighty coil anent it. But oh, I have so longed for pretty things such as Rachel wears Why is it wrong to love bright colours and soft fabrics? I will not believe it is. When I am grown to woman’s estate, and have a home of my own to regulate, I will wear what I choose and what becomes me best. It is folly to think God loves not beauty and brightness. Has He not made the sky blue, the trees green, the flowers of every hue of the rainbow? Does He not paint the sky with brilliant hues? Why is man alone of his creatures to be dull and sad?”

“Nay, I know not; I am unlearned in these questions. But how got you these fine clothes? Did Mistress Rachel lend them?”

“Rachel has always longed to give this petticoat to me. She is weary of it, and it is something too short for her; but I knew I might never wear it, and that Aunt Susan would chide me roundly for bringing such a thing home. So Rachel said she would lay it by for me when her new robe came home at Christmastide. Then she whispered to me last week that her father had a present for me—a cloak and hood that he thought my father would let me wear, albeit Aunt Susan might ill like it. So passing the house today, methought I might slip in and ask Rachel if I might wear the new cloak and hood to Lord Andover’s;

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and forthwith she had me up to her room and into this scarlet petticoat in a twinkling, and mine uncle brought the white cloak and hood himself and fastened it on me, and Jacob came with the shoes and said he had had them made strong for the muddy streets, but smart with the buckles on the top. And here I be the happiest girl in all London town! Nay, Cuthbert, but I feel as if my feet could dance of themselves all the way!"

Her happiness was infectious. Cuthbert felt more like a light-hearted boy than ever he had done in his life before. His lively little companion, clinging to his arm and chattering like a magpie, effectually drove away all grave thoughts. The sun shone brightly in the steely-blue sky; the frost had made the streets absolutely clean and dry. Walking, even in the most trodden places, was easy and pleasant, and everybody seemed in excellent good humour.

Many admiring glances were levelled at the pair as they passed along—the charming blushing damsel in the white hood, and the distinguished-looking youth with the grave dark face. Cuthbert gratified the little girl's curiosity by taking her up and down Paul's Walk as they passed through St. Paul's Churchyard, and by the time they gained Fleet Street and Temple Bar she had reached the limit of her farthest walk westward.

They spent several minutes before the clock of St. Dunstan's in the West, and watched the bronze figures striking on their bells as the hour of midday sounded forth from many steeples. Then Cherry must needs go down to the river banks between the gentlemen's gardens and see how the river looked from here. She was a little awed by the grandeur of the houses all along the Strand, and wondered mightily what it could feel like to be one of the fine Court dames who drove in and out of the great gates in gilded coaches, or ambled forth upon snow-white palfreys, attended by lackeys afoot and on horseback.

Another hour had passed in delighted watching of the street sights and the fine folks who dwelt in these parts, before Cuthbert led her under the archway of the great courtyard, and told her that this was Lord Andover's house. It was one of the finest in the Strand, and it was plain that some gay festivity was in foot or in preparation; for there was such a to-ing and fro-ing of serving men, lackeys and scullions, such a clatter of voices, such an air of hurry and jollity on every face, that Cherry could have looked and listened for ever, but that Cuthbert hurried her through the crowd towards a big door opening into the courtyard, and whispered in her ear:

"They all be too busy to heed me here. Come to the house, and see what hap we have there. I may deliver this letter to none other save Lord Culverhouse himself."

The great door which stood wide open proved to be that of the kitchen—a vast hall in itself, along the farther side of which were no less than six huge fireplaces. Cooks and

scullions stood at each of these, shouting out orders and moving to and fro; while a perfect crowd of menials and servants, messengers and idlers, stood or sat about, chatting, laughing, and even gaming in corners. Huge tankards of ale, hot and strongly spiced, stood upon the table, and every one who passed by appeared permitted to help himself at will.

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Busy and noisy as this place was, an air of good fellowship and good humour pervaded it which was reassuring and pleasant; and before the cousins had stood many minutes in their corner, a serving man came up and asked them civilly enough of their business. Cuthbert replied that he had a letter which he had been charged to give into Lord Culverhouse's own hands; and hearing that, the servant gave a keen look at the pair, and apparently satisfied with his inspection, bid them follow him.

He took them up a wide staircase, and brought them out into another large hall, where servants of a different class were gathered together—the liveried footmen and pages and lackeys, and some waiting women, very grandly attired, who speedily beckoned Cherry amongst them, and began making much of her, rather as though she were a little child, feeding her with comfits and cakes and spiced wine, examining her soft white cloak, and asking a host of questions as to where she got it, who was the maker, and if her uncle sold his wares to the public.

Cherry had pretty, dainty little ways of her own, and was not in the least shy where she felt herself liked. She did not even miss Cuthbert when he was summoned away, so happy was she to be talked to by these fine waiting women, who were kind and comfortable souls enough. She learned on her side that there was to be a play given in half-an-hour's time within the house itself, and that all the serving men and women were permitted to witness it. She was pressed to stay and see it herself, and her eyes beamed with delight at the bare thought. To see a play had always been the very height of her youthful ambition, and had not father said that she could get no hurt at Lord Andover's house?

Presently Cuthbert came back, his face aglow with pleasure.

"Cherry," said he, "I have seen Lord Culverhouse, and methinks Kate's letter was like a talisman; for after reading it he bid me welcome as though I were in some sort a kinsman, and said that I must stay and see the mask that is to be played here in a short while, and remain as a guest at the feast which will follow, where the boar's head is to be brought in, and all sorts of revelry are to be held. I told him I could not stay till dark, for that we had promised to be home ere that; but that I would gladly see the play acting an I might. And then I told him of thee, and he bid me go fetch thee. My cousin, said he, must i' faith be in some sort his cousin, since Kate, who was his cousin, also spoke of me as one. I told him nay, but that thou wert cousin only on my mother's side; but he laughed, and would not listen, and bid me fetch thee, that he might place thee well to see the mummery. So come with me, fair cousin, for we must not keep him waiting."

Cherry's cheeks were dyed with bewitching blushes, and her big gray eyes were shining like stars, as she followed her cousin, accompanied by a little murmur of congratulation from the waiting women, who had all fallen in love with the charming child. She looked a perfect picture as she stood before Lord Culverhouse in her scarlet petticoat and snow-white hood, making her pretty quaint reverence to him, hardly daring to raise her

eyes, but quite lost in the glamour of the honour done to her in being thus noticed by a real lord and good humouredly dubbed a cousin.

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And then her hand was actually taken by this handsome and elegant young gallant, and she felt herself being conducted through rooms the magnificence of which she could not take in in her timid, hasty glances. She had almost begun to think it all a dream from which she must soon awaken, when she heard her companion say in his sweet voice:

“Mother mine, have you room beneath your ample wing for a little city guest—a cousin of Cuthbert Trevlyn, who has brought me a most welcome missive from my dear cousin Kate?”

And then Cherry looked up with a pretty, frightened, trusting glance, to find herself being examined and smiled at by quite a bevy of wonderfully-dressed ladies, who after one good look began to laugh in a very reassuring and kindly way, and made room in their midst for the little city maiden with that ease of true good breeding which has ever been the truest test of the blue blood of the English aristocracy. She looked such a child, in her pretty confusion and bashfulness, that not one of them resented her presence amongst them. Courtesy and kindliness had always been Lady Andover’s salient characteristics, and there was a native refinement and quaint simplicity about Cherry that would have gone far to disarm severer critics than the present company round Lady Andover.

“Come, my pretty child,” she said; “thou shalt sit beside me, and tell me all about thyself. The name of Trevlyn is well known and well loved in this house. Thou comest under good auspices.”

And so Cherry again found herself the plaything and pet of a group of good-humoured people, though this time they were fine ladies in dresses that fairly took away her breath, as she ventured to study them with eager, furtive glances. She answered all their questions with pretty, candid frankness; told of her adventure in the osier beds, and of Cuthbert’s timely rescue; told of her life under her father’s roof, and her simple daily duties and pleasures. And the grand ladies listened and laughed, and made much of her; and her soft white hood was removed and admired, and passed round almost as it had been amongst the waiting women. Cherry felt quite bashful at sitting amongst those fine ladies with no cover for her head but her own curls; but she noted that the younger ladies present had no adornment beside that, unless it were a bow of ribbon or a few sparkling pins: so she took courage, and her hot cheeks burned less brightly, though she could not help her eyes sparkling and dancing beneath their long lashes as she wondered what in the world her aunt Susan would say could she see her for a moment in her present surroundings.

And then the play began, and Cherry sat entranced from the moment the curtain rose till it fell again. She had never seen anything of the sort before, and was perfectly captivated and carried away, living in the glamour of absolute enchantment, and amusing her fashionable companions almost as much by her artless admiration and enthusiasm as the players did by their mummery and stage tricks.

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But time was flying all too fast, and almost as soon as the curtain fell for the last time, Cuthbert came up and carried her away, Lord Culverhouse walking with them once more through the long rooms, and insisting on their partaking of some spiced wine and game pasty before going out into the cold air again.

What with the fumes of the wine, the extraordinary grandeur of the house, and the wonderful nature of the adventure altogether, Cherry hardly knew whether or not she any longer trod on solid ground as she pursued her way along the streets clinging tight to Cuthbert's arm. It was growing dusk now, and Cuthbert was anxious to get his charge home before the early darkness should have fallen upon the city. They hardly spoke as they wended their way. Cherry gave a little gasp from time to time indicative of her unbounded delight, whilst Cuthbert was thinking pleasantly of the kind and cordial reception he had met with from Lord Culverhouse.

Both felt more or less in dreamland till they reached Abraham Dyson's house, where Cherry ran indoors again to rid herself of her finery.

When she emerged once more into the familiar streets of the city, her cheeks had lost a little of their bloom, her eyes some of their star-like brightness; and heaving a great sigh as she took Cuthbert's arm, she said:

"Ah me! it is a hard fate to be a city maid and a Puritan's daughter. I shall never see such lovely sights again! And oh, how happy I should be if only I could be a lady, and live where everything is soft and beautiful and gentle! Oh how I shall dream of it all now! But it will never be anything but a dream!" and a great tear like a diamond sparkled on the thick lashes and rolled down the girl's soft cheek.

Cuthbert had been thinking hard as he stood there in the gathering darkness. He was rather taken out of himself, which was perhaps the reason he forgot all prudence and reserve. Bending suddenly over Cherry, he kissed away the tears on her cheeks, and said in low, passionate tones:

"Nay, sweet Cherry, weep not for that. I will make thee yet a lady, whom none shall dare flout. I have loved thee, sweet cousin, from the day I found thee by the river in hapless plight. And when I have found the lost treasure of Trevlyn, and have brought luck and fortune to each one that bears the old name, then will I come and wed thee, sweet coz; and thou wilt be a Trevlyn then, and none shall dare to scorn thee for thy good father's honest name. My father did wed a Holt, and his son shall do the same. Tell me, Cherry, dost thou love me well enough to be my little wife one day? for by the mass I will have none other; and if thou lovest me not I will go unwed all the days of my life!"

Cherry turned hot and cold, flushed scarlet, and then grew pale as this speech proceeded, till at the last words the red came back in a flood, and hiding her face on Cuthbert's shoulder, she sobbed out:

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“Oh, how could I love anybody else? O Cuthbert, how happy thou hast made me! Art sure thou speakest sooth?”

“Sooth! ay, that I do. Thou art the sweetest maid the sun e’er looked on. Thou wert the fairest of all that gay company at my Lord Andover’s, and many beside myself said as much. Cherry, thou shalt one day be my own true wife; and if kind fortune do but favour me, thou shalt have gold and jewels and fine robes enow, and shalt hold up thy head with the best of them: see if it be not so!”

A boy and girl wooing certainly, but none the less hearty for that. The love had been growing silently for many weeks, the young folks scarcely knowing what they were learning to be to each other. And now these sudden burning words had revealed all, and Cherry felt more than ever that she trod on air and moved in a dream; only this time there was the pleasant sense that the dream would not vanish away in smoke, but would become more and more a living reality.

But there was something Cuthbert had said which yet required explanation, and presently she looked up and asked:

“What didst thou mean when thou spokest of a lost treasure? What is it, and who has lost it?”

And then Cuthbert forthwith plunged into the story of the lost treasure of Trevlyn, as he had heard it from his cousin Kate; and Cherry listened with parted lips, thinking that it was almost like living in some play to be hearing this strange tale.

When she heard of the gipsies and their vengeful words, she stopped suddenly short and gazed intently at Cuthbert.

“This is the second time thou hast spoken of gipsies,” she said, in a whisper. “Thou hast yet to tell me the tale of how thou didst spend a night in the gipsies’ cave. Cuthbert, were those gipsies thou didst light upon that night of thy flight the same as have stolen the treasure from Trevlyn?”

“Cherry, I trow that they are,” he answered, in a very low voice, bending his head closer over her as he spoke. “Listen, and I will tell thee all. There was an old fierce woman, with hair as white as driven snow, among them, who, when she heard the name of Trevlyn, launched at me a glance of hatred that I never can forget; and I knew well by her looks and her words that, had she had her will, I should have suffered the same fate that her mother had done from the hands of my grandfather. I knew not then that it was her mother who had been burnt by him as a witch; but I saw the evil purposed me, and knew she was my foe. But a stately woman—the old gipsy’s daughter, as I later learned—interposed on my behalf, and her all obeyed as queen, even her mother bowing down before her. She protected me, and bid me sit at table with them, saw me served with

the best, and at night showed me herself to a ruinous bed chamber where, however, a weary man might comfortably lodge. There she left me, but bid me not to undress; and presently after I had slept,

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I know not how many hours, I was awakened by her entrance with a dim light, and she bid me rise but speak low, as she had somewhat of moment to say to me. She asked me then of myself and my kindred; and I asked her many things, and to my questions she gave ready response. Last of all, I dared to name the lost treasure, and I saw a new look come upon her face. I said that I had heard enough to make me think it had been stolen and hidden in the forest, and I asked her if in her wanderings there she had heard aught of it. I saw that the question moved her. I saw her flashing glance rest on me again and again, and her lips tremble as though she fain would speak, and yet was half afraid to do so. Every moment I suspected more and more that she knew somewhat; but whether or no she would reveal this I dared not guess. At the last the eager light died out of her eyes. She answered that she had heard somewhat of the story, but that she herself knew naught. The treasure had been lost many years before she had first seen the light, and men had long ceased to look for it, albeit there were many traditions that it would one day be found. As to that she knew naught; but she promised me this thing, that she would ask and strive to learn if any in the forest knew more than she. And she bid me meet her at a certain cave in the heart of the forest upon May Day next, when she said she would speak with me again anent this same matter."

Cherry's lips were parted, her eyes were full of wonder and curiosity. She shivered with excitement and surprise.

"Thinkest thou that she knows the place?"

"That I know not, but I trow well that she knows more than she said then, and that I shall learn more when I seek her again, and we are not in a walled place where eavesdroppers may lurk with itching ears."

"Then thou wilt keep the tryst?"

"Assuredly I will."

"And thou art not afraid that harm will befall thee? Oh beware, Cuthbert, of that wicked, fierce old woman!"

"Oh, I fear her not. Their queen has bidden me. They dare not defy her. I shall go to the forest and keep the tryst. I trow there be much yet for me to know."

Cherry hesitated and trembled, and hesitated again, and finally said in a low whisper:

"Cuthbert, it may be that there is a speedier and a safer way of discovering what thou wouldst know."

“And what way is that, sweet coz?”

Again came the little pause of hesitation, and then Cherry said:

“We might consult the wise woman.

“The wise woman! and who is she?”

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“There be many of them,” answered Cherry, still speaking in a very low and rapid whisper. “But breathe not a word at home, for father says they be surely in league with the devil, if they be not impostors who deserve whipping at the cart’s tail. But Rachel went to one three years back, and the dame told her a husband would come wooing within three short months, and told the colour of his hair and his eyes. And sure enough it all came true, and now she is quickly to be wed. And others have done the like, and the things have all come true. And she is not a wicked woman neither, for she cures agues and fevers, and the leeches themselves ask her simples of her. There may be wicked women plying this trade too; I know not how that may be. But this dame is not wicked; Rachel goes to her still, and she has never deceived her yet. But she liveth very secretly now, as a wise woman must needs to in these times; for the King, they say, is very wroth against all such, and in the country men are going about from him and burning all who practise such arts, and otherwise cruelly maltreating them. So no man speaks openly of them now, though they still ply their trade in secret.”

“Hast thou ever been to one thyself, Cherry?”

Her face was all in a glow. She clung closer to Cuthbert’s arm.

“Chide me not, and tell not my father; but I went with Rachel once, when she went to have a wart charmed that was causing her much vexation. I asked nothing of the dame myself; but she took my hand and looked into my eyes, and she nodded her head and chuckled and made strange marks upon a bit of paper, which she said was casting my horoscope. And then she told me that I had an ugly lover that I loved not, but that another more gently born should come in time, and that we should love each other well and be faithful through all, and that I should end by being a lady with all I wanted at command.”

And there Cherry stopped, blushing and palpitating with happiness and shy joy; whilst Cuthbert, struck by this very remarkable and original specimen of fortune telling, began to think he might do worse than consult this same wise woman who had gauged his sweetheart’s case so fairly.

He himself had no scruples. He had a strong belief in necromancy, and had never heard that there was sin in its practice. He was still Romanist enough at heart to look upon the confessional as an easy and pleasant way of getting rid of the burden of an uneasy conscience. His mind was very open to conviction and impression in religious matters. He was no bigot, but he had a constitutionally inherited tendency towards the old faith that was possibly stronger than he knew. Had he seen his father’s party in power, persecuting and coercing, he would have had scant sympathy or love for them and their ways; but as the contrary was now the case, and he saw them downtrodden and abused, he felt considerable drawings towards them, and these drawings were not the less strong from the intercourse he was enjoying almost daily with Anthony Cole and his son Walter.

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Cuthbert's love of learning and eager wish to improve his scholarship drew him almost daily to the dark little shop in the bridge, wedged in, as it were, between two larger and more imposing structures, where the father and son plied a modest trade and lived somewhat hazardously; for they did not hesitate to circulate pamphlets and leaflets the sale of which had been forbidden, and which might at any time get them into serious trouble with the authorities, and lead to imprisonment, if not to death.

But to return to the pair now closely approaching their home, and lagging somewhat in their walk to prolong the talk for a few minutes. Cherry was in a fever of curiosity and impatience, and longed to hear her lover speak the word.

"It is so long to wait till May Day; and I trow that she could tell us all. Say, Cuthbert, shall we go to her?"

It was sweet to Cuthbert to hear the little word "we" dropping so naturally from Cherry's lips. He pressed the hand that lay upon his arm, and looked down into the upraised eager face.

"Wilt thou go with me an I go?"

"To be sure I will. I should love to be thy companion."

"And brave thy father's wrath should he find out?"

Cherry clung yet closer to his arm.

"I fear nothing when thou art beside me, Cuthbert. I would go with thee to death."

He stooped and kissed her eagerly, passionately.

"Then thy sweet will shall be law," he answered, "and I will go as soon as thou canst make shift to take me."

Cherry uttered a little cry of delight.

"Ah, how pleased I am—how pleased I am! We will go this very week, so soon as the Yuletide stir be past. O Cuthbert, Cuthbert, what a wondrous day this has been! Methinks it must surely be a dream. But thou art no dream; thou art real and true. So long as thou art near me and with me, I shall know that it is all true."

Chapter 9: The Wise Woman.

"Cuthbert! alas, Cuthbert!"

“Why, how now? What ails thee, Cherry?”

“Cuthbert, my father hath been speaking with me.”

“Well, and wherefore not? Thy father is no stern tyrant like mine, sweet coz.”

Cherry was panting with excitement and what appeared like terror. She clung fast to Cuthbert’s arm, and her eyes were dilated with fear. She was an excitable little mortal, so he did not feel any great alarm at her looks, but strove to reassure her in a friendly, brotherly fashion. The Christmas festivities and excitements, which had lasted above a week, had doubtless done something to upset the balance of her mind. She had been so extravagantly and overwhelmingly happy with the remembrance of her adventure at Lord Andover’s house, and her knowledge of the secret between herself and Cuthbert, that the young man had felt half afraid lest she should contrive to betray it to others by her blushes, her bright,

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fitful glances, and her newborn softness in his presence, which gave a sweeter quality to her childish charms. He himself did not wish Martin Holt to be aware that anything had passed between him and Cherry till he could come boldly forward and ask her at her father's hands, having the wherewithal to support her. He had been surprised into an admission of youthful devotion, and he by no means wished the words unsaid; for the secret understanding now existing betwixt himself and Cherry was the sweetest element in his daily life, and he was more and more in love every day with his charming cousin. But he knew that until he could come with his share of the Trevlyn treasure in his hands, he could scarce hope or look for a patient hearing from the shrewd man of business. And though he himself was increasingly confident that the treasure had been hidden out of spite, and not really made away with, and that some day it would be found, he knew that this opinion would be regarded by the world at large as a chimera of ardent youth, and that Martin Holt for one would bid him lay aside all such vain and idle dreams, and strive by steady perseverance in business to win for himself a modest independence. Only to the young, the ardent, the lovers of imaginative romance, had the notion of hidden treasure any charm.

And here was Cherry crying, palpitating, trembling in his arms as though some great trouble menaced them.

"What ails thee, sweetheart?" he asked, with playful tenderness; and Cherry choked back her sobs to answer:

"Cuthbert, he has spoken to me of marriage—my father. He has told me plainly what he purposes for me. He and my uncle Dyson have talked of it together. I am to wed my cousin Jacob. O Cuthbert, Cuthbert! what must I do? what must I say?"

Cuthbert heard the news in silence. It was not altogether unexpected, but he had scarce looked to have heard the subject openly broached so soon. Cherry had been regarded in her home as such a child, and her father, sisters, and aunt had so combined to speak and think of her as such, that although her eighteenth birthday was hard at hand, and she was certainly of marriageable age, he had not looked to have to face this complication in the situation quite so quickly. But as he stood holding Cherry in his arms (for she had come to him in the upper parlour at an hour when all the household were elsewhere engaged, and there was no fear of interruption), a look of stern purpose and resolution passed across the young man's face—an expression which those who knew the Trevlyn family would have recognized as a true Trevlyn look. His face seemed to take added years and manliness as that expression crossed it; and looking tenderly down at the quivering Cherry, he asked:

"Thinkest thou that he has seen or suspected aught?"

“I know not. He said no word of that, only looked hard at me as be spoke of Jacob.”

“And what saidst thou?”

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“Alack! what could I say? I did but tell him I had no thoughts of such a thing. I prayed he would not send me from him. I told him I was over young to think of marriage, and besought him to speak of it no more. And as my tears began to flow I could say no more.”

“And he?”

“He reminded me that many another girl was a wedded wife and mother at my age; and then I turned and said that since Jemima and Kezzie were yet unwed—ay, and Rachel too, for all her rosy cheeks and her dowry—it was hard that I should have to be the one to be turned first out of the nest. And at that I cried the more; and he put his arm about me, and said he had no thought to grieve me, and did not think that Jacob would wish me vexed in the matter. And I begged for a year’s grace; and, after thinking and pondering awhile, he answered that he had no wish to hurry things on—that I was full young to leave my girlhood behind and be saddled with the cares of a household. And then it came out that the haste was all Uncle Dyson’s doing. Rachel is to be wed at Easter, and he wants his son to bring home a wife to nurse Aunt Rebecca and mind his house. And when I heard that I was in a pretty rage; for I cannot abide Aunt Rebecca, who is as cross as a bear with a sore head, and she cannot abear the sight of me. I know not wherefore I have offended her, but so it is. And I know naught of managing a house, and so Aunt Susan will tell them an they ask her. So I dared to stamp my foot, and to tell father I would not wed Jacob to be made his mother’s slave; that I would rather live and die a maid like the good Queen who has been taken from us. And father, he scarce seemed to know what to say. I know he muttered something about its being a sore pity it was not Jemima or Kezzie that had been chosen. And then he bethought him that it was not right to let a daughter see too much of his mind, or speak too much of her own; and he bid me begone something sternly, declaring he would think the matter over, but that he looked for dutiful obedience from any child of his, and that I was not to think I might set up mine own will against his whatever his decision might be in the end.”

Cherry’s tempest of tears was by this time ended, and she spoke collectedly enough, raising her eyes now and then to the grave face of her lover to mark the effect of her words upon him. Cuthbert’s face was grave but not unhopeful, and taking Cherry’s hand firmly in his as she ended her tale, he said:

“If he will but put the matter off for a year, all will be well. If the treasure is to be found at all, I shall have found it by then. Let these dark winter days but change to the long soft ones of spring, and I go forth into the forest upon my quest. When I return laden with my share of the spoil, I trow I shall be able to win and wed my Cherry, be there never so many Jacobs in the field before me!”

Cherry laughed a soft little laugh, and her fears and tremblings ceased for the time being. Looking fondly up into Cuthbert’s face, she said:

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“And why wait till the spring to begin? Hast forgotten what we spoke of not long since? The wise woman—let us go to her! Thou hast money, and I trow she will be able to tell thee somewhat of the treasure. Men say that she hath a marvellous gift.”

Waiting was slow work, and Cuthbert was by no means averse to testing the skill of the old sorceress. He had a certain amount of faith in the divinations of magic, and at least it could do no harm to see what the beldam would say. He would but have to risk a gold or silver piece, and it would satisfy Cherry that he was not loitering and half hearted.

“I will go gladly an thou canst come with me. But when shall it be? I have heard that these witches and diviners only exercise their skill at night, and how couldst thou be abroad with me then? There would be a pretty coil if it were discovered that we were not within doors.”

But Cherry was full of invention, and had all a woman’s wit and readiness of resource. She was a true daughter of Eve, this little rosy-cheeked maiden; and when her heart was set on a thing, she, could generally find the means to carry it out.

“Listen!” she said, after pausing a few moments to think the thing out. “Any time after dark will do for the wise woman. It matters not for it to be late in the night, so long as the sun be down and the world wrapped in gloom. That happens early enow in these winter days. Now do thou listen and heed me, Cuthbert. Thou hast heard of good Master Harlow, hast thou not?”

“Ay, verily! I have heard of little else these many days!” answered Cuthbert, with a touch of impatience in his voice. “I am well nigh weary of the sound of his name. He is a notable Puritan preacher, is he not?”

“Ay, verily, most notable and most wearisome!” answered Cherry, with a delightful little grimace. “Thou speakest of being weary of the sound of his name. Thou wouldst be tenfold more weary of the sound of his voice didst thou but attend one of his preachings. I have known him discourse for four hours at a time—all men hanging on his words as if they were those of God Himself, and only poor little me well nigh dead from weariness and hunger”

“I marvel not at that,” answered Cuthbert. “Four hours would tax the patience of the most ardent disciple.”

“Nay, but thou little knowest. There be those amongst my father’s sect who call it all too short, who would listen, I verily believe, till they dropped from their benches with starvation. But however that may be, this Master Harlow is one of the hunted martyrs of the cause, and he is not allowed to exercise his gifts save by stealth; and the preaching, of which thou hast heard these many whispers, is to be held by night, and in some

obscure cellar underground, where they who go will be safe from all molestation from spies and foes."

"Ah!" said Cuthbert, looking quickly at her, "and thou thinkest that this will be our chance?"

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“Let them but once start forth without us and all will be well,” answered Cherry quickly. “The only trouble will be that Aunt Susan loves to drag me whither she knows I love not to go, and father thinks that these wearisome discourses are for the saving of souls. He will wish to take the twain of us. It must be ours to escape him and abide at home.”

“And how can we compass that?”

“For thee it will be easy,” answered Cherry. “Thou must promise Walter Cole to assist him with some task of printing or binding that same evening, and tell my father that thou art not seasoned to long discourses, and hast no desire to fill the room of another who would fain hear the words of life from the notable man. There will be more crowding to hear him than the room will hold, so that it will be no idle plea on thy part. Once thou art gone I can yawn and feign some sort of ache or colic that will make me plead to go to bed rather than attend the preaching. Aunt Susan will scold and protest it is but mine idleness and sinfulness in striving to avoid the godly discourse; but father will not compel me to go. And when all have started thou canst return, and we will together to the wise woman; and be she never so long with her divinations, we shall have returned long ere they have done, and none will know of the visit.”

Cuthbert agreed willingly to this plan. A bit of mischief and frolic was as palatable to young folks in the seventeenth century as it is in the nineteenth, and as a frolic those two regarded the whole business. They were both full of curiosity about the wise woman and her divinations, and it seemed to Cherry that to fail in taking advantage of her skill when they had the chance of doing so would be simple folly and absurdity. If she could read the secrets of the future, surely she must be able to tell them somewhat of the lost treasure.

Cherry’s plan was carried out to the letter without the least real difficulty, and without raising any suspicion. Martin Holt was not particularly anxious that the exact locality of the underground meeting place should be known to his nephew, who had not professed himself by any means on the Puritan side as yet, though listening with dutiful and heedful attention whenever his uncle spoke to him on the matter of his tenets. As for Cherry, her dislike to sermons had long been openly declared, and it was scarcely expected that she would patiently endure another of the discourses that had caused her such distaste before.

And so it came about that upon a chill, frosty January night, Cuthbert and Cherry stood before a small, narrow house in Budge Row—a house that seemed to be jammed in between its two neighbours, and almost crushed by their overhanging gables and heavy beams; and Cherry, with a trembling hand, gave a peculiar knock, thrice repeated, upon the stout panels of the narrow door, that at the third summons opened slowly and noiselessly, as if without any human agency.

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The dark passage thus revealed to view was black as pitch, and Cuthbert involuntarily recoiled. But Cherry had been here before, and knew the place, and laid her hand upon his arm.

“Courage!” she said, in a voice that quivered with excitement and not with fear; “it is always so here. Walk boldly in; there is naught to hurt us. When the door has closed we shall see a light.”

Stepping across the threshold, and keeping fast hold of Cherry’s arm, his quick glance roving from side to side in search of any possible foe lurking in the shadows, Cuthbert entered this strange abode, and felt rather than saw that the door closed noiselessly behind them, whilst he heard the shooting of a heavy bolt, and turned with a start, for it seemed impossible that this could have been done without some human hand to accomplish the deed. But his sense of touch assured him that he and Cherry were the only persons at this end of the narrow passage, and with a light shiver at the uncanny occurrence, he made up his mind to follow this adventure to the end.

“See, there is the light!” whispered Cherry, who was quivering with excitement. “That is the sign that the wise woman is ready. We have to follow it. It will lead us to her.”

The light was dim enough, but it showed plainly in the pitchy darkness of the passage, and seemed to be considerably above them.

“We must mount the stairs,” whispered Cherry, feeling her way cautiously to the foot of the rickety flight; and the cousins mounted carefully, the dun light, which they did not see—only the reflections it cast brightening the dimness—going on before, until they reached an upper chamber, the door of which stood wide open, a soft radiance shining out, whilst a strange monotonous chanting was heard within.

Upon the threshold of the room stood a huge black cat with bristling tail and fiery eyes. It seemed as though he would dispute the entrance of the strangers, and Cuthbert said to himself that he had never seen an uglier-looking brute of the kind since the monster wildcat he had killed in the forest about his home. He drew Cherry a pace backwards, for the creature looked crouching for a spring.

“It is the wise woman’s cat, her familiar spirit!” whispered the girl, in a very low voice. “Show him a piece of money; then he will let us pass. He takes toll of those who come to the wise woman. Show him the gold, and then place it within that shell. After that he will let us go in.”

Cuthbert took a small piece of gold from his purse. He held it up before the formidable-looking creature, and then let it drop into a shell fixed in the outer wall of the room. He heard it fall as if through a slot, and fancied that some person within the room had taken it out and examined it. There was a slight peculiar call, and the cat, whose tail had

begun to grow less, and whose snarlings had ceased at sight of the coin, now sprang suddenly backwards and vanished within the room, whilst a cracked voice was heard bidding them enter.

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“That is the voice of the wise woman,” said Cherry. “Come, Cuthbert, and fear nothing.”

Together the pair stepped over the threshold, and again the door closed noiselessly behind them, and the bolt flew as it seemed of itself into its socket. Cuthbert did not altogether relish this locking of doors behind them as they went; but Cherry, who had been here before, did not seem to mind, and doubtless it was but prudence that had taught the old woman to carry on her arts secretly if she wished to escape imprisonment or death.

Glancing curiously round him, Cuthbert saw himself in a long, low, narrow room that was all in deep shadow save at the upper end, where a soft bright light was burning, carefully shaded at one side, and so arranged that whilst it illuminated the features of those who stood beside the table behind which the oracle sat, it left the features of the wise woman herself in the deepest shadow, a pair of small black beady eyes being at first glance the only feature Cuthbert could distinguish.

The lamp stood upon a table, and the old woman, clad from head to foot in a long black mantle, sat on the farther side. There were a few implements of her profession about her—one or two big books, a crystal bowl containing some black fluid very clear and sparkling, an ebony wand, and a dusky mirror in a silver frame. She fixed her bright bead-like eyes upon her guests as they advanced, and asked in her cracked, harsh tones:

“Who comes here?”

“Two persons desirous of testing your skill,” answered Cuthbert boldly. “It is told me that you can read the future; I would ask if you can also look back into the past?”

He felt the snake-like glance bent fixedly upon him. There was a subtle fascination in those eyes, and he looked into them fixedly whether he would or no. As his eyes became used to the dimness in which the old woman sat, he saw that her face was brown and wrinkled like a fragment of ancient parchment, that her features were very sharp and wasted, and that there was something weird and witch-like in her whole aspect. He felt as though he had seen before some face that that withered one faintly resembled, but in the confusion of the moment he could put no name to it. He wanted to keep his head, and to retain his firmness and acuteness, but he was conscious of a strange whirling in his brain as the old woman continued to gaze and gaze upon him as though she would never be satisfied with her inspection.

At last she spoke again.

“And who art thou that comest so boldly to pry into the dead secrets of the past?”

“I am one Cuthbert Trevlyn, son of a house that has suffered sore vicissitudes. I come to ask the skill of the wise woman in discovering a secret long hidden from our family.”

He stopped suddenly, for the woman held up her hand as if to stop him, and her voice took a strange hissing tone.

“Silence! Enough—thou hast spoken enough. Let me now tell thee the rest. I will tell thee what thou hast come to seek for. Silence! I will consult the spirits; they will tell me all.”

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Drawing nearer to her the crystal bowl, the old woman bent her head over it, and whispered incantations, as it seemed, over its contents. For a while there was deep silence in the room, and Cherry felt chill with excitement and wonder. This was very different from the reception she and her cousin Rachel had met. They had but been bidden to show their hands, and had then seen some cabalistic characters formed by the wise woman, from which she had told them all they wished to know. But there had been nothing half so mysterious as this, and the girl felt certain that the wise woman regarded Cuthbert and his questions with far greater interest than any she had bestowed upon the fortunes or the ailments of Rachel.

Presently there arose, as if in the far, far distance, a sound of voices faint and confused. Cherry clung to Cuthbert's arm, and looked about her with a pale, scared face, half expecting to see the room filled with disembodied spirits; but his glance never shifted from the down-bent face of the wise woman, and he half suspected that the sounds proceeded in some way from her, albeit they seemed to float about in the air round them, and to approach and die away at will.

Suddenly the old woman raised her head and spoke.

"Thy mission to me this day is to ask news of the lost treasure of Trevlyn."

Cherry started, and so did Cuthbert. There could be no doubting the old woman's power now. If she could see so much in her bowl, could she not likewise see where that lost treasure lay buried?

"Thou speakest sooth, mother," he said boldly. "It is of the lost treasure I would speak. Canst tell me if it still remains as it was when it was lost? Canst tell me the spot where it lies hid, that I may draw it thence? If thou canst lead me to it, thou shalt not lose thy reward; thou shalt be rich for life."

The youth spoke eagerly; but a curious smile crept over the old woman's face at his words.

"Foolish boy!" she said. "Seest thou not that if gold were my desire I have but to discover the place where the treasure lies to some stalwart knave sworn to do my bidding, and all would be mine? Could I not sell this golden secret to the highest bidder, an wealth was all I craved? Foolish, foolish boy—impetuous like all thy race! What hast thou to offer me that I may not obtain by one wave of this wand?"

Cuthbert was silent, wondering alike at the old woman and her words. If she was not disposed to sell her golden secret (and what she said was but too true—that the treasure would be more to her than any reward), what hope was there of her revealing it to him? He stood silent and perplexed, waiting for the old woman to speak again.

“Cuthbert Trevlyn,” she said, after a long pause, “methought that the hope of finding the treasure had long since been abandoned by thy race.”

“That may well be, but it has not been so abandoned by me. Whilst I have youth and health and strength, I will not give up that hope. I, the grandson of Isabel Wyvern, will not cease to strive till I have won back the lost luck that was to return to that house through the daughters’ sons.”

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It was almost at random that Cuthbert had spoken these words, but some recollection had come over him of the story he had heard of the devotion of certain gipsy people to the family of the Wyverns, and their prognostications concerning them. This woman, with the brown and crumpled skin and the beady black eyes, was very like some of those wild gipsy folk he had seen from time to time in the forest. Was it not just possible that she might be one of their tribe, who for some reason or some physical infirmity had abandoned the wandering life, and had set up for a wise woman in the heart of the great city? Was there not some strange community of knowledge and interest amongst all these wandering people? and might she not in any case know something about the families of foe and friend, and the loss of the vast treasure one day to be restored?

As his grandmother's name passed his lips, Cuthbert was certain that he saw a flicker pass across the wise woman's face; but she bent her head again over her bowl, and for some minutes remained in deep silence. Then she looked up and scanned his face again.

"Let me see thy hand," she said.

He held it out fearlessly, and she bent over it for some time.

"It is a good hand," she said at length, "and its owner may look for prosperity in life, But he must heed one thing, and that is his own over-bold rashness. He must beware of trusting all men. He must beware of fatal fascination. He must beware of a darkly-flowing river, and the dark cellar beyond. He must have the courage to say 'nay'—the courage to fly as well as to fight. Young man, thou hast over-much curiosity. In these times of peril men must walk warily. Choose the safe path, and keep therein. Think not to play with edge tools and yet keep thy fingers unscarred."

Cuthbert felt the colour rising in his face. He felt the home thrust embodied in these words. He knew that they were a warning addressed to that side of his character which urged him to make friends on all sides, and strive to see good in all men, and to avoid joining himself to any one party in Church or State whilst in measure belonging to all. For a man of quality he knew such a course would be impossible and foolishly perilous, but he had felt secure in his own insignificance. He, however, well understood the warning, and so he marked the words about the flowing river and dark cellar, and though by no means understanding them now, he resolved that he would not forget.

But Cherry was shivering with excitement, and at last she could keep silence no longer. The wise woman had been kind to her before; surely she would not resent it if she spoke now.

"But the treasure, mother, the treasure," she urged. "Canst not thou help us there?"

The old woman shifted her bright eyes to the flushed face of the girl, and a flicker passed over her face as she repeated:

“Us—us? And what part or lot has Martin Holt’s daughter in the lost treasure of Trevlyn? What, my pretty child, has thy handsome lover come so soon? and art thou looking already to be made a lady of by him?”

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The girl hid her blushing face on Cuthbert's shoulder, whilst he answered with boyish straightforwardness:

"I will wed my cousin Cherry or none else. We have plighted our troth secretly, and she shall one day be my bride. If thou canst help me in this matter, it will make our lot easier; but, poor or rich, she shall be mine!"

The old woman nodded her head several times, and Cuthbert fancied that a greater benignity of expression crossed her wrinkled face.

"Brave words! brave words!" she muttered, "and a brave heart behind. Grandson to Isabel Wyvern! Ay, so it is; and there is Wyvern in that face as well as Trevlyn. For her sake—for her sake! Ay, I would do much for that.

"Boy," she said suddenly, raising her voice and speaking in her witch-like accents again, "thou hast spoken a name which is as a talisman, and though thou hast asked a hard thing, I will help thee an I can. Yet I myself know naught. It is the familiar spirits that know, and they will not always come even at my call; they will not always speak sooth at my bidding. I can but use my arts; the rest lies with them; and this is a secret that has been long-time hid."

"Ay, and the time has now come when it should be revealed," answered Cuthbert boldly. "Use what arts thou wilt! I ask the answer to my question. I would know where the lost treasure lies."

As he spoke these words the room became suddenly darkened. Around them again as they stood there seemed to float voices and whispers, though not one articulate word could either hear. In the gloom they saw nothing save the fiery eyes of the great cat, which appeared to be crouched upon the table beside its mistress. The whisperings and voices, sometimes accompanied by soft or mocking laughter, continued for the space of several moments, and appeared to be interrupted at last by the tap of the wise woman's wand upon the table, which three times repeated enforced a sudden silence.

The silence was for a moment more awe inspiring than what had gone first; but before Cherry had more time than sufficed to nip Cuthbert hard by the hand, they heard the old woman's voice, in an accent of stern command, uttering one single word:

"Speak!"

There was a brief pause, and then a sweet low voice rose in the room and seemed to float round them, whilst the words with their rhythmic cadence fell distinctly on the ears of the listening pair:

"Three times three—on a moonlight night,
The oak behind, the beech to right;

Three times three—over ling and moss,
Robin's gain is Trevlyn's loss.

"Three times three—the war is long,
Yet vengeance hums, and the back is strong;
Three times three—the dell is deep,
It knows its secret well to keep.

"Three times three—the bones gleam white,
None dare pass by day or night;
Three times three—the riddle tell!
The answer lies in the pixies' well."

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The voice ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

“Is that all?” asked the harsh accents of the wise woman.

“That is all the spirits choose to tell,” answered the soft voice, already, as it seemed, far away; and in another moment the lamp shone forth again.

The cat leaped down from the table with a hissing sound, and the old woman was revealed in her former position, resting her two elbows on the table, her withered face supported in the palm of her hand.

“Thou hast heard?”

“Ay, but I have not understood. Canst thou read the riddle to me?”

But the old woman shook her head.

“That may not be; that thou must do for thyself. I will write down the words for thee, that thou mayest not forget; but thou, and thou alone, must find the clue.”

With swift fingers she transcribed some characters on a fragment of parchment, and Cuthbert marvelled at the skill in penmanship the old woman displayed when she gave the paper into his hands. It was with a beating heart that he scanned the mysterious characters; but the old woman had risen to her feet, and motioned them away.

“Begone!” she cried, “begone! I have no more to say. Heed my warning. Beware of menaced perils. The perils of the forest are less than the perils of the city; and an open foe is better than a false friend—a friend who lures those that trust him to a common destruction, even though he himself be ready to share it. Harden thine heart—beware of thine own merciful spirit. Turn a deaf ear to the cry of the pursued. Swim with the current, and strive not to stem it. And now go! I have said my say. Thou hast fortune within thy grasp an thou hast wits to find it and hold it.”

There was no disobeying the imperious gesture of the old woman. Cuthbert would fain have lingered to ask more questions, but he dared not do so. With a few brief words of thanks and farewell, he took Cherry’s hand and turned away. The bolt of the door flew back; the door opened of itself again. The cat stalked on before down the dark staircase, and a faint gleam from above showed them the way down. The outer door sprang open before and closed behind them, and the next minute Cuthbert was hurrying his companion along the dark street, pulling her into the shadow of a doorway if any sounds announced the approach of any of the tavern roisterers, and so protecting her from any danger or peril till they stood at last in safety beneath Martin Holt’s roof, and looked wonderingly into each other’s eyes, as if questioning whether it had not all been part and parcel of a dream.

They had not been long gone; a bare hour had elapsed since they had stolen out into the darkness together. There was no fear that any other member of Martin Holt's household would be back for a considerable time. The two conspirators bent over the scrap of parchment they placed between them on the table, and pored earnestly over it together.

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“What does it mean, Cuthbert? what can it mean? Canst read the words aright?”

“Ay, it is well writ. I can read it, but I know not what it means.”

“Read it again to me.”

He obeyed, and she forthwith began to ask a hundred questions.

“’Three times three’—that comes so many times. What can that mean, Cuthbert? it must mean something.”

“Yes, doubtless, but I know not what.”

“And again, ‘Robin’s gain is Trevlyn’s loss.’ Cuthbert, who may Robin be?”

“I know not: Yet stop—hold! Yes, I have it now. Not that it may be aught of import. Robin is a name a score of men may bear even in one village. But when the robbers of the road found themselves at the ruined mill where the gipsies were, I heard the leader ask, ‘Where is Long Robin?’”

“And was he there?” asked Cherry eagerly.

“I know not: none answered the question, and I heeded it no more. Most like he was but some serving man they wanted to take the horses.”

“Cuthbert, it seems plain that some Robin has stolen this treasure, and carried it off and hidden it. The verses must mean that!”

“Ay, I doubt it not, Cherry,” answered Cuthbert, smiling; “but see you not, fair cousin, that almost any person knowing of this lost treasure and the legend of the gipsies’ hate could have strung together words like these? All men hold that it may still be hidden in the forest around the Chase; but there be deep dells by the dozen, and the pixies, men say, have all fled away. And there be wells that run dry, and men find fresh ones bursting out where never water was before. These lines scarce show me more than I have known or thought before.”

“But they do, they do!” cried Cherry excitedly. “They tell that it was Robin who has stolen it. Cuthbert, when thou goest to the forest next thou must find this Long Robin and see if it can be he.”

The young man smiled at her credulity and enthusiasm. He was not so entirely sceptical as to some possible clue being given by these verses as he would have her believe, but he could not see any daylight yet, and wished to save her from disappointment.

“That is scarce like to be. The treasure was stolen nigh on fifty years agone, and he must have been a lusty robber who stole it then—scarce like to be living now. But we will think of this more. The wise woman must have dealings with a familiar, else how could she have known our errand? We must heed her words well; they may be words of wisdom. She knew strange things from my hand. I marvel how she could read it all there.”

Cuthbert looked upon his palm and shook his head. It was all a mystery to him. But he had greater faith in the wise woman than he altogether felt prepared to admit, and as he sought his couch that night he kept saying over and over to himself the magic words he had heard.

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"'Three times three—three times three!' What can that signify? In the forest perchance I shall read the riddle aright. Or perchance the gipsy queen, the dark-eyed Joanna, will aid me in the search. If I could but trust her, she might see things that I cannot in these lines. Would that the winter were past; would that the summer were about to come! The perils of the forest are to be less to me than the perils of the city. I wonder what perils menace me here. Beneath my father's roof I oft went in peril of my life; but here —why, here I feel safer than ever in my life before!"

Chapter 10: The Hunted Priest.

The two friends that Cuthbert had made of his own sex during the first weeks spent beneath his uncle's roof were the same two guests he had seen at the supper table on the evening of his arrival—Walter Cole and Jacob Dyson.

Both these men were several years older than himself, but in a short time he became exceedingly intimate with the pair, and thus obtained insight into the home life of persons belonging to the three leading parties in the realm. The Puritan element was strongly represented in Martin Holt's house, the Romanist in that of the Coles, whilst the Dysons, although springing from a Puritan stock, had been amongst those willing to conform to the laws as laid down in the late Queen's time. Both Rachel and Jacob preferred the Episcopal form of worship to any other, and openly marvelled at the taste of those who still frequented the private conventicles, where unlicensed preachers, at the risk of liberty and even life, held forth by the hour together upon their favourite doctrines and arguments.

But honest Jacob was no theologian. He did not hesitate to assert openly his ignorance of all controversy, and his opinion that it mattered uncommonly little what a man believed, so long as he led an upright life and did his duty in the world. He was "fair sick" of long-drawn arguments, the splitting of hairs, and those questions which the theologians of all parties took such keen joy in discussing—though, as nobody ever moved his opponent one whit, the disputes could only be held for the love the disputants felt for hearing themselves talk. Jacob had long since claimed for himself the right to leave the room when politics and religion came under discussion. As an only son, he had some privileges accorded him, and this was one he used without stint.

Honest Jacob had taken an immediate and great liking for Cuthbert Trevlyn from the first appearance of that youth at his uncle's house. Though himself rough and uncouth of aspect, clumsy of gait and slow of speech, he was quick to see and admire beauty and wit in others. He had picked out Cherry from amongst her sisters for those qualities of brightness and vivacity in which he felt himself so deficient, and it seemed as though he took to Cuthbert for very much the same reason.

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Cuthbert was ready enough to accept the advances of this good-natured youth. He was a stranger in this great city, whilst Jacob knew it well. He was eager to hear and see and learn all he could; and though Jacob's ideas were few and his powers of observation limited, he was still able to answer a great many of the eager questions that came crowding to the lips of the stranger as they walked the streets together. And when Cuthbert accompanied Jacob to his home, Abraham Dyson could fill up all the blank in his son's story, and was secretly not a little pleased with Cuthbert's keen intelligence and ready interest.

The Dysons were merchants in a small way of business, but were thriving and thrifty folks. They and the Holts had been in close relations one with the other for more than one generation, and any relative of Martin Holt's would have been welcome at their house. Cuthbert was liked on his own account; and soon he became greatly fascinated by the river-side traffic, took the greatest interest in the vessels that came to the wharves to be unladed, and delighted in going aboard and making friends with the sailors. He quickly came to learn the name of every part of the ship, and to pick up a few ideas on the subject of navigation. Whenever a vessel came in from the New World but recently discovered, he would try to get on board and question the sailors about the wonders they had seen. Afterwards he would discourse to Jacob or to Cherry of the things he had learned, and would win more and more admiration from both by his brilliant powers of imagination and description.

So the river became, as it were, a second home to him. Abraham Dyson had more than one wherry of his own in which Cuthbert was welcome to skim about upon the broad bosom of the great river. He soon became so skillful with the rude oars or the sail, that he was a match for the hardiest waterman on the river, and more than once Cherry had been permitted to accompany Cuthbert and Jacob upon some excursion up or down stream.

And now, after many weeks of pleasant comradeship, Cuthbert found himself in the unenviable position of standing rival to his friend in the affections of Cherry, and the more he thought about it the less he liked the situation. He could not give Cherry up—-that was out of the question; besides, had he renounced her twenty times over, that would not improve Jacob's case one whit. Cherry was her father's own daughter, and, with all her kittenish softness, had a very decided will of her own. She was not the sort of daughter to be bought and sold, or calmly made over like a bale of wool. She would certainly insist on having a voice in the matter, and her choice was not likely at any time to fall upon the worthy but unprepossessing Jacob.

All this Cuthbert understood with the quick apprehension of a lover; but it was very doubtful if Jacob would so see things, and Cuthbert felt as though there was something of treachery in accepting and returning his many advances of friendship whilst all the time he was secretly affianced to the girl for whose hand Jacob had made formal

application, and had been formally accepted, though for the present, on account of the maiden's tender years, the matter was allowed to stand over.

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With Walter Cole there was no such hindrance to friendship, and just at this juncture Cuthbert prosecuted and confirmed his intimacy at that house by constant visits there. He was greedy of information and book learning, and in this narrow dim dwelling, literally stacked with books, papers, and pamphlets of all kinds, and partially given over to the mysteries of the printing press, seldom worked save at dead of night, Cuthbert's expanding mind could revel to its full content.

He devoured every book upon which he could lay hands—history, theology, philosophy; nothing came amiss to him. He would sit by the hour watching Anthony Cole at work setting type, asking him innumerable questions about what he had been last reading, and finding the white-headed bookseller a perfect mine of information.

Controversy and the vexed topics of the day were generally avoided by common consent. The Coles had learned through bitter experience the necessity for silence and reticence. Everybody knew them for ardent and devoted sons of Rome, and they were under suspicion of issuing many of the pamphlets against the policy of the King that raised ire in the hearts of the great ones of the land. But none of these "seditious" writings had so far been traced to them, and they still lived in comparative peace, although the tranquillity somewhat resembled that of the peaceful dwellers upon the sides of a volcanic mountain, within whose crater grumblings and mutterings are heard from time to time.

Cuthbert's frequent visits, and the manifest pleasure he took in their society, were a source of pleasure to both father and son; and though they never showed this pleasure too openly, or asked him to continue his visits or help them in their night work, they did not refuse his help when offered, and sometimes would look at each other and say:

"He is drawing nearer; he is drawing nearer. Old traditions, race instincts, are telling upon him. He is too true a Trevlyn not to become a member of the true fold. His vagrant fancy is straying here and there. He is tasting the bitter-sweet fruit of knowledge and restless search after the wisdom of this world. But already he begins to turn with loathing from the cold, lifeless Puritan code. Anon he will find that the Established Church has naught to give him save the husk, from which the precious grain has been carefully extracted."

"Father Urban thinks well of him," Walter once remarked, as they discussed the youth after his departure one evening. "He has met him, I know not where, and believes that there may be work for him to do yet. We want those with us who have the single mind and honest heart, the devotion that counts not the cost. All that is written on the lad's face. If he breaks not away from us, he may become a tool in a practised hand to do a mighty work."

Cuthbert, however, went on his way all unconscious of the notice he was arousing in certain quarters. His mind was filled just now with other matters than those of religious

controversy. He had become rather weary of the strife of tongues, and was glad to busy himself with the practical concerns of life that did not always land him in a dilemma or a difficulty.

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Abraham Dyson was having a new sloop built for trading purposes, and both Jacob and Cuthbert took the keenest interest in the progress of the work. The sloop was to be called the Cherry Blossom when complete, and it was Abraham Dyson's plan that the christening of the vessel by Cherry herself should be the occasion of her formal betrothal to his son.

This ceremony, however, would not take place for some while yet, as at present the little vessel was only in the earlier stages of construction. Neither Jacob nor Cuthbert had heard anything about this secondary plan, but both took the greater interest in the sloop from the fact that she was to be named after Cherry.

Cuthbert visited her daily, and Jacob as often as his duties at his father's warehouse allowed him. On this particular bright February afternoon the pair had been a great part of their time on the river, skimming about in the wherry, and examining every part of the little vessel under the auspices of the master builder. Dusk had fallen upon the river before they landed, and a heavy fog beginning to rise from the water made them glad to leave it behind. They secured the wherry to the landing stage, leaving the oars in her, as they not unfrequently did when returning late, and were pursuing their way up the dark and unsavoury streets, when the sound of a distant tumult smote upon their ears, and they arrested their steps that they might listen the better.

Cuthbert's quick ears were the first to gather any sort of meaning from the discordant shouts and cries which arose.

"They are chasing some wretched fugitive!" he said in a low voice. "That is the sound of pursuit. Hark! they are coming this way. Who and what are they thus hounding on?"

Nearer and nearer came the surging sound of many voices and the hurried trampling of feet.

"Stop him—catch him—hold him!" shouted a score of hoarse voices, rolling along through the fog-laden air long before anything could be seen. "Stop him, good folks, stop him! stop the runaway priest—stop the treacherous Jesuit! He is an enemy to peace—a stirrer up of sedition and conspiracy! Down with him—to prison with him! it is not fit for such a fellow to live. Down with him—stop him!"

"A priest!" exclaimed Cuthbert between his shut teeth, a sudden gleam corning into his eyes. "Jacob, heard you that? A priest—a man of God! one man against a hundred! Canst thou stand by and see such a one hunted to death? that cannot I."

Jacob cared little for priests—indeed, he had no very good opinion of the race, and none of Cuthbert's traditional reverence; but he had all an Englishman's love of fair play, and hated the cruelty and cowardice of an angry mob as he hated anything mean and vile, and he doubled back his wrist bands and clinched his horny fists as he answered:

“I am with thee, good Cuthbert. We will stand for the weaker side. Priest or no, he shall not be hounded to death in the streets without one blow struck in his defence. But how to find him in this fog?”

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“We need not fight; that were mere madness,” answered Cuthbert in rapid tones. “Ours is to hurry the fugitive into the wherry, loose from shore, and out into the river; and then they may seek as they will, they can never find us. Mist! hark! the cries come nigher. If the quarry is indeed before them, it must be very nigh. Mark! I hear a gliding footfall beside the wall. Keep close to me; I go to the rescue.”

Cuthbert sprang swiftly through the darkness, and in a moment he felt the gown of a priest in his hand, and heard the sound of the distressed breathing of one hunted well nigh to the verge of exhaustion. As the hunted man felt the clasp upon his robe he uttered a little short, sharp cry, and made as if he would have stopped short; but Cuthbert had him fast by the arm, and hurried him along the narrow alley towards the river, upholding him over the rough ground, and saying in short phrases: “Fear nothing from us, holy Father; we are friends. We have come to save you. Trust only to us and, believe me, in three more minutes we shall be beyond the reach of these savage pursuers. The river is before us, though we see it not, and our boat awaits us there. Once aboard, they may weary themselves in their vain efforts to catch us; they will never find us in this fog.

“Here is the water side. Have a care how you step—Jacob, hold fast the craft whilst the Father steps in. So. All is well; cast off and I will follow.”

There was the sound of a light spring; the boat gave a slight lurch, and then, gliding off into the mysterious darkness of the great river, was lost to sight of shore in the wreaths of foggy vapour.

“Where is the hound? where is the caitiff miscreant? Has he thrown himself into the river? Drowning is too good for such a dog as he!” shouted angry voices on the river’s bank, and through the still air the sound of trampling footsteps could be heard up and down the little wharf which formed the landing stage.

“I hear the sound of oars!” shouted one.

“He has escaped us—curse the cunning of that Papist brood!” yelled another.

“Let us get a boat and follow,” counselled a third; but this was more easily said than done, as there was no other boat tied up at that landing stage, and the fog rendered navigation too difficult and dangerous to be lightly attempted. With sullen growls and many curses the mob seemed to break up and disperse; but the leaders appeared to stand in discussion for some moments after the rest had gone, and several sentences were distinctly heard by those in the boat, who thought it safer to drift with the tide awhile close to the shore than to use their oars and betray their close proximity to their foes.

“We shall know him again; and if he dares to show his face in the city, we will have him at last, even if we have to search for him in Alsatia with a band of soldiers. He has too long escaped the doom he merits, the plotter and schemer, the vile dog of a seminary priest! Once let us get him into our hands and he shall be hanged, drawn, and quartered, like those six of his fellows. No mercy for the Jesuits; it is not fit that such fellows should camber the earth. There will be no peace for this realm till we have destroyed them root and branch.”

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The boat had now drifted too far for the conversation to be any longer audible. Jacob gave a long, low whistle, and took to the oars. Cuthbert, who sat beside the priest in the stern, had his hand upon the tiller; and as the fog cloud lifted just a little, so that the darkness about them became hardly more than that of twilight, he looked at the silent, motionless figure beside him, and exclaimed in surprise:

“Father Urban!”

A slight smile hovered for a moment over the wan face of the priest. He lifted his thin hand and said solemnly:

“Peace be with thee, my son.”

Cuthbert bent his head in reverence, and then turned again towards the Father.

“What hast thou done that they should rail at thee thus—thou the friend of the poor, the friend even of the leper? What has come to them that they turn thus against thee? Sure, but a few short weeks ago and thou didst hold back an angry crowd by the glance of thine eye.”

“My son, trust not in the temper of the crowd, in the goodwill of the multitude. Was it not the same crowd who on the Sabbath shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ that on the Friday yelled, ‘Crucify Him! crucify Him!’ Never put faith in man, still less in the multitude that is ever swayed like a reed, and may be driven like a wave of the sea hither and thither as the wind listeth.

“And then I was not amongst mine own flock. I had—rashly, perchance—adventured myself further than I ought, for I had a message of consequence to execute, and I have not been wont to hide myself from my fellow men. But there is no knowing in these fearful times of lawlessness and savage hate what will be the temper either of rulers or people. It seems that I am known—that there is some warrant out against me. So be it. If I must flee from this city to another, holier men have done the like ere now. I would mine errand had been completed. I would I had accomplished my task. But—”

The priest’s voice had been growing fainter for some moments. Cuthbert supposed it to be a natural caution on his part, lest even Jacob should hear him as he plied his oars; but as he came to this sudden stop, he felt that the slight frame collapsed in some way, and leaned heavily against him as he sat. Turning his eyes from the dim, rippling water, so little of which could be seen in the darkness and the fog, to the face of the priest, he saw that it had turned ghastly pale, and that the eyes were glazing over as if with the approach of death. Plainly the fugitive had received some bodily hurt of which he had not spoken, and the question what to do with their helpless burden became a difficult one to answer.

“My father will not receive him,” said Jacob, shaking his head, as he leaned upon his oars and let the boat drift along with the tide that was carrying them towards the bridge. “He hates the priests worse than your good uncle and mine, who has something of a fellow feeling for them in these days of common persecution; and you know well what sort of a welcome we should receive from him did we arrive with a seminary priest in our arms.”

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“And I trow the mob would be upon us ere we had got him safe housed, and for aught we could do to stop it might tear him limb from limb in our very sight.”

“Ay, there is always some rumour afoot of a new Papist plot; and whether it be true or no, the people set on to harry the priests as dogs harry the hunted hare. I know not what to do. To land with him will do neither good to him nor to us. A fine coil there would be at home if my father heard of me mixing myself up with Jesuit traitors; and Martin Holt would not be much better pleased neither.”

“Martin Holt is not my father,” answered Cuthbert, with a touch of haughtiness; “and let him say what he will, I must save this man’s life, even if it cost me mine own. Thou knowest how he saved me that day in the dens of Whitefriars. To leave him to the mercy of the howling mob would be an act of blackest treachery; it would disgrace my manhood for ever.”

“Tush, man, who asked that of thee?” answered Jacob, with something of a smile at the lad’s impetuosity. “I love not a black cassock nor a tonsured head so passing well; but a man is a man, even though he be a priest, and I call shame upon those who would thus maltreat a brother man, and the more so when he is one who has visited the sick and tended the leper, and been the friend of those who have no friends in this great city. I would no sooner than thou give him up to the will of the mob; but we must bethink ourselves where he may be in safety stowed, else the mob will have him whether we will or no. All I was meaning by my words was that neither my home nor thine could be the place for him.”

“I ask thy pardon, good Jacob, for my heat,” answered Cuthbert humbly. “I should have known better thy good heart than to have thought such a thing of thee.”

“Nay, nay; I am no hero.”

“Thou art a kindly hearted and an honest man, which I misdoubt me if all the world’s heroes are,” answered Cuthbert quickly. “And now, Jacob, it behoves us to think. Yes, I have it. We must ask counsel of Master Anthony Cole. He would be the one to hide Father Urban if it could be done. Let me land nigh to the bridge, and go to them and tell them all; and do thou push out once more and anchor the craft beneath the pier on which their house rests. Methinks when I have taken counsel with them I can make shift to slip down the wooden shaft of that pier, and so hold parley with thee. Walter has done the like before now, and I am more agile in such feats than he; moreover, I can swim like a duck if I should chance to miss my hold, and so reach the water unawares. That will be the best, for the boat may not linger at the wharf side. We know not what news may be afoot in the city, nor that there may not be searchers bent on finding Father Urban, let him land where he may.”

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Whether or not Jacob relished this adventure, he was too stanch and too honest hearted to turn back now. The priest lay insensible at the bottom of the boat, his head pillowed upon the cloaks the youths had sacrificed for his better comfort. It was plainly a matter of consequence that he should soon be housed in some friendly shelter. His gray face looked ghastly in the dim moonlight which began to struggle through the fog wreaths. When Cuthbert leaped lightly ashore hard by the bridge, and Jacob sheered off again in the darkness, he felt as though he were out alone on the black river, with only a corpse for company.

"If it were but for Cherry's sake, I would do ten-fold more," he murmured, as he glanced up in the direction of the wool stapler's shop, and pictured pretty Cherry stepping backwards and forwards at her spinning wheel. "But I trow she will hear naught of it; or if she does, she will think only of Cuthbert's share. Alack! I fear me she will never think of me now. Why should she, when so proper a youth is nigh? If he should go away and leave her, perchance her heart might turn to me for comfort; but I fear me he looks every day more tenderly into her bright eyes. How could he live beneath the roof and not learn to love her? He would be scarce human, scarce flesh and blood, were he to fail in loving her; and what is my chance beside his? I might, almost as well yield her at once, and take good Kezzie instead. Kezzie would make a better housewife—my mother has told me so a hundred times; and I am fond of her, and methinks she—"

But there Jacob stopped short, blushing even in the darkness at the thought of what he had nearly said. Anchoring against the wooden piles of the bridge, and letting his fancy run riot as it would, he indulged in a shifting daydream, in which pain and a vague sense of consolation were oddly blended. He sighed a good many times, but he smiled once or twice likewise, and at last he gave himself a shake and spoke out aloud.

"At least it shall make no cloud and no bitterness betwixt us twain. He is a fine lad and a noble one, and he deserves more at Dame Fortune's hands than such a clown as I. Shall I grudge him his luck if he gets her? never a whit! There may not be more than one Cherry in the world, but there are plenty of good wives and honest maidens who will brighten a man's home for him."

Musing thus, Jacob kept his watch, and was not long in hearing strange and cautious sounds above his head. Looking up, he beheld a lithe form slipping, in something of a snake fashion, down the woodwork of the bridge, and the next moment Cuthbert sprang softly down, so deftly that the wherry only rolled a little at the shock.

"Hast thought me long? Hast been frozen with cold? I have made all the haste I could. All is planned. This is not strange work to them. See, I have brought with me this cradle of cord. We can place Father Urban within, and they will draw him up from above, that no man shall see him enter their house. All the windows be shuttered and barred by now. None will see or hear. They have harboured many a fugitive before, I

take it. They had all the ropes and needful gear ready beneath their hand at a moment's notice."

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Whilst he was speaking, Cuthbert was wrapping the inanimate figure in the cloaks, and placing it gently in the hammock, as we should call it, that, suspended by strong cords from above, had assisted him in his descent to the boat. Then at a given signal this hammock, with its human load, was slowly and steadily drawn upwards, with a cautious, silent skill that betokened use and experience; and as the eager watchers pushed out their boat a little further into the river, they saw the bulky object vanish at last within the dimly-lighted window of the tall, narrow house. A light was flashed for a moment from the window, and then all was wrapped in darkness.

“All is well,” exclaimed Cuthbert, with an accent of relief; “and I trow that not a living soul but our two selves knows whither the priest has fled. He is safe from that savage, howling mob. Methinks I hear their cries still! It was just so they yelled and hooted round me when Father Urban came so timely to my rescue.”

Mistress Susan chid Cuthbert somewhat roundly for being late for supper that night. But when he said he had been belated by the fog on the river with Jacob, the excuse was allowed to stand. Cherry was eager to know the progress making with her namesake, and no inconvenient questions were asked of Cuthbert when once her chattering tongue had been unloosed.

Cuthbert’s dreams were a little troubled and uneasy that night; but he woke in good spirits, and was anxious to know the state of Father Urban. He made an early excuse for visiting the Coles’ abode, and found the elder man busy over his type.

He looked up with a smile as Cuthbert appeared, but laid his fingers on his lips.

“Be cautious; he has but just sunk to sleep after a night of wakeful pain. He is anxious to see thee. He asked for thee a score of times in the night; but he must not be wakened now. Thou hast done a good deed, boy. Had Father Urban fallen a victim to yon hooting mob last eve, a deadly blow would have been dealt to the faith of this land.”

“And is his sickness very sore? has he any grievous hurt?”

“He was sore knocked about and bruised ere he first wrenched himself from the officer of the law who sprang upon him with an order of arrest. Two of his ribs be broke; and that long and fearful race for his life did cause him sore pain and greater injury, so that a fever has been set up, and he has had to lose much blood to allay it. But he is quiet and at rest just now. Thou hadst better come again at sundown; he will doubtless be awake then. He has somewhat to say to thee, I know. I believe that he has some mission to entrust to thee. Thou hast a kindly heart and a strong arm. I trow thou wilt not fail him now.”

Anthony Cole looked fixedly into the boy’s face, and Cuthbert returned the glance unflinchingly. He was possessed by the generous feeling all young and ardent natures

know of keen desire to assist further any person already indebted to them for past grace. The fact that already he had run some risk on account of Father Urban only made Cuthbert the more anxious to help him in whatever manner might best conduce to his well being and comfort. He looked full at his interlocutor, and said:

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“Whatever I may with honour and right do for Father Urban shall not be lacking. I owe him my life. I can never grudge any service for him, be it great or small.”

“Well spoken, my boy,” answered the bookseller, with his calm, penetrating smile. “May the blessed saints long preserve untainted that true nobility of soul.”

Cuthbert spent a restless day, wondering what mission the priest had for him, and whether his uncle would be angry at him for meddling in any such matters. But Martin Holt was friendly with several of the Papist families about him, notably with the Coles themselves; and Cuthbert had a growing sense of his own independence and the right to choose his own associates and his own path in life.

It was growing dusk when he stood beside the narrow bed on which Father Urban lay. The light filtered in scantily through the narrow window pane, and illumined a face lined by pain and white with exhaustion. Upon the bed lay a packet which looked like papers, and one of the priest’s wasted hands lay upon it as if to guard it. As Cuthbert bent over him and spoke his name, Father Urban looked up, and a dim light crept into his eyes.

“Is it thou, my son, come at last?”

“Yes, Father. What may I do for thee?”

“Wilt thou do one small service more for me, my son?”

“Willingly, Father, if it lies within my power.”

“It is well within thy power, boy. It is not the power I question, but the will. We live in dangerous days. Art willing to partake of the peril which compasses the steps of those who tread in the old ways wherein the fathers trod?”

“Try me and see,” was the quiet reply.

Perhaps none could better have suited the astute reader of character. The hollow eyes lighted, and the old man bent upon Cuthbert a searching glance whilst he seemed to pause to gather strength.

“I would have thee take this packet,” he said, speaking slowly and with some pain and difficulty. “There is no superscription; and sooner than let them be found by others on thy person, fling them into the river, or cut them to fragments with thy dagger; and plunge thy dagger into thine own heart sooner than be taken with them upon thee. But with caution and courage and strength (and I know that thou hast all of these) thou canst avoid this peril. What thy part is, is but this: Deliver this packet into the hand of Master Robert Catesby himself. Thou knowest him. Thou wilt make no error. Seek him not at any tavern or public place. Go to a lone house at Lambeth, with moss-grown steps down to the water’s edge. Go by thine own wherry thither, and go alone. Thou

canst not mistake the house. There is none like it besides. It stands upon the water, and none other building is nigh at hand; but a giant elm overshadows it, and there is a door scarce above high water level and steps that lead from it. Knock three times, thus, upon that door"—and the priest gave a curious tap, which Cuthbert repeated by imitation; "and when thou art admitted, ask for Robert Catesby, and give him the packet. That is all. Thy mission will then be done. Wilt thou do as much for me?"

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Cuthbert answered, without the least hesitation:

“I will.”

Chapter 11: The Lone House On The River.

“Cuthbert, do not go—ah, do not go!”

“And wherefore not, my Cherry?”

“I am afraid. I had such dreams last night. And, Cuthbert, didst thou not heed? Notedst thou not how in handing the salt at supper thy hand shook, and it was spilled? I like not such auguries; they fill my heart with fear. Do not go—ah, do not!”

Cuthbert smiled as he caressed his little love, not averse to feeling her soft arms clinging round his neck, yet quite disposed to laugh at her youthful terrors.

“But what dost thou fear, sweetheart?”

“I fear everything,” she replied, with inconsequent vehemence. “I remember the stories I have heard of the wiles of the priests, and how they tempt unwary men to their destruction. What is this Father Urban to thee, that thou shouldst risk aught for him? I will not let thee go—I will not!”

“Father Urban saved my life.”

“And thou hast saved his. That debt is paid in full,” was the prompt response. “He saved thee at no peril to himself; thou hast saved him when it might have cost thee thy life. Thou owest him nothing—nothing! Why should he ask this further service of thee?”

Cuthbert smiled. Cherry’s petulance and vehemence amused him. Her little spoiled-child tempers and exactions were beginning to have a great charm. He scarcely knew how much of the deeper fears of dawning womanhood were beginning to intermingle with the “child’s” eager love of her own way. Love was gradually transforming Cherry, but the transformation was as yet scarcely seen, and the added charm of her new softness and timidity had hardly begun to be observed by those about her.

“He is sorely sick, sweetheart, and he has asked this thing of me. I have passed my word. Thou wouldst not have me go back therefrom?”

“He should not have asked thee; he had no right,” flashed out Cherry, in some despite. “Why did he not ask Walter Cole? he was a fitter person than thou.”

“And wherefore so?”

“Why, everybody knows him for a pestilent Papist!” answered Cherry, with a flash of her big eyes. “Nothing he did would surprise anybody. He is suspected already; whilst thou —nay, Cuthbert, wherefore dost thou laugh?”

“Marry, at the logic of thy words, sweetheart! Father Urban desires a safe and secret messenger, and thou wouldst have him employ one already suspected and watched! That were a strange way of setting to work, Why, I may come and go unquestioned. No man has suspected me of aught, and I am one of those who willingly conform to the laws. With Walter things be far different: he might be stopped and searched by any suspicious knave who saw him pushing forth into the river.”

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“And a good riddance, too!” cried Cherry, who was in no humour to be tolerant of the Romanists, who were, as she thought, putting her lover in peril. “I hate those plotting, secret, cunning Papists! They are like men who are always mining in the dark, working and striving in deadly secret, no man knowing what will next be heard or seen. I like not such ways. I like not that thou shouldst meddle with them. Those be treasonable papers, I doubt not. Cuthbert, it is not meet that thou shouldst have dealings with traitors!”

Cuthbert smiled, but the earnestness with which Cherry spake impressed him in spite of himself. It had been one thing to make this promise to the sick priest who trusted him, but it was a different matter to be told that he was meddling in treason. Still, what did Cherry know about it? She was but a child.

“I know that there be treasons and treacherous plots enow in the world,” answered Cherry, as he put the question to her. “I hear more than men think; and since thou hast been here, Cuthbert, I have listened and heeded as I was not wont to do. All men whisper of the treachery and malice of the Papists. All men know that had they their will the King would be sent to death or imprisonment, and some other person placed upon the throne.”

“I know not how that may be,” answered Cuthbert slowly, “and I have no concern in such matters. All I have to do is to give these papers to one whom I know, and who has befriended me; and that must I do at all cost, for my word is pledged, and thou wouldst not have me go back from that, wouldst thou, Cherry?”

“I would not have thee run into danger,” answered Cherry, sticking persistently to her point with true feminine insistence, “and I know better than thou canst do what evil haps befall them who meddle in matters too hard for them, and that they reek not of.

“Cuthbert,” drawing a little nearer and speaking in a breathless whisper, “dost call to mind what the wise woman said: how thou wast to beware of the dark river—the flowing river? And yet thou wilt venture forth upon it this eve! I like it not; I like it not! I would that I could make a prisoner of thee, that thou mightest not go.”

“It were sweet imprisonment to be held in such thrall,” answered Cuthbert, smiling, as he loosed the clasp of the warm arms from about his neck; “but this time, sweetheart, I must needs go. I will be cautious and careful. I are too much upon the river in the wherry for any to question my coming or going. None knew aught of our rescue of the hunted priest; none but thyself knows of him nor where he lies. It is impossible that any can suspect me yet; and for the future, for thy sweet sake, I will be cautious how I adventure myself into any like peril, if peril there be.”

With that Cherry had to be content, for Cuthbert was immovable where his word was pledged, and she had perforce to let him go, since he would not be stayed.

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“Tell thy father that I sup tonight with Abraham Dyson,” said Cuthbert, as he kissed her for the last time before he left. “It may be I shall not be home in time for the supper, and I would not be too close questioned on my return. I will go thither when I have landed once more. Good Jacob will wish for news of Father Urban.”

Cuthbert was gone, Cherry looking wistfully after him. She had already begun to know something of the pain as well as of the joy of love. She felt that there was in Cuthbert’s nature a strain of self devotion and heroism which frightened her whilst it enthralled her fancy. She had an instinct that he would never turn back in any quest he had undertaken for the peril he might have to face. She felt that in him she was realizing her vague ideals of knightly prowess and dauntless courage; but all the same, unless she might be at his side to share the peril, she would almost have felt happier had this fearless bravery been somewhat less.

Cuthbert meantime pursued his way with a light heart, his packet of papers securely buttoned in the breast of his doublet. The keen air of the February afternoon fanned his face. His heart was full of tender thoughts of Cherry and her sweet affection for him. How soon would it be possible, he wondered, to claim her as his own; and what would Martin Holt say to the frustration of one of his favourite schemes?

Of his present mission, and of any peril likely to accrue to him therefrom, Cuthbert thought little or nothing. He did not see how he could possibly come under suspicion simply from fulfilling the priest’s request. It would have been brutal to refuse; and what harm could he do to himself or others by simply delivering a packet of papers?

He had almost promised Master Robert Catesby before this to visit him in his river-side house. Doubtless this was the very place for which he was now bound. Anything like an adventure was agreeable to one of Cuthbert’s imaginative nature, and a spice of possible danger did not detract from the sense of fascination, even though he might not see wherein the danger lay.

The wherry he was wont to use lay moored near to the Three Cranes, and no one heeded or questioned him as he stepped in and pushed off into the river. A couple of soldiers were lounging upon the little wharf and watching the small craft as they came and went. They appeared to take some note of Cuthbert, as of others who passed by, but they did not speak to him, and he wondered what their business was there.

A fragment of talk between two watermen reached him as he began rowing out in the direction of the Cherry Blossom; for he did not wish to take the upstream direction till twilight should have fallen and his movements would escape unheeded, and the voices of these men as they passed him reached him clearly over the water.

“On the lookout for the runaway priest, I take it. Thou surely didst hear how he gave them the slip in the fog, just when they thought they had him safe. He had been well

bruised and battered. It was a marvel how he got free. But he knew the narrow lanes well, and doubled like a hare. Doubtless he had his friends in waiting, for he slipped into some craft and eluded pursuit. But for the fog they would have made sure of him that time. They say he—"

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But the rest of the sentence was lost in the distance, and Cuthbert laughed silently as he plied his oars.

“Beshrew me, but they make a mighty coil anent this good Father Urban. One would have thought they could have made shift to lay hands on him before were he so notable a miscreant. He was not in hiding when I saw him first; he appeared to go about the city fearlessly. Doubtless it is but some new panic on the part of the King. God help us all now that we be ruled over by such a poor poltroon!”

Cuthbert had caught the prevailing contempt for the foolish and feeble James that was shared by the nation in general, and London in particular.

They put up with him to avoid the horrors and confusion of a disputed succession and a possible repetition of the bloody strife of the Roses; but there was not one section of the community with whom he was popular: even the ecclesiastics of the Episcopal party despised whilst they flattered and upheld him. Cuthbert felt an access of zeal in his present mission in the thought that it would be displeasing to the unkingly mind of the King. He had seen the ungainly monarch riding through Westminster one day not long since, and the sight of his slovenly and undignified figure, trapped out in all the extravagance of an extravagant age, his clumsy seat on horseback (of which, nevertheless, he was not a little proud), and his goggle eyes and protruding tongue, filled the young man with disgust and dislike. But for the noble bearing and boyish beauty of the Prince of Wales, who rode beside his father, his disgust would have been greater; and all men were somewhat more patient with the defects of the father in prognosticating better and happier times when young Henry should succeed to the throne.

Nevertheless treasonable plottings at this juncture did not appear as fearful and horrible as they had done in the days of “good Queen Bess,” who, with all her faults and follies, contrived to keep her people’s affection in a marvellous fashion, as her sire had done before her. Men who would have recoiled with horror at a whisper against the Queen’s Majesty, shrugged their shoulders with comparative indifference when they heard vague whispers of Popish or Puritan plots directed more or less against the person of King James. Any warm personal love and loyalty was altogether lacking to the nation, and with it was lacking the element which has always been the strongest bulwark of the sovereign’s safety.

James appears to have been dimly conscious of this, always insisting on wearing heavy and cumbersome garments, quilted so strongly as to defy the thrust of a dagger. A monarch who goes about in habitual fear of assassination betrays his knowledge that he has failed to win the love or veneration of his subjects.

Cuthbert mused idly of these things as he pushed out into the middle of the river, and then eased up and looked about him to see if his movements were observed. It was

beginning to grow dusk now. The sun had dipped behind the trees and buildings. The two sentries on the wharf had turned their backs upon the river, and were entering a tavern. The other wherries were all making for the shore, and the tide was running in strongly and carrying Cuthbert's boat upstream for him in the direction whither he would go.

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Letting himself drift with the tide, and contenting himself with keeping the prow in the right direction, Cuthbert drifted on his way quite as fast as he cared to. He had not often been as far up the stream as this, since business always took him down towards the shipping in the mouth of the river. He had never before gone higher up than the Temple Stairs, and now as he drifted past these and saw the fine pile of Westminster rising before his eyes, he felt a thrill of admiration and awe, and turned in his seat the better to observe and admire.

Westminster was almost like another town in those days, divided from the busy walled city of London by fields and gardens and fine mansions standing in their own grounds. On the south side of the river the houses were few and far between, and save at Southwark, hardly any attempt at regular building had been made. Past the great Palace of Whitehall and Westminster, with its Parliament Houses rising majestic against the darkening sky, drifted the lonely little boat. And then Cuthbert took his oars and pulled for the southern bank; for he knew that Lambeth was not very much farther away, and he recalled to mind the directions of the priest, how to find it and know it.

Trees fringed the southern bank here, leafless at this season, but still imparting a certain dark dreariness to the scene. The hoot of an owl occasionally broke the silence, and sent light shivers through Cuthbert's frame. He was not free from superstition, and the evil-omened bird was no friend of his. He would rather not have heard its harsh note just at this time; and he could have wished that the river did not look so inky black, or that the trees did not cast such weird shadows.

But the tide ran strong beneath the overhanging bank, and Cuthbert was carried onwards without any effort of his own. There was something just a little uncanny in this swift force. It reminded Cuthbert of relentless destiny sweeping him onward whether or not he would go.

But it was too late to consider or turn back even if such had been his desire. Already he began to see white gleams as of stone work along the water's edge. The willow trees came to an end; a wall bounded the river for fifty yards or more, and then there arose before his eyes the structure of the lonely old house, guarded by its giant elms—a house seeming to be actually built upon the water itself, one door, as Cuthbert had been told, opening upon the flight of steps which at high water were almost covered.

It was well nigh high water now, and Cuthbert could bring the prow of his boat to within a foot of the door. There were rings all along the topmost step for the mooring of small craft, and he quickly made fast his wherry and stood at the iron-clamped portal.

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How dark and silent and lonely the house looked, rising gaunt and dim in the uncertain light! Who would choose such a spot for a home? Surely only those whose deeds would not bear the light of day. And why that deadly silence and torpor in a house inhabited by human beings? It seemed unnatural and uncanny, and as a great white owl swept by on silent wing with a hollow note of challenge, Cuthbert felt a chill sense of coming ill creep through his veins and run down his spine; and fearful lest his resolution should desert him at the last, he raised his hand and gave the thrice-repeated knock he had been taught by Father Urban.

He doubted if the signal would be heard. He could scarcely believe that the house boasted any inhabitants, but soon he heard a heavy yet cautious tread approach the door from the other side. Some heavy bolts were drawn back, and the door was opened a little way.

“Who is there?” asked a muffled voice.

“One wishful to see Master Robert Catesby.”

“Why come to this back door, then? Why not approach the house by the front way, like an honest man?”

Cuthbert was rather taken aback by this question. He answered with a touch of sharpness:

“I came the way I was bidden to come. If I am in fault, the blame lies with him who sent me.”

“And who is that?”

“Father Urban.”

At the sound of that name the door was cautiously opened a little further, and Cuthbert felt himself confronted by a man whose face still remained in deep shadow.

“You come from Father Urban, and with a message to Robert Catesby?”

“Not a message; a packet which methinks contains papers. I was bidden to deliver them into no hand but his, and to destroy both them and myself sooner than let them fall into alien hands.”

At that the door opened wider yet, and Cuthbert could look along a dark stone passage, at the end of which glowed a light. His companion’s first suspicions now appeared laid to rest.

“Come in, come in. Speak not thus aloud without, even at this dead hour of dim loneliness. Men like ourselves stand in sore need of every caution. Come in, and let me lock the door behind us. There may be spies lurking even round these walls.”

“Spies!” echoed Cuthbert, as he strode along the passage towards the light. “I fear no spies; I have naught to conceal!”

But the other man was drawing the heavy bolts, and did not hear this remark. He followed Cuthbert into the great vaulted kitchen, which was illumined by a noble fire, the warmth of which was very welcome to the youth after his chilly voyage on the river. There was some cooking going on at the stove, and an appetizing odour filled the air.

Cuthbert turned his curious glance upon the custodian of this strange place, and saw a man who was evidently a gentleman, though very plainly and simply dressed, and employed at this moment in menial toil. He had a thin, worn face, and his eyes gleamed brightly under their heavy brows. He looked like one who had seen both trouble and suffering, and had grown somewhat reckless under successive miseries,

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He on his side was attentively regarding Cuthbert.

“Thy name, good youth?” he asked abruptly.

“Cuthbert Trevlyn,” was the unhesitating rejoinder.

The lad had not yet learned the prudence of reticence in dealing with strangers. He was neither ashamed of his errand nor of his name.

“Trevlyn—Trevlyn. It is a good name, and I have heard it before. I have heard Catesby speak of thee. So thou hast come with papers for him? Art thou indeed to be one of us?”

The question was asked almost in a whisper, accompanied by a very keen and searching glance. Cuthbert did not exactly know what to make of it.

He shook his head as he replied:

“Nay, I know naught of that. I am but a messenger from Father Urban, who was in sore straits but two days back, and well-nigh fell into the hands of his foes with these papers upon him. I had the good hap to help him to escape the peril; and as he was sore hurt, he begged of me to carry them to Master Catesby and deliver them with mine own hand. This have I come to do. He bid me seek this house, for that I should likely find him here. If he be not so, I pray you direct me where he may be found; for I have no mind to return with my task unfulfilled, nor yet to carry about with me these same papers an hour longer than need be.”

“Heaven forfend!” ejaculated the custodian of the place with unfeigned anxiety. “Father Urban in peril! Father Urban sore hurt! We must know more of this business, and that without delay. Art sure he is safe for the present? Art sure he hath not fallen into the hands of the King’s hirelings?”

“He is safe enow for the nonce.”

“And where—where is he hidden?”

Cuthbert gave the man a keen look as he answered:

“That will I tell to none save Master Robert Catesby himself, whom I know. You, good sir, are a stranger to me, albeit, I doubt not, a very worthy gentleman.”

The man’s thin face lighted up with a gleam of approval.

“You are i’ the right, young sir; you are i’ the right of it,” he said. “In these days of peril and trouble men cannot walk too warily. My name is Robert Kay, and the fate which has

been your father's has been mine, too. I have been ruined and beggared for my devotion to my faith; and but for Master Robert Catesby and others who have given me assistance and employment, I might well have starved in some garret ere now. Yet I was gently born and nurtured, and mine only cause of offence was the religion which but a generation back all men in this realm honoured and loved. Well-a-day! alack-a-day! we have fallen on evil times. Yet there is still a God in the heavens above us, and our turn may come—yea, our turn may come!"

The fierce wild gesture that accompanied these words recalled to Cuthbert's mind the same sort of prediction and menace uttered by Catesby on the night of their journey together over Hammerton Heath. He felt at once a lively curiosity and a sense of awe and repulsion; but he made no remark, and Kay quickly recovered himself.

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“It boots not to linger. We must to Catesby without delay. He must hear your news, young man, and must learn of you the fate of Father Urban. You will come with me to find him?”

“Very gladly, an you know where he is to be found.”

A curious expression flitted across the man’s face.

“Ay, that do I know well; nor is he far from here. We shall soon reach him in that wherry of yours. He is but across the river at Westminster, in the house of Thomas Percy, who has a lodging there in right of his office and stewardship to my Lord of Northumberland.”

Kay glanced rather keenly into Cuthbert’s face as he spoke these words, but they evoked no answering spark of intelligence, and again the mask fell, leaving the face expressionless and weary as before.

“I can take you across in my boat right well,” answered Cuthbert; “and the sooner we start the better I shall be pleased, for I have a dark journey back tonight, and there be sentries on the watch along the banks who may perchance ask somewhat too curiously of my movements an I be detained late.”

“Nay, then let us hurry,” said Kay restlessly; “for Catesby will not be back for many hours, and we must needs find him. I will but tarry to get my cloak, and then we will to the boat.”

He vanished as he spoke through an open door, and Cuthbert stood looking inquisitively about him. There were several deep recesses in this vault-like place, and in one of these were piled a large number of small barrels, the contents of which Cuthbert guessed to be wine or spirits. He was rather amused at the store thus got together, and thought that Master Kay and his companions knew how to enjoy themselves, even though they did lead lonely and troubled lives. His eyes were still fixed upon the barrels when Kay returned, and a smile hovered round the corners of his lips. The man seemed to note the glance, and looked sharply at him.

“Thou knowest the meaning of those?” he said suddenly; and Cuthbert smiled again as he answered readily:

“Ay, verily that do I.”

That was all which then passed. Kay took up a lantern and led the way. Cuthbert followed, and soon the door was unbarred and barred again behind them, the wherry was pushed out into deep water, and Cuthbert’s strong arms were soon propelling it across the river, Kay steering carefully, and with the air of a man well used to the transit.

He cautioned quietness as they neared the shore, but in the little creek where the boat was pushed up not a living thing was seen. Another boat somewhat larger in build was already in the creek, and there was a post to which craft could he made fast whilst the owners landed. Kay dexterously performed this office, and taking Cuthbert by the arm, bid him muffle his face in the collar of his cloak, and walk cautiously and with circumspection. They quickly reached the great block of buildings of which the Houses of Parliament formed the most conspicuous feature; and diving down a narrow entry, Kay paused suddenly before a low-browed door, and gave the peculiar knock Cuthbert had learned from the priest.

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The door was quickly opened, and a rough head thrust forth.

“Who goes there?”

“It is I, good Bates—I and a gentleman—one of us—come on business that brooks no delay with Master Robert Catesby. Go summon thy master, good knave, without delay. It is needful this gentleman speak with him at once.”

Kay had been leading Cuthbert along a passage with the familiarity of a friend of the house, whilst the serving man barred the door, and answered somewhat gruffly, as though disturbed by the interruption:

“Nay, if he is one of us, let him seek the master below. He is there, and hard at work, and will not be best pleased at being called away. I have but just come up myself. I am weary as a hunted hare and thirsty as a fish in a desert. Find my master thyself, Master Kay; I am no servant of thine.”

Kay appeared in no way astonished at this rough answer. He went on before without any remark, and Cuthbert, not knowing what else to do, followed. Presently they reached the head of a long flight of stairs that seemed to descend into the very heart of the earth, and from below there arose strange hollow sounds—the sound of blows steadily struck upon some hard substance; it seemed as though they were struck upon the very rock itself.

Greatly amazed, and wondering not a little what it could mean, Cuthbert paused at the head of this long flight, and saw his companion prepare to descend; but just at that moment the sound of blows ceased. A cry and confusion of voices arose, as if the speakers were somewhere in the heart of the earth; and almost immediately there dashed up the stairs a man with stained garments, bloodshot eyes, and a white, scared face, crying out in fearful terror:

“The bell! the bell! the tolling bell! God and the Holy Saints protect us! It is our death knell—our death knell!”

Kay seized the man by the arm.

“What ails you, man? what is it?” he asked, quickly and sternly; but at that moment the pale face of Robert Catesby appeared, and he was followed by a tall bearded man of very soldierly bearing, who said, in calm, authoritative accents:

“I have here some holy water, blessed by the Pope himself. If we do but sprinkle the walls with that and bid the daring fiend cease, all will be well. It is no work of God; it is a work of the devil, striving to turn us aside from our laudable and righteous purpose. Prove me if it be not so. If yon booming bell sounds again after this holy water has been sprinkled, then will I own that it is God fighting against us; but if it cease after this

has been sprinkled, then shall we know that heaven is on our side and only the powers of darkness against us."

"So be it," answered Catesby, quickly and decisively; "thou shalt make trial of it, good Guido. I trow we shall learn by that token that God is on our side."

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All this Cuthbert saw and heard, as he stood in the shadow at the top of the stairs consumed by a burning curiosity. Something had occurred of such overwhelming interest as to obliterate even from Kay's mind for the moment the errand on which he had come, and his presence in the house at this moment awoke no question amongst the men assembled there, who were plainly otherwise engrossed. All vanished again down the stairs, and Cuthbert stole after them with cautious footfalls, too eager to discover what could be so moving them to consider what he was doing.

It was easy to track, by their voices and the light they carried, the men who had preceded him. The long flight of stairs terminated in a long stone passage, deadly cold; and this led in turn to a great cellar, at the far end of which a group of seven men was assembled. They appeared to be standing round the entrance to a small tunnel, and this tunnel they had plainly been making themselves; for a number of tools for boring and picking lay about, and the faces, hands, and clothes of the assembled party plainly indicated the nature of their toil, albeit from their speech and bearing it was plain that all were gentlemen.

Robert Catesby was sprinkling the walls of this tunnel with some water, using words of supplication and exorcism, and his companions stood bare headed around him. A great hush fell upon all as this ceremony ceased, and all seemed to listen intently.

"There is no sound; the devil hath taken flight. I knew how it would be!" spoke the tall dark man exultantly. "And now, comrades, to work again, for we have heard the last of our knell tonight. No powers of darkness can stand before the charm of His Holiness's power."

With an air of relief and alacrity the gentlemen seized their tools, and again the hollow or ringing sounds commenced to sound in that dim place; but Kay had plucked Robert Catesby by the sleeve, and was whispering some words in his ear.

Catesby turned quickly round, made a few strides towards the staircase, and then catching sight of Cuthbert, stopped short, and seized Kay by the arm.

"Fool!" he cried, in a low, hissing tone, "what possessed you to bring him here? We are undone!"

"Nay, but he knows; he is one of us."

"He is not; it is a lie! If he said so, he is a foul spy!"

And then striding up to Cuthbert with eyes that gleamed murderously, he looked into the youth's face, and suddenly the fury died out of his own.

"Why, it is Cuthbert Trevlyn! Good luck to you, good youth! I had feared I know not what. But thou art stanch and true; thou art a chip of the old block. If it had to be some

one, better thee than any other. Boy, thou hast seen a sight tonight that must have awakened thy curiosity. Swear to secrecy—swear to reveal nothing—and I will tell thee all."

"Nay, tell me nothing," answered Cuthbert firmly; "I love not mysteries. I would fain forget all I have heard and seen. Let me tell thee of Father Urban—let me give thee his letters; but tell me naught in return. I will not know—I will not."

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Cuthbert spoke with sudden vehemence. He and Catesby were mounting the stairs together. As they reached the dim vestibule above, Catesby took him by the arm and looked him searchingly in the face, as he said:

“Maybe thou art in the right. It may be better so. But thou must swear one thing ere thou goest hence, and that is—to reveal to no living soul what thou hast seen this night. Know, boy, that if thou wilt not swear this—”

But Cuthbert shook himself free, and looked proudly at his interlocutor.

“Nay, threaten me not, good Master Catesby, else I may be moved to defy thee and thy power. For the goodwill I bear thee, and for that I loathe and abhor those craven souls who will betray their fellow men to prison and death, I will give thee my word of honour to hold sacred all that I have seen and heard in this house this night. I know not what it means, nor do I desire to know. Be it for good or be it for ill, it is thy secret, not mine, and with me it is safe. But I will not be threatened nor coerced—no, not by any man. What I will not give for friendship and brotherly love, no man shall wrest from me through fear.”

Catesby looked at the lad with his flashing eyes and proudly-held head, and a smile illuminated his features. Whether or not his companions would have been satisfied with this pledge, he himself was content, and with a kindly grip of the hand he said:

“Enough, boy, enough! I like thy spirit, and I ask thy pardon for dreaming of treating thee in any unworthy fashion. And now let us talk of Father Urban and what has befallen him; and give to me these papers of which thou hast been such a careful custodian.”

An hour later, Cuthbert’s wherry floated out into midstream once more, and swiftly sped along the dark water, propelled by a pair of strong young arms. Could any have seen the rower’s face, it would have been seen to be grave and rather pale. The lights of the bridge beginning to gleam ahead of him as he looked over his shoulder, Cuthbert muttered to himself:

“This has been a strange night’s work, and there be more in all than I can rightly understand. Pray Heaven I be not further entangled in such mysteries and secrets! Well did the wise woman bid me beware of underground cellars. Would I had never been into that ill place this night!”

Chapter 12: May Day In The Forest.

“Canst put up with my company, good Cuthbert? for I have a mind to travel with thee.”

Cuthbert turned quickly as these words fell upon his ear, and found himself face to face with a gay-looking youth dressed all in forester's green, whom at first he took for a stranger, till the young man with a laugh removed his wide-brimmed hat, so that the evening light fell full upon his handsome boyish face; and Cuthbert exclaimed, with a start of surprise:

"Verily, it is Lord Culverhouse!"

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“And thy very good cousin, Cuthbert Trevlyn,” said the Viscount, as he linked his arm within that of his would-be comrade. “So let there be no more ceremony betwixt thee and me; for we are both bent upon a merry time in the forest, and we will fare forth thither together as brothers and friends.”

“With all my heart,” answered Cuthbert warmly; for he loved companionship, and greatly liked what he had seen of Kate’s cousin and lover, the gay and handsome Lord Culverhouse. He had been once or twice recently to the great house in the Strand, generally rowing himself up to the garden steps, and sometimes taking the Viscount upon the river with him. In this way they had struck up a certain friendliness and intimacy; and Cuthbert had spoken to Lord Culverhouse of his proposed visit to the forest on May Day, although without explaining to him the real and chief object of that journey. Culverhouse had not at the time expressed any desire to accompany him, though he had asked a good many questions respecting the forest and the forest fetes held upon that day. Cuthbert had observed an unwonted animation in his eyes as he had done so; but nothing in the young nobleman’s manner had prepared him for this freak on his part, and he had actually failed at the first moment to recognize this fanciful figure in its smart forester’s dress when first saluted by the wearer. But he was glad enough of the meeting, and the proposition of travelling in company was very welcome, though he still had one qualm to set at rest.

“I only go on foot, my lord. Doubtless you have a horse in waiting, and will soon outride me.”

“A horse! not I. I have neither beast nor man in waiting. I travel alone and on foot, and for the nonce am no more Lord Culverhouse, but only Rupert de Grey—thy trusty comrade Rupert—and a would-be follower of bold Robin Hood, did he but hold his court with his merry, merry men in the free forest now. See, I wear his livery. I feel as free as air. I marvel I never thought of such a masquerade before. We will have a right merry time this joyous springtide. How long dost thou purpose to remain in the greenwood thyself?”

“I know not,” answered Cuthbert, as the pair strode southward together, quickly leaving behind the last houses of London, and striking away in the direction of the forest whither both were bound. It was the last day in April: the soft south wind was blowing in their faces, the trees were beginning to hang out their tassels of tender green, the hawthorn was bursting into bloom and filling the air with its fragrance. It was, in fact, the eve of one of those old-fashioned May Days which seem utterly to have gone by now, and all nature was rejoicing in the sweet exaltation of the happy springtide, full of the promises of the golden summer to come.

Cuthbert’s heart swelled with delight as he looked about him and felt that the strife and bustle of the great city were at last shaken off. In spite of the spell exercised upon him by the life of London, he had for some weeks been pining like a caged bird for the

freedom of the country again, the vault of the sky alone above him, the songs of the birds in his ears. The spring had brought to him yearnings and desires which he scarcely understood, and latterly he had been counting the days which must pass ere he should find himself in the forest once again.

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In his uncle's house matters were growing a little strained. Martin Holt undoubtedly suspected something of the matter betwixt him and Cherry, and as plainly disapproved. He looked upon Cherry as promised to her cousin Jacob, and doubtless he thought the steady, plodding, slow-witted son of the house of Dyson a far safer husband for his feather-brained youngest than handsome Cuthbert Trevlyn, with his gentler birth, his quick and keen intelligence, and his versatile, inquiring mind, which was always inclining him to meddle in matters better left alone, and to judge for himself with an independence that was perilous in times like these. Not that Martin Holt was himself averse to independence of judgment, rather the reverse; but he knew the dangers besetting the path of those who were resolved to think and judge for themselves, and he would fain have seen his youngest and dearest child safely made over to the care of one who would be content to go through life without asking troublesome questions or intermeddling with matters of danger and difficulty, and would conform to all laws, civil and religious, without a qualm, recognizing the King's will as supreme in all matters, temporal and spiritual, without a doubt or a scruple. Cherry would be safe with Jacob, that was Martin's feeling, whilst with Cuthbert he could have no such security. Cuthbert had still his way to make in the world, and it had not yet appeared that he would be of any use in business matters. He was clever with his pen. He was a good scholar, and had been able to make himself useful to his uncle in a number of small matters where his quickness and sharp wits had room to work. He was also of no small use in the matter of the building and fitting up of the new sloop, in which he took such keen interest. He would go over every bit of the work, comparing it with what he saw in other vessels, and learning quickly to distinguish good workmanship from bad. He became so ready of resource and suggestion when any small difficulty occurred, that both Martin Holt and Abraham Dyson learned to think exceedingly well of his abilities, and employed him largely in matters where quickness of observation and apprehension was wanted. But for all that, and despite the fact that he had earned some considerable sum of money (as he reckoned it) during the winter and spring months, he had shown no great desire to settle himself down to any steady occupation or trade, and neither of the elder men saw any opening for him that should give him regular and permanent occupation.

"He has too much of the gay gallant about him for my taste," Abraham would say. "He is more Trevlyn than Holt; and some folks say more Wyvern than Trevlyn. Be that as it may, he is a gentleman to the fingertips; and one might as well try to tame an eagle as set him down to the round of work that comes natural to lads like Jacob."

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And Martin Holt would nod assent, feeling that there was something about his sister's son that would never assimilate with the life of a merchant tradesman. He liked his nephew, and thought well of him in many ways; but he was not sorry to receive his request for leave to revisit his old haunts and his own kindred when the long spring days were upon the world; and he bid the lad please himself for the future, and return or not as he best liked. There was the gold to be given up to him when he should make formal claim for it. Martin had satisfied himself by now that he was worthy to be intrusted with it; but Cuthbert intended Petronella to have the bulk of that, so that she might wed Philip, if they were both inclined that way. As for himself, he was still bent on finding the lost treasure of Trevlyn, and he had vowed the whole of the long summer to the search, resolved that he would find it, be the perils and perplexities what they might.

So that although he saw by his uncle's manner that he was not especially anxious to see him back soon, and shrewdly guessed that this was in part on Cherry's account, he did not let the matter distress him. When good Jacob had had his turn, and had failed in winning Cherry's hand, and when he himself should return laden with the treasure which should enable him to place his little love in a nest in all ways worthy of her, surely then his uncle would give her up to him without opposition. This was how he spoke to Cherry, comforting her as the hour for his departure drew near, and vowing eternal constancy and unchanging love. He was beginning to feel that he was doing his cause more harm than good by lingering on, unable to declare himself, yet betraying himself, as he often felt, in a hundred little nameless ways. It would be better for all when the wrench was finally made; and neither he nor Cherry doubted for a moment that he would be successful in his search, and would come riding up at last to the house on the bridge, the gayest of gay gallants, to claim Cherry in the sight of all, lifting her upon his horse, and riding away with her in the fashion of the bold knights of old, whose deeds of prowess they both so greatly admired.

It was this brilliant prospect of glory to come which consoled Cherry and reconciled her to the parting of the present. Hard as it would be to live without Cuthbert, she would strive to do so in the thought that he would come again ere long and take her away for ever from the life which was becoming odious to her, she scarce knew why. So they had parted in hope as well as in sorrow, and Cuthbert felt all his elasticity of spirit returning to him as he strode along by his unexpected comrade's side.

"I know not how long I shall be absent from London," he said in answer to Culverhouse's question. "There be many things depending on that. I have set myself a task, and I know not how long a time it will take to accomplish. And you, my good lord, how goes it with you? Are you about to visit Trevlyn Chase, as you will be thus near, and see your kinsfolks there?"

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“Call me not good lord, call me Rupert, as I have bidden thee before!” was the quick response, as a flush dyed for the moment the smooth fair cheek of the Viscount. “Cuthbert, since we are to travel together, I must needs tell thee my secret. I am not bound for Trevlyn Chase. My father has forbidden me for the nonce to visit there, not for any ill will he bears our kinsfolk, but—but that—”

“But that he fears the bright eyes of Mistress Kate, and hopes by keeping you apart to help thee to forget? Is it not so, Rupert?”

“Marry, thou hast well guessed. Or has it been no guess? Hast thou heard aught?”

“My cousin Kate herself told me somewhat of it,” answered Cuthbert; “but she laughed to scorn the artifice. She is not made of the stuff that forgets.”

“Heaven’s blessing be upon her for a true-hearted maiden!” cried Culverhouse, with a lover’s easily-stirred enthusiasm. “Cuthbert, since thou knowest so much, thou shalt know more. I have made shift to write to Kate about this purpose of mine to visit the forest glades on blithe May Day; and she has sent me a little missive, fresh and sweet and dainty like herself, to tell me that she will ride forth herself into the forest that day, and giving the slip to her sisters or servants, or any who may accompany her, will meet me without fail in a certain dell that doubtless I shall find from the directions she gives. There is a giant yew tree in the midst that would hide six men in its hollow trunk, and a laughing streamlet circles well-nigh round it. She tells me it has got the name of Oberon’s Horseshoe.”

“I know the place well,” answered Cuthbert. “I can guide thee thither. So Mistress Kate will meet thee there! It is like her. She has a daring spirit. I would I could help her to her dowry.”

“Her dowry! thou!” echoed Culverhouse in surprise; and then as they walked onwards through the dewy night, Cuthbert could not but tell a little of his purpose to the comrade who had intrusted him with his own secret; and Culverhouse listened with the greatest interest, albeit without quite the same sanguine hope of success that Cuthbert himself entertained. Still, he was of opinion that a patient search and inquiry instituted by an obscure lad like Cuthbert, used to rough ways and the life of the forest, would be more likely to succeed than one set on foot by any person better known. If the old tradition were true that the gipsies had hidden the gold again in spite, it was possible that after this lapse of time the old hatred would have died out, and that somebody might be willing to betray the precious secret for a sufficient reward. At any rate Cuthbert’s idea of living in the forest and cultivating and studying these strange folk was amply worth a trial. If his quest succeeded, the whole Trevlyn family would be once more wealthy and prosperous; if not, no harm would have been done, and the youth would have enjoyed his free life and new experiences after the winter spent in the confinement of the great city.

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The travellers walked on through the twilight and until long after moonrise. They had put a good twelve miles between them and London before they talked of halting. They had no intention of seeking shelter for the night in any wayside hostelry. A hollow tree would give them all the cover they needed, and both had brought with them such supply of provision as would render them independent of chance hospitality for twenty-four hours at least.

Cuthbert's quick eyes soon sought out the sort of resting place they desired—a great oak, into whose hollowed trunk the dead leaves had drifted, and were now piled up into a soft heap. Lying luxuriously upon this easy couch, the two travellers took such refreshment as each needed; and as Cuthbert saw in the distance before them the bold outlines of the high ground, part of which went by the name of Hammerton Heath, he recounted to his companion his adventure there the November previous, and by what means he had saved his purse from the hands of the robbers.

Culverhouse listened to the story, and when it was done he said:

"Take heed, good Cuthbert, that thou dost not meet with a worse mischance than the loss of thy purse. I would sooner have mine filched from me by freebooters than owe aught to Robert Catesby that could give him any claim upon me."

Cuthbert looked up quickly. Since that night when he had delivered the papers to Catesby, and had seen and heard so much that was mysterious, he had gradually let the strange incident slip from his memory. Nothing had occurred to recall it, or to render him in any wise uneasy. He had seen nothing of Catesby or his companions. Father Urban had said that they had all dispersed into the country. He himself shortly took leave of the Coles, and was taken off by a boat on a dark night to reach a vessel about to start for Spain. The whole incident seemed more like a dream than a reality now; and Cuthbert's vague sense of uneasiness had by this time died quite away.

"What dost thou mean?" he asked, as the Viscount's words fell on his ear.

"No more than this, that yon Catesby is a dangerous man. I know naught against him, save that he is a Papist of the type I like not—a plotting, designing, desperate type, that ofttimes injure themselves far more than they injure others, yet too often drag their friends and those who trust them to destruction with them—and all for some wild and foolish design which they have not the wits to carry through, and against which Heaven itself fights to its overthrow. Have no dealings with this same Catesby, good Cuthbert; thou wilt rue it an thou dost."

"I am not like to see him again," answered Cuthbert slowly. "He is gone I know not whither. If men look thus darkly upon him, doubtless he will not adventure himself in London again."

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“I know not how that may be. My father hath heard disquieting rumours of late, and the name of Robert Catesby is mingled in all of them. However, he speaks little to me of matters of state. Men in high places are for ever hearing whispers and rumours, and it boots not to give over-much credence to every idle tale. Only, what thou spakest of this Catesby recalled the matter to my mind. He is a man to fear, to avoid. He has a way with him that wins men’s hearts; yet it is but the fatal fascination of the glittering snake, that snares the fluttering bird to its destruction. So, at least, I have heard.”

Cuthbert made no direct reply. He would have liked to tell Culverhouse of the incident of the lonely house on the river, and the dark cellar in which Catesby and others had been at work; but his tongue was bound by his promise. Moreover, the hour for sleep was at hand, and the travellers, wrapping themselves in their cloaks and stretching their limbs upon their soft couch, were soon lost in the land of dreams.

The following morning dawned as fair and clear and bright as heart could wish. It was just such a May Day as one pictures in reading of those old-time festivities incident to that joyous season. And the forest that day was alive with holiday makers and rustic folks, enjoying themselves to the full in all the green glades and bosky dells. Culverhouse and Cuthbert found it hard to push along upon their way into the heart of the forest, so attractive were the scenes enacted in every little clearing that had become the site of a tiny hamlet or village, so full of hospitality to wayfarers was every house they passed, and so merry were the dances being footed on the greensward, in which every passer by was expected to take a part.

Culverhouse, in his green forester’s dress, daintily faced with silver, a silver hunting horn slung round his neck, was an object of universal admiration, and the fact that he was plainly some wealthy gentleman masquerading and playing a part did not in any way detract from the interest his appearance excited. His merry, courteous ways and well-turned compliments won the hearts of maidens and matrons alike, whilst his deft and elegant dancing was the admiration of all who watched; and he was besought on all hands to stay, and found no small difficulty in pursuing his way into the forest itself.

However, they had made an early start, and as they drew near to the denser part of the wood interruptions became less frequent, and presently ceased altogether. Cuthbert found a track he knew which led straight to the trysting place with Kate; and though from time to time the travellers heard distant sounds of mirth and revelry proceeding from the right hand or the left, they did not come upon any groups of gipsies or freebooters, who were doubtless enjoying the day after their own fashion, and the two pursued their way rapidly and without molestation.

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“This is the place,” said Cuthbert at length, as the underwood grew thick and tangled and the path became almost lost. “And see, yonder is a lady’s palfrey tethered to a tree. Mistress Kate is the first at the tryst. Go down thither to her, and I will wait here and guard her steed; for there be many afoot in the forest this day, and all may not be so bent on pleasure taking that they will not wander about in search of gain, and a fair palfrey like yon would be no small prize.”

Culverhouse readily consented to this arrangement, and for some time Cuthbert was left to a solitary enjoyment of the forest. He caressed the horse, which responded with great gentleness and goodwill; and then he lay down in luxurious ease, his hands crossed behind his head, his face turned upwards towards the clear blue of the sunny sky, seen through the delicate tracery of the bursting buds of elm and beech. It was a perfect feast for eye and ear to lie thus in the forest, listening to the songs of the birds, and watching the play of light and shadow. Fresh from the roar and the bustle of the city, Cuthbert enjoyed it as a thirsty traveller in the desert enjoys a draught of clear cold water from a spring. He was almost sorry when at last the sound of voices warned him that the lovers’ stolen interview was at an end, and that they were approaching him at last.

Kate’s bright face was all alight with happiness and joy as she appeared, holding fast to her lover’s arm. She greeted Cuthbert with the prettiest air of cousinly affection, asked of himself and his welfare with undisguised interest, and then told them of some rustic sports being held at a village only three miles distant, and begged Culverhouse to take her to see the spectacle. She had set her heart upon it all day, and there would be no danger of her being seen in the crowd sure to be assembled there to witness the sights. Her sisters had no love for such shows, and nobody would be greatly troubled at her hardihood in escaping from the escort of her servants. She was always doing the like, and no harm had ever befallen her. Her father was wont to call her his Madcap, and her mother sometimes chided, and feared she would come to ill by her wild freaks; but she had always turned up safe and sound, and her independent ways had almost ceased to excite comment or uneasiness. On May Day, when all the world was abroad and in good humour, they would trouble still less on her account. Kate had no fear of being overtaken and brought back, and had set her heart on going with Culverhouse to this village fete and fair. She had heard much of it, yet had never seen it. Sure this was the very day on which to go.

Culverhouse would have gone to the moon with her had she asked it—or would at least have striven to do so—and his assent was cordially given. Cuthbert knew the place well; and Kate was quickly mounted on the palfrey, Culverhouse walking at her bridle-rein, whilst Cuthbert walked on ahead to choose the safest paths, and warn them of any peril in the road. He could hear scraps of lover-like dialogue, that sent his heart back to Cherry, and made him long to have her beside him; but that being impossible, he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the present, and found pleasure in everything about him.

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He had been before to this gay fair, held every May Day, to which all the rustic folks from far and near flocked with one accord. He knew well the look of the tents and booths, the bright dresses of the women, the feats of skill and strength carried on between the younger men, the noise, the merriment, the revelry that towards sundown became almost an orgie.

But in the bright noon-day light all was at its best. Kate was delighted with everything, especially with the May Queen upon her throne, surrounded by her attendant maidens in their white holiday dresses, with their huge posies in their hands. This was the place for love making, and it attracted the lovers not a little. Cuthbert, who undertook to tie up the horse in some safe place, and then wandered alone through the shifting throng, found them still upon the green when he rejoined them after his ramble. Plainly there was something of interest greater than before going on in this quarter. People were flocking to the green, laughing, chattering, and questioning. Blushing girls were being led along by their ardent swains; some were protesting, others laughing. Cuthbert could not make out what it was all about, and presently asked a countryman why the folks were all in such a coil.

“Why? because the priest has come, and all who will may be wed by him. He comes like this every May Day, and he stands in the church porch, and he weds all who come to him for a silver sixpence, and asks no questions. Half our folks are so wed year by year, for there be no priest or parson here this many years, not since the last one was hunted to death by good Queen Bess—Heaven rest her soul! The church is well nigh falling to pieces as it stands; but the porch is the best part of it, and the priest who comes says it is consecrated ground, and so he can use it for his weddings. That is what the coil is about, young sir. You be a stranger in these parts, I take it?”

Cuthbert was not quite a stranger, but he had never heard before of these weddings.

“Are they lawfully wed whom he marries?” he asked; but the man only shook his head.

“Nay, as for that I know naught, nor do any of the folks hereabouts neither. But he is a priest, and he says the right words, and joins their hands and calls them man and wife. No man can do more so far as my poor wits tell me. Most of our young folks—ay, and some of the old ones too—have been married that fashion, and I can’t see that there is aught amiss with them. They be as happy and comfortable as other folks.”

Cuthbert moved on with the interested crowd to see these haphazard weddings. It was plain that the marrying of a number of young couples was looked upon as part of the May Day sports. It was a pretty enough sight to see some of the flower-crowned blushing girls in their festal white, led along by their gaily-bedecked swains in the direction of the church, which was hard by the open village green. Some other importunate

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youths were eagerly pleading their cause, and striving to drag their mistresses to the nuptial altar amid the laughter and encouragement of the bystanders. Cuthbert moved along in search of his companions, greatly amused by all he saw and heard; and presently he caught sight of Kate and Culverhouse standing together close beside the church, half hidden within a small embrasure enclosed between two buttresses. Her face was covered with brilliant blushes, whilst he had hold of her hand, and seemed to be pleading with her with impassioned earnestness. As Cuthbert approached he heard these words:

“Nay, sweetest Kate, why hold back? Have we not loved each other faithfully and long? Why dost thou fear?”

“O Culverhouse, methinks it would be wrong. How can we know that such wedlock would be lawful? Methinks my mother would break her heart did she think the knot had been thus loosely tied.”

“Nay, but, Kate, thou scarce takest my meaning as yet. This pledge given betwixt us before yon priest would be to us but the betrothal troth plight. I doubt myself whether such wedlock would be lawful; nor would I dare to call thee my wife did none but he tie the knot. But listen, sweet coz: if we go before him and thus plight our troth and join our hands together, none will dare to bid us wed another. It will be too solemn a pledge to be lightly broken. Men think gravely of such matters as solemn betrothal, and in days to come if they should urge upon thee or me to wed with another, we have but to tell of what was done this day, and they will cease to strive to come between us more.

“O sweetest mistress, fairest Kate, let us not part today without some pledge of mutual faith and constancy! Let me hold this little hand and place my token on thy finger; then be the time of waiting never so long, I shall know that at last I may call thee mine before all the world!”

Kate was quivering, blushing, trembling with excitement, though not with fear; for she loved Culverhouse too completely to feel aught but the most perfect confidence in him and his honour and faith.

“If only I could be sure it was not wrong!” she faltered.

“Wrong to plight thy hand, when thy heart is long since given?” he asked, with tender playfulness. “Where can the wrong be there?”

“I know not. I would fain be altogether thine. But what would my father and mother say?”

It was plain already that she was yielding. Culverhouse drew her tenderly towards him.

“Nay, sweet coz, there be times when the claim of the parent must give place to the closer claim of the lover, the husband. Does not Scripture itself tell us as much? Trust me, I speak for our best good. Let us but go together before this priest and speak the words that, said in church, would make us man and wife, and none will dare to keep us apart for ever, or bid us wed with another. Such words must be binding upon the soul, be the legal bond little or much. It is hard to say what the force of such a pledge may be; but well I know that neither my father nor thine would dare to try to break it, once they were told how and when it had been made. Thou wilt be mine for ever, Kate, an thou wilt do this thing.”

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The temptation was too great to be resisted. To plight her troth thus to Culverhouse, in a fashion which might not be wholly ignored or set aside, was a thing but too congenial to the daring and ardent temperament of the girl. With but a few more quivers of hesitation she let herself be persuaded; and Culverhouse, turning round with a radiant smile of triumph, saw that Cuthbert was standing beside them, sympathy and interest written upon his face.

“Thou wilt be witness to our espousals, good cousin,” he said gaily, as he led his betrothed to the porch, where the crowd made way for them right and left, seeing well the purpose for which these gentlefolks had come. It pleased them mightily that this fine young forester with his air of noble birth, and this high-born maiden in her costly riding dress, should condescend to come before the priest here in their own little church porch, and plight their troth as their own young folks were doing.

A hush of eager expectation fell upon the crowd as Culverhouse led his betrothed love before the priest; and when the ring, bought from an old peddler who always attended at such times and found ready sale for his wares, was placed on Kate’s slim finger, a murmur of applause and sympathy ran through the crowd, and Kate quivered from head to foot at the thought of her own daring.

The thing was done. She and Culverhouse had plighted themselves in a fashion solemn enough to hinder any person from trying to make light of their betrothal. Right or wrong, the deed was done, and neither looked as though he or she wished the words unsaid.

But Kate dared not linger longer. Cuthbert fetched her palfrey, and Culverhouse lifted her to the saddle; and hiring a steed from a farmer for a brief hour, promising to bring it back in time for the good man to jog home again at dusk, the newly-plighted pair rode off into the forest together, he promising to see her to within sight of her own home before taking a last adieu.

Cuthbert stood looking after them with a smile on his lips.

“Now, if Heaven will but speed my quest and give me happy success, I trow those twain may yet be wed again, no man saying them nay; for if sweet Mistress Kate can but bring with her the dower the treasure will afford, none will forbid the union: she will be welcomed by Lord Andover as a fitting wife for his son and heir!”

Chapter 13: The Gipsy’s Tryst.

“This is surely the spot. Methinks she will not fail me. Moonrise was the hour she named. I will wait with what patience I may till she comes to keep the tryst.”

So said Cuthbert to himself as, at the close of that long and varied day, he stood at the mouth of a natural cave, half hidden by tangled undergrowth, which had been appointed months ago by Joanna the gipsy as the place where on May Day evening she would meet him, and tell him more of the matter so near to his heart.

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Culverhouse and he had parted company when the former had escorted towards her home the lady of his choice, to whom his troth had been so solemnly plighted a short while before. The young Viscount was going to make his way rapidly to London again; but Cuthbert purposed a long stay in the forest. The search for the lost treasure might be a matter of weeks, possibly of months. But he was very well resolved not to give it up until the search had been pursued with unabated zeal to the last extremity, and he himself was fully satisfied as to its fate. Nothing but actual knowledge that it had been dissipated and dispersed should induce him to abandon the quest.

Standing at the mouth of the cave, leaning against the rocky wall, and enjoying the deep solitude of the forest and its tranquil stillness, Cuthbert revolved many matters in his mind, and it seemed more certain than ever that the finding of the treasure alone could save him and many that he loved from manifold difficulties and perplexities. How that treasure would smooth the path and bring happiness and ease to the Trevlyn family! Surely it was well worth a more vigorous search than had long been made! Cuthbert took from his pocket the bit of parchment containing the mystic words of the wise woman, or her familiar spirit, and perused them again and again, albeit he knew them well nigh by heart.

“Thou art here! It is well.”

Cuthbert started at the sound of the rich, deep tones, and found himself confronted by the queenly-looking gipsy. He had not heard her approach. She seemed to have risen from the very ground at his feet. But he was scarcely surprised. She had the air of one who could come and go at will even upon the wings of the wind.

“I am here,” answered Cuthbert, making a courteous salutation. “I thank thee that thou hast not forgotten the tryst.”

“I never forget aught, least of all a promise,” answered Joanna, with her queenly air of dignity. “I come to strive to do my share to atone a wrong and render restitution where it is due. What paper is that, boy, that thou studiest with such care?”

Cuthbert handed her the scrap of parchment. He did not know if she would have learning to decipher it; but the writing appeared to have no difficulties for her. She read the words in the clear light of the May evening, albeit the sun had set and the crescent moon was hanging like a silver lamp in the sky; and as she did so she started slightly, and fixed a keenly penetrating glance upon Cuthbert.

“Where didst thou get these lines, boy?”

“They were given me by a wise woman, whom I consulted to see if she could aid me in this matter.”

“A wise woman! And where didst thou find her?”

“In London town, where she practises her arts, and many come unto her by secret. She is veritably that which she professes, for she told me the object of my quest ere I had told mine errand to her.”

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“But thou hadst told her thy name?”

“Yes, verily, I had done that.”

“And knowing that, she divined all. Verily thou hast seen Esther the witch! And this was all she knew—this was all she knew!”

Joanna’s head was bent over the parchment. Her eyes were full of fire. Her words seemed addressed rather to herself than to Cuthbert, and they excited his ardent curiosity.

“And who is Esther? and dost thou know her? thou speakest as if thou didst.”

“All of us forest gipsies know Esther well. She is one of us, though she has left the forest to dwell in cities. According to the language of men, she is my aunt. She is sister to old Miriam, whom thou sawest in the forest mill, and who would have done thee to death an I had not interposed to save thee. And Miriam is my mother, albeit I am her queen, and may impose my will on her.”

“And does she know aught of the lost treasure?” asked Cuthbert, with eager impatience.

“I had hoped she did,” answered Joanna slowly, her eyes still bent on the paper. “I have seen her myself since I saw thee last. I have spoken with her on this same matter. I could not draw from her what I strove to do; but I see now that I prepared the way, and that when thou didst go by chance to her, she was ready for thee. But if this is all she knows, it goes not far. Still it may help—it may help. In a tangled web, no one may say which will be the thread which patiently followed may unravel the skein.”

“Belike she knows more than she would say,” suggested Cuthbert quickly. “If she can look into the future, sure she may look into the past likewise—”

But Joanna stopped him by a strange gesture.

“Peace, foolish boy! Thinkest thou if gipsy lore could unravel the riddle, that it had not long ago become known to me? We have our gifts, our powers, our arts, and well we know how to use them be it for good or ill. But we know full well what the limits are. And if men know it not, it is more their blindness than our skill that keeps them in ignorance. And if they give us more praise and wonder than we merit, do they not also give us hatred and enmity in like meed? Have we not gone through fire and sword when men have risen up against us and called us sorcerers? Have we not suffered for our reputation; and do we not therefore deserve to wear it with what honour we may?”

The woman spoke with a strange mixture of bitterness, earnestness, and scorn—scorn, as it seemed, almost of herself and of her tribe, yet a scorn so proudly worn that it scarce seemed other than a mark of distinction to the wearer. Cuthbert listened in

amaze and bewilderment. It was all so different from what he had looked for. He had hoped to consult an oracle, to learn hidden secrets of which the gipsies had cognizance through their mysterious gifts; and, behold, he was almost told that these same gifts were little more than the idle imagining of superstitious and ignorant men.

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“Then canst thou tell me nothing?” he asked.

“I can tell thee much,” was the steady answer, “albeit not all that thou wouldst know; that will still be thine to track out with patience and care. But these lines may help; they may contain a clue. I wonder how and where Esther learned them! But come within the cave. The evening air grows chill, and I and thou have both walked far, and stand in need of refreshment. All is ready for us within. Come; I will lead the way.”

Joanna stepped on before, and Cuthbert followed. He had thought the cave a small and shallow place before, but now he discovered that this shallow cavity in the rock was but the antechamber, as it were, to a larger cavern, where twenty men might sit or lie at ease; and the entrance to this larger place was through a passage so narrow and low that none who did not know the secret would think it possible to traverse it.

Cuthbert wondered if he were letting himself be taken in a trap as he followed the gipsy through this narrow way; but he trusted Joanna with the confidence of instinct which is seldom deceived, and presently felt that they had emerged into some larger and wider place. In a few moments the gipsy had produced a light, and the proportions of the larger cavern became visible. It was a vaulted place that had been hollowed out of the ruddy sandstone either by some freak of nature or by the device of men, and had plainly been adapted by the wandering gipsy tribes as a place of refuge and resort. There were several rude pieces of furniture about—a few pallet beds, some benches, and a table. On this table was now spread the wherewithal for a modest repast—some cold venison, some wheaten bread, a piece of cheese, and a flagon of wine. Cuthbert, who had fared but scantily all that day, was ready enough to obey the gipsy’s hospitable invitation, and seated himself at the board. She helped him liberally to all that was there, but appeared to want nothing herself; and whilst Cuthbert satisfied his hunger she commenced the tale, part of which in its bare outline was already known to him.

“Thou knowest the story of the witch burned on the village common, nigh to Trevlyn Chase, by the order of the knight then ruling in that house? Dost know too that that woman was my grandam, the mother of Miriam and of Esther?”

“I knew that not,” answered Cuthbert.

“But so it was,” pursued Joanna, her big dark eyes fixed upon the flickering flame of the lamp she had kindled. “I never saw my grandam myself; she had met her doom before I saw the light. Yet I have heard the tale so ofttimes told that methinks I see myself the threatening crowd hooting the old woman to her fiery death, the stern knight and his servants watching that the cruel law was carried out, and the gipsy tribe hanging on the outskirts of the wood, yet not daring to adventure themselves into the midst of the infuriated villagers, watching all, and treasuring up the curses and maledictions poured upon the proud head of Sir Richard as the old woman went to her death.”

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“A cruel death, in all truth,” said Cuthbert. “Yet why hold Sir Richard in fault? He was not the maker of that law; he was but the instrument used for its enforcement, the magistrate bound to see the will of the sovereign performed. Most like he could not help himself, were his heart never so pitiful. I trow the Trevlyns have always done their duty; yet I misdoubt me if by nature they have been sterner or more cruel than other men.”

A faint smile flickered round the lips of the gipsy. She went on with her story without heeding this plea.

“They had made shift to see her once before her death—my mother, my father, and Esther with them. Upon those three she had laid a solemn charge—a charge to be handed down to their children, and passed throughout all the tribe—a charge of deadly hatred to all that bore the name of Trevlyn—a charge to deal them one day some terrible blow in vengeance for her death, a vengeance that should be felt to the third and fourth generation.”

“I have heard somewhat of that,” said Cuthbert.

“Ay, the old woman raved out her curses in the hearing of all as she was fastened to the stake and the flames leaped about her. All heard and many treasured up those words, and hence the tradition always in men’s mouths that the treasure of Trevlyn was filched by the gipsy folks in fulfilment of that curse. But now another word. My grandam laid another charge upon the tribe and all who claimed kindred with her; and that charge was that all should give loving and watchful care and tender service to the house of Wyvern; that all bearing that name should be the especial care of the gipsies—they and their children after them, whether bearing the old name or not. The Wyverns had been true friends to the gipsy folk, had protected them in many an hour of peril, had spoken them gently and kindly when all men else spoke ill of them, had given them food and shelter and a place to live in; and to my grandam had given a home and sanctuary one bitter winter’s night, when, pursued by foes who strove then to get her into their hands and do her to death, she flung herself upon their charity, and received a welcome and a home in her hour of peril and sore need. It was beneath the roof of the Wyverns that Esther first saw the light; and in gratitude for their many acts of charity and kindness my grandam, ere she died, laid instructions on all who owned her sway that the Wyverns and all descended from them should be sacred to the gipsies—watched over and guarded from all ill.”

“Ah!” said Cuthbert, drawing a long breath; “and shortly after that a Wyvern wedded with this same Sir Richard.”

“Ay, and that but just one short month before his house was to have been burned about his head, and he himself slain had he come forth alive. All the plans were laid, and it was to be done so soon as he should return to the Chase after long absence. Long Robin had planned it all, and he had a head as clever and a will as firm as any man that

ever lived. He had thought of all—he had everything in order; and then came the news that the knight had wed with Isabel Wyvern, the tenderest, the sweetest, the gentlest maiden that ever drew breath; and when they knew that, even Long Robin knew that no hand could thenceforward be raised against the knight."

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“Long Robin—who is he?” questioned Cuthbert eagerly.

“He is Miriam’s husband—my father,” answered Joanna, a strange shadow passing across her face.

“And does he yet live?”

The gipsy paused and hesitated.

“Ask any other member of the tribe, and they will tell thee that he does; but for me, I do not know, I cannot tell.”

Cuthbert looked at her in amaze.

“Not know, and he thy father!”

A curious smile crossed her face.

“We think little of such ties amongst the gipsy folk. The tie betwixt us all is stronger than the simple one of blood. We are all of one race—of one stock; that is enough for us. The lesser is swallowed up of the greater.”

“But thy mother lives; she must know?”

Joanna’s dark eyes glowed strangely.

“Ay, she verily must know; but will she tell what she knows? If it be as I suspect, she must be in the plot.”

“What plot?” asked Cuthbert, beginning to feel bewildered with all this intricacy of mystery.

“Thou hadst better hear my story to the end,” answered Joanna with a slight smile; “then thou wilt better comprehend. Listen to me, and ask thy questions when I have done.”

“Speak on, then,” said Cuthbert, glad enough to hold his peace; “I will give good heed to all thou sayest.”

And Joanna continued her tale.

“Sir Richard, wedded to Isabel Wyvern, might no longer be the mark for the gipsy’s curse. Esther was then queen of the tribe, and with her, love for the Wyverns far outweighed hatred towards the Trevlyns. She gave it out that no hair of his head should be hurt; the vengeance must wait. If it were to be carried out, it must be upon another generation. So said the queen, and none dared openly lift the voice against her; but

there were angry mutterings and murmurings in the tribe, and none were more wroth at this decree than Miriam and Long Robin."

"Her sister and that sister's husband."

"Ay. Long Robin was the head of the tribe, and loved not to yield to the sway of a woman; but amongst us there has always been a queen, and he was powerless to hinder the rest from owning Esther's rule. But he and Miriam withdrew in wrathful indignation for a time from the rest of the tribe, and brooded over schemes of vengeance, and delighted themselves in every misfortune that befell the house of Trevlyn. It was whispered by many that these two had a hand in the death of more than one fair child. If their beasts sickened, or any mischance happened, men laid it to the door of Miriam and Long Robin. But for mine own part, I trow that they had little to do with any of these matters. Trouble is the lot of many born into this world. The Trevlyns had no more than their fair share of troubles that I can see. One fine stalwart son grew up to manhood, and in time he too wedded into the house of Wyvern—married thy grandam the fair Mistress Gertrude, whose eyes thou hast, albeit in many points a Trevlyn."

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“And what said Miriam then?”

“She liked it not well. Sullen, brooding hatred had gained possession of her and of Long Robin. As Esther and some of the tribe had learned to forgive Trevlyn for the sake of Wyvern, those twain and a few others had come to hate Wyvern for their alliance with Trevlyn.

“All this I have been told by Esther. I was not born till after the treasure had been stolen—born when my mother had long ceased to look for offspring, and had no love for the infant thrust upon her care. I was taken from my infancy by Esther, who trained me up, with the consent of all the tribe, to take her place as their queen when I should have grown to womanhood. Esther loved not the roving life of the forest; she had other wishes for herself. She practised divination and astrology and many dark arts, and wished a settled place of abode for herself when she could leave the tribe. She brought me up and taught me all I knew; and she has told me all she knows about that strange night on which the treasure of Trevlyn was taken—and lost!”

“Lost—lost by the Trevlyns truly; but surely thou dost not mean that they who stole it lost it likewise!”

Joanna’s dark eyes were fixed. She seemed to be looking backwards to a far-distant time. Her voice was low and monotonous as she proceeded with her tale.

“The years had flown by since Miriam and Long Robin had divided themselves from the tribe; and they had long since returned, though still keeping aloof in part from the rest—-still forming, as it were, a separate party of their own. Long Robin had dealings with the robbers of the King’s highway; he often accompanied them on their raids, he and some of the men with him. The tribe began to have regular dealings with the freebooters, as thou hast seen. They come to us for shelter and for food. They divide their spoil with us from time to time. Since the hand of all men has been against us, our hands have been raised freely against the world. Our younger men all go out to join the highwaymen. We are friends and brothers, and the wronged and needy resort to us, and are made welcome.”

Joanna threw back her proud head as though rejoicing in this lawless freedom; and then giving herself a little moment for recollection, she returned to the main course of her narrative.

“It was easy for us gipsies, roving hither and thither and picking up the news from travellers on the road, to know all that was going on about us and in the world beyond. We had scouts all over the forest. We knew everything that passed; and when the treasure was borne in the dead of night from Trevlyn Chase, and hidden beneath the giant oak in the forest, we knew where and wherefore it was so hidden, and the flame of vengeance long deferred leaped into Miriam’s eyes.

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"'This is our hour!' she cried; 'this the day for which we have had long patience! Thus can we smite the false Trevlyns, yet do them no bodily hurt; thus can we smite them, and lay no hand upon the house of Wyvern. It is the Trevlyns that love the red gold; the grasping, covetous Trevlyns who will feel most keenly this blow! Upon the gentler spirits of the ladies the loss of wealth will fall less keenly. The proud men will feel it. They will gnash their teeth in impotent fury. Our vow of vengeance will be accomplished. We shall smite the foe by taking away from him the desire of his heart, and yet lay no hand upon any who is loved by a Wyvern.'

"And this desire after vengeance took hold of all those gathered in the ruined mill that night, whilst into Long Robin's eyes there crept a gleam which Esther liked not to see; for it spoke of a lust after gold for its own sake which she had striven to quench amongst her children, and she wished not to see them enriched beyond what was needful for their daily wants, knowing that the possession of gold and treasure would bring about the slackening of those bonds which had hitherto bound them together."

Joanna paused, and looked long into Cuthbert's attentive face. He asked no question, and presently she continued:

"Esther laid this charge upon those who were to go forth after the treasure: They might move it from its present resting place, and hide it somewhere in the forest, as securely as they would; but no man should lay hands upon the spoil. It should be hidden away intact as it was found. It should belong to none, but be guarded by all; so that if the day should come when the Trevlyns should have won the love and trust of their whilom foes, we should have the power to make restitution to them in full."

Cuthbert started, and his eyes gleamed beneath their dark brows; but Joanna lifted her hand and continued:

"Remember I am telling the tale as I learned it from Esther. As she spoke those words she saw a dark gleam shine in Robin's eyes—saw a glitter of rage and wrath that told her he would defy her if he dared. The rest opposed her not. The wild, free life of the forest had not bred in them any covetous lust after gold. So long as the day brought food and raiment sufficient for their needs they asked no more. Men called them robbers, murderers, freebooters; but though they might deserve these names, there was yet much good in them. They robbed the rich alone; to the poor they showed themselves kindly and generous. They were eager to find and secrete this treasure, but agreed by acclamation that it should not be touched. Only Robin answered not, but looked askance with evil eye; and him alone of the eight men intrusted with the task did she distrust."

"Then why was he sent?"

"Verily because he was too powerful to be refused. It would have made a split in the camp, and the end of that might no man see. She was forced to send him in charge of the expedition; and he alone of the eight that went forth ever returned to the mill."

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“What!” cried Cuthbert, “did some mischance befall them?”

“That is a thing that no man knows,” answered Joanna darkly. “It is as I have said: Long Robin, and he alone, ever came back to the mill. He was five days gone, and men said he looked ten years older in those days. He told a strange tale. He said that the treasure had been found and secreted, but that the sight of the gold had acted like strong drink upon his seven comrades: that they had vowed to carry it away and convert it into money, that they might be rich for the rest of their days; and that when he had opposed them, bidding them remember the words of the queen, they had set upon him, had bound him hand and foot, and had left him to perish in a cave, whence he had only been released by the charity of a passer by, when he was well-nigh starved with hunger and cold. He said that he had gone at once to the place where the treasure had been hid, and had found all of it gone. The seven covetous men had plainly carried it off, and he prophesied that they would never be seen again.”

“And they never were?”

“Never!” answered Joanna, in that same dark way; “for they were all dead men!”

“Dead! how came they so?”

“Listen, and I will tell thee. I cannot prove my words. The fate of the seven lies wrapped in mystery; but Esther vows that they were all slain in the heart of the forest by Long Robin. She is as certain of it as though she saw the deed. She knows that as the men were carrying their last loads to the hiding place, wherever that might be, Long Robin lay in wait and slew them one by one, taking them unawares and plunging his knife into the neck of each, so that they fell with never a cry. She knows it from strange words uttered by him in sleep; knows it from the finding in the forest not many years since of a number of human bones and seven skulls, all lying near together in one place. Some woodmen found the ghastly remains; and from that day forward none has cared to pass that way. It was whispered that it was the work of fairies or gnomes, and the dell is shunned by all who have ever heard the tale.”

“As the lines say!” cried Cuthbert, in great excitement. “Thinkest thou that it is in that dell that the treasure lies hid?”

“Esther thinks so, but she knows not; and I have hunted and hunted in vain for traces of digging and signs of disturbance in the ground, but I have sought in vain. Long Robin keeps his secret well. If he knows the place, no living soul shares his knowledge. It may be that long since all has been removed. It may be he has vast wealth stored up in some other country, awaiting the moment when he shall go forth to claim it.”

A puzzled look crossed Cuthbert’s face. He put his hand to his head.

"Thou speakest of Robin as though he were yet alive, and yet thou hast said thou thinkest him dead. And there is Miriam—surely she knows all. I am yet more than half in the dark."

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“None may wholly know what all this means,” answered Joanna; “but upon me has Esther laid the charge to strive that restitution be done, since now the house of Trevlyn has become the friend and champion of the poor and oppressed, and the present knight is a very proper gentleman, well worthy of being the son and the grandson of the house of Wyvern. This charge she laid upon me five long years agone, when she bid the tribe own me their queen, for that her age and infirmities hindered her from acting longer as such. Ever since then I have been pondering and wondering how this thing may be done; but I have had to hold my peace, for if but a whisper got abroad and so came to Miriam’s ears, I trow that the treasure, if still it lies hidden in the forest, would forthwith be spirited away once more.”

“Then Miriam knows the hiding place?”

“I say not that, I think not that. I have watched, and used every art to discover all I may; and I well believe that Miriam herself knows not the spot, but that she knows it lies yet in the forest, and that when the hour is come she and Robin together will bear it away, and keep it for ever from the house of Trevlyn.”

“But sure if they are ever to enjoy their ill-gotten gains it should be soon,” said Cuthbert. “Miriam is old, and Long Robin can scarce be younger—”

“Hold! I have not done. Long Robin, her husband, was older by far than she. If the old man who goes by that name be indeed he, he must be nigh upon fourscore and ten. But I have long doubted what no man else doubts. I believe not that yon gray-beard is Robin; I believe that it is another who masquerades in old man’s garb, but has the strength and hardihood of youth beneath that garb and that air of age.”

“Marry! yet how can that be?”

“It might not be so hard as thou deemest. In our tribe our men resemble each other closely, and have the same tricks of voice and speech. Nay, it was whispered that many of the youths were in very truth sons to Robin; and one of these so far favoured him that they were ever together, and he was treated in all ways like a son. Miriam loved him as though he had been her own. Where Long Robin went there went this other Robin, too. He was as the shadow of the other. And a day came when they went forth together to roam in foreign lands, and Miriam with them. They were gone for full three years. We gave up the hope of seeing them more. But suddenly they came amongst us again—two of them, not three. They said the younger Robin had died of the plague in foreign lands, and all men gave heed to the tale. But from the first I noted that Long Robin’s step was firmer than when he went forth, that there was more power in his voice, more strength in his arm. True, he goes about with bowed back; but I have seen him lift himself up when he thought there was none to see him, and stretch his long arms with a strength and ease that are seldom seen in the very aged. He can accomplish long rides and rambles, strange in one so old; and our people begin to

regard him with awe, as a man whom death has passed by. But I verily believe that it was old Robin who passed away, and that this man is none other but young Robin; and that in him and him alone is reposed the secret of the lost treasure, that he may one day have it for his own."

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“And why to him?” questioned Cuthbert, drawing his brows together in the effort to understand; “why to him rather than to Miriam or any other of the tribe?”

“Verily because he was the one being in the world beloved of Long Robin. Miriam he trusted not, for that she was a woman, and he held that no woman, however faithful, might be trusted with a secret. I have heard him say so a hundred times, and have seen her flinch beneath the words, whilst her eyes flashed fire. Methinks that Long Robin loved gold with the miser’s greed—loved to hoard and not to spend—loved to feel it in his power, but desired not to touch it. Miriam was content so long as vengeance on the Trevlyns had been taken. She wanted not the gold herself so long as it was hidden from them. But the secret was one that must not die, and to young Robin it has been intrusted. And if I mistake me not, he has other notions regarding it, and will not let it lie in its hiding place for ever. He is sharp and shrewd as Lucifer. He knows by some instinct that I suspect and that I watch him, and never has he betrayed aught to me. But sure am I that the secret rests with him; and if thou wouldst find it out, it is Long Robin’s steps that thou must dog and watch.”

“I will watch him till I have tracked him to his lair!” cried Cuthbert, springing to his feet in great excitement. “I will never rest, day nor night, until the golden secret is mine!”

Chapter 14: Long Robin.

The gipsy had left him, gliding away in the moonlight like a veritable shadow; and Cuthbert, left alone in the dim cave, buried his face in his hands and sank into a deep reverie.

This, then, was the meaning of it all: the long-deferred vengeance of the gipsy tribe; the avaricious greed of one amongst their number, who had committed dastardly crimes so as to keep the secret hiding place in his own power alone; the secret passed on (as it seemed) to one who feigned to be what he was not, and was cunningly awaiting time and opportunity to remove the gold, and amass to himself this vast hoard; none beside himself of all the tribe heeding or caring for it, all holding to the story told long ago of the seven men who had disappeared bearing away to foreign lands the stolen treasure. A generation had well-nigh passed since that treasure had been filched from the grasp of the Trevlyns. The stalwart fellows who had been bred up amongst the gipsies, or had joined the bands of freebooters with whom they were so closely connected, knew little of and cared nothing for the tradition of the hidden hoard. They found gold enough in the pockets of the travellers they waylaid to supply their daily needs; the free life of the forest was dear to them, and left them no lingering longings after wealth that might prove a burden instead of a joy to its possessor.

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Out of those who had been living when the treasure was stolen and lost, only Miriam and Long Robin (if indeed it were he) and Esther remained alive. Esther had retired to London, and was lost to her people. Miriam had done everything to encourage the belief that the treasure had been made away with by the seven helpers who had gone forth, but had never returned to tell the tale. Esther, who had thought very differently, had confined her suspicious for a time to her own bosom, and later on had spoken of them only to Joanna. Upon her had she laid the charge to strive to make restitution, now that vengeance had been inflicted and the curse of the old witch fulfilled. To Joanna it belonged to restore prosperity to the house of Wyvern through the daughters' sons, and it was for her to strive to learn where the treasure lay, and give notice of the spot to the Trevlyns.

The queen had done all that she could. She had watched with close attention the pair with whom Esther believed the secret to lie. Miriam, her mother, knew not the spot, of that she was convinced; but she did know that the treasure had been hidden somewhere in the forest by her husband, and that the exact place was known to the white-bearded man whom she and others called Long Robin.

About that weird old man, said to be well-nigh a hundred years old, a flavour of romance existed. Men looked upon him as bearing a charmed existence. He went his lonely way unheeded by all. He was said to have dealings with the fairies and the pixies of the forest. All regarded him with a species of awe. He had drawn, as it were, a charmed circle about himself and his ways. None desired to interfere with him; none questioned his coming or going. All brought to him a share of the spoil taken on the roads as a matter of right and due, but none looked to receive aught in return from him. He and Miriam, from their great age, lived as it were apart. They took the place of patriarchal heads of the tribe, and were treated with reverence and filial respect by all.

The question Cuthbert had pressed home on Joanna was why, this being so, the treasure had not been moved away before this, so that Miriam should end her days in peace and luxury, instead of growing old in the wilds of the forest.

Joanna's reply had been that she did not think Miriam had ever really wished to leave the free forest life; that with her, vengeance upon the Trevlyns had been the leading impulse of her life; and that she had no covetous desires herself after the gold. Old Robin had loved it with the miser's love; but doubtless the younger Robin (if indeed the long-bearded man were he) was waiting till such time as Miriam should be dead, and he alone in full possession of the golden secret. Then he would without doubt bear it away and live like a prince the rest of his days; but for the present he made no move, and Joanna was very certain that he suspected her of watching him, as indeed she did, and he had shown himself as

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cunning as any fox in baffling her when she had sought to discover any of his haunts. Her watching had been in vain, because she was suspected of a too great knowledge, and was looked upon as dangerous. But where she failed Cuthbert might succeed, for he was absolutely unknown to Robin, and if the two were to meet face to face in the forest, it would be impossible that the wily old man (if old he were) should suspect him of any ulterior purpose.

Robin had not been at the mill the night that Cuthbert had been brought there by Tyrrel and his companions. Joanna had described him so graphically that the lad was certain of knowing him were he to come across him in the forest. She had also indicated to him the region in which she suspected him most generally to lurk when he spent days and sometimes weeks alone in the forest. She believed that during the summer months, when the forest became the resort of many wandering bands of gipsies or of robbers and outlaws, he kept a pretty close and constant watch upon the spot where his treasure lay hid. The dell, at the head of which the bones of the seven murdered men had been found, was certainly a favourite spot of his; and she believed it was owing to some trickery of his that men still declared it haunted by evil or troubled spirits. Travellers passing that way had been scared almost out of their senses by the sight of a ghostly white figure gliding about, or by the sound of hollow moans and the rattling of chains. None but the ignorant stranger ever ventured within half-a-mile of that ill-omened spot. Cuthbert, as he sat thinking over the gipsy's words and charge, saw clearly that there was ample room for suspicion that here the treasure might lie, since Robin took such pains to scare away all men from the spot.

The light burned dim; but Cuthbert still sat on beside the rude table where he had supped. Before him lay the scrap of parchment with the doggerel lines of the wise woman inscribed upon them. It had been something of a shock to his faith to find that the wise woman knew all his story beforehand, and had had no need to dive into the spirit world to ask the nature of his errand. He felt slightly aggrieved, as though he had been tricked and imposed upon. He was very nearly burning the parchment in despite; but Joanna had bidden him keep it, and had added, with a slight significant smile:

"Keep it, boy; and think not too hardly of those who juggle with men's fears and fancies, to obtain the greater sway upon them. It is not always used amiss. As for those lines, there may be more in them yet than thou or I can see at this moment. For there may be words in them that have been spoken by Long Robin in his dreams. Esther has told me such before now. She knew not their meaning, nor do I; but that they have a meaning she is very sure. 'Three times three'—that was what he was muttering ever. It was the burden of his thought, even as she made it the burden of her song. Keep the lines; they may serve thy turn yet. Esther is a wise woman. She did not give thee that paper for naught."

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The day had well-nigh dawned before Cuthbert flung himself upon one of the pallet beds in the cave, and fell asleep from sheer weariness of mind and body; but he was young, and sleep came quickly and held him in a fast embrace. The silence and darkness of this underground place were favourable to a long spell of repose. The youth did not open his eyes till the sun had passed its meridian many hours, though no ray of daylight glinted into that dim abode.

It might have been the middle of the night for all he knew when he opened his eyes once again; and when he did so he lay perfectly still, for he was convinced that he was yet in the midst of some strange dream. He was in the cave of red sandstone where he had fallen asleep, lying in the darkest corner of all upon a straw pallet, with his sad-coloured cloak over him; but the cave itself was lighter than it had been when he had fallen asleep. Two torches flamed upon the table, and by the bright flame they cast upon the objects near to them, Cuthbert saw a strange and weird-looking figure.

This figure was that of a man, who was seated at table, and had evidently been partaking of some refreshment. He was dressed in outlandish garb, and in a fashion which was only affected now by very old men, who had worn such garments all their lives, and were averse to change. Cuthbert had occasionally seen such a dress amongst the aged folks about his home, but this was more fanciful than any assumed by a mere rustic, and gave to the tall thin figure a certain air of distinction. A soft felt hat with a high crown lay upon the table; and the light shone full upon a face that was seamed by tiny wrinkles, and upon a thick head of hair that was either flaxen or white, Cuthbert could scarcely say which. The face was almost entirely hidden by a tangled growth of beard as white as snow, which beard descended almost to the man's waist, and was of wonderful fineness and bushiness. At the first glance the impression produced by this strange apparition was that he was a man immensely old; but a closer examination might well raise doubts. The air and bearing of the man were strangely alert for an octogenarian, and the way in which he tackled the hard bread and cheese which still stood before him was scarcely like the fashion in which the aged generally eat.

Cuthbert held his breath as he gazed. Was this a dream—the outcome of his talk with the gipsy? No, he was awake; he became more and more sure of it. But lying perfectly still, and not betraying his presence by so much as a deeply-drawn breath, he gazed and gazed as if fascinated upon the face of this strange being, and in his heart he said:

"Long Robin himself!"

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He was certain of it; there could be no manner of mistake. Dress, air, everything corresponded with Joanna's description. For a moment a sick fear crossed his mind lest he should have left upon the table the fragment of parchment with the mystic words upon it, for he had had no idea that the cave would be invaded that night. But no; the habit of caution had been strong within him, and he had put the paper away before retiring to his corner. Plainly the man before him had no suspicion that any living soul was near. The deep shadows of the cave hid Cuthbert completely from view, and the secret entrance to the inner cave was doubtless known to very few. None would suspect the presence of a hidden stranger there.

As Cuthbert watched as if fascinated, Robin ceased eating, and pushed back his stool, rising to his feet quickly, and showing the grand proportions of his tall figure, which certainly deserved the epithet of "long." He stretched his arms, and swung them backwards and forwards with a gesture strangely unlike that of age; and throwing back his broad shoulders, he began pacing to and fro in the cave with a firm, elastic tread seldom seen after the meridian of life is passed.

"Joanna is right," thought Cuthbert, crouching closer against the wall and into the shadows; for he had no wish to be discovered by this giant, who would probably have scant mercy upon an observer who might have taken his measure and discovered his secret now that he was off his guard. "In all truth this man is not old; he can scarce be above forty years. It is by some clever artifice that he whitens his beard to that snow-like hue. He himself is young and strong. He shows it in every movement."

He certainly did, pacing to and fro with rapid strides; and presently he began to mutter words and phrases to himself, Cuthbert listening with all his ears.

"A curse upon the women!" he said more than once; "they are the very plague of my life! Miriam's besotted love, Joanna's suspicions and her accursed watch upon me, both hinder my plans. If the twain were in league together, it could not be worse. Miriam implores me with tears and lamentations to wait till she be laid in the tomb for the fulfilment of my cherished dream. And if I thwart her too far, there is no telling what she may not say or do. Love and hate in jealous natures such as hers are terribly near akin, and the love may change to burning hatred if once I provoke her too far. She knows not all, but she knows too much. She could spoil my hand full well if she did but tell all she knows. And that jade Joanna, how I hate her! She has been well drilled by that witch Esther, who ought long ere this to have been hanged or burned. I would I could set the King's officers on her now, but if I did I should have the whole tribe at my throat like bloodhounds, and not even my great age would serve to save me from their fury.

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“Ha, ha! ha, ha!” and a sardonic laugh rang through the cave. “Would that I could wed Joanna to Tyrrel, who would give his soul to call her his. Once the wife of a member of the band, and some of her power would go. I misdoubt me if any would long call her queen; and when she had babes to fill her mind and her thoughts, she would soon cease to watch me with those suspicions eyes of hers, and to make me fear continually for my secret. Would that they were both dead! Would that I could kill them even as he killed the other seven who had a share in the golden secret! I would strangle them with my own hands if I did but dare. Once those two removed from my path and my way would be plain. I could remove it all, bit by bit and piece by piece, away from this accursed forest, of which I am sick to the death. Then in some far-off foreign land of perpetual sunshine, I could reign a prince and a king, and life would be one long dream of ease and delight; no more toil, no more privation, no more scorching summer heat or biting winter cold. I have seen what the life of the East is like—the kneeling slaves, the harem of beauteous dark-eyed women, the dream-like indolence and ease. That is the life for me. That is whither I and my treasure will go. A plague upon old Miriam, that she clings to these cold forests and the sordid life we live here! But for her insane jealousy and love I would defy Joanna and go. But the pair of them are too much for me. I must find a way of ridding myself of one or both. I will not be bound like this for ever!”

The man raised his right hand and shook it with a vehement, threatening gesture; and then relapsing into sudden moody silence, continued his pacing to and fro, wrapped in gloomy thought.

Cuthbert held his breath as this monologue proceeded, and a sense of unlooked-for triumph made his heart swell within him. Here was proof positive that the treasure lay still in the forest; that it had not been taken thence and dissipated; that it still remained to be found by his unremitting endeavours. The youth felt almost as though the victory were already his. What might not a few weeks of patient perseverance bring? He would dog Robin’s’ steps like a bloodhound. He had not been brought up to hardship and forest life for nothing. To sleep in the open, to live scantily on such fare as might be picked up at the huts of the woodmen or in the camps of the gipsies, was nothing to him. He would live on roots and wild fruits sooner than abandon his quest. Nothing should come between him and his overmastering resolve to win back for the house of Trevlyn the long-lost treasure.

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But as he mused and Robin impatiently paced the floor of the cavern, the torches burned slowly down, till one flickered and went out and the other showed signs of speedy extinction. Robin, with a start and an oath, stopped in his walk and muttered that he must be gone. He placed upon his head the slouched hat, that at once concealed his features, and gave a different expression to his face. As he donned his hat and took up a heavy oaken staff that lay upon the table, his whole aspect changed. He seemed to don likewise a new action, a new outward appearance altogether. His straight back bent and assumed a stoop such as one sees in men who have long grown old. There came a feebleness into his gait, a slight uncertainty into his movements. And all this was done so naturally, so cleverly, that Cuthbert, as he gazed fascinated at the figure before him, could scarcely believe that his eyes had not played him some strange trick—could scarcely credit that this could be the same being as the upright, stalwart man, whose movements he had been watching during the past half hour. But all this only went to show how shrewd Joanna's surmise had been, and every corroborating fact increased Cuthbert's confidence in all that she had told him.

Leaving the last torch to die into obscurity by itself, Long Robin made for the opening in the wall which led to the outer cave, and Cuthbert rose swiftly and silently and crept after him, gaining the opening in time to see the tall figure slouching across the moorland track in the direction of the westering sun.

Afraid of following too closely, and so of being seen, Cuthbert retreated once more into the cave, and had the forethought to fill his wallet with the remains of the meal of which both he and Long Robin had partaken. He did not know exactly what was his best course to pursue, but it seemed a pity to let Long Robin out of his sight without tracking him to some one of his lairs or hiding places.

Cuthbert now knew that he had slept during the greater part of the day, and taking a draught of mead, and rapidly munching some bread and cheese, he fortified himself for his evening stroll, and then, before the torch actually expired, found his way to the opening again, and so out upon the moor.

Far away, but still distinctly visible against the bright sky, was the tall figure of the gipsy. Cuthbert was not afraid of being seen at so great a distance, but he still took the precaution of keeping all the tallest bushes and clumps of flowering gorse between him and the quarry he was following; and when at length the trees of the wooded tracts rose up before his eyes, he quickened his pace slightly, and gained decidedly upon Robin before he glided into the dark pine forest.

Before doing this, the gipsy turned back and looked carefully round; but Cuthbert was already crouching behind a bush, and escaped observation. As soon as Robin had fairly disappeared, the youth rose and ran quickly after him, and soon caught glimpses of the tall, stooping figure wending its way amongst the ruddy pine stems, now dyed golden and crimson in the glow of the bright sunset.

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On and on he went in the fading light, and on and on went Cuthbert in steady pursuit. This part of the forest was strange to the youth, but it was familiar enough to the gipsy. From the mechanical way in which he chose his track, and the direct certainty with which he walked, it was plain that he knew every inch of the road, and could have found the path by night as well as by day.

“Sure it must lead to the haunted dell,” thought Cuthbert, as the gloom deepened around him and the wood grew denser and denser. The pines began to be mingled with other trees. The undergrowth was thicker and more tangled. It was not always easy for Cuthbert to force his way along. He paused sometimes in fear lest his steps and the cracking of the boughs should be heard by the man in advance of him.

On and on they went, and now the track became more distinct, and it led downwards. An owl in a tree overhead hooted as Cuthbert passed by, and something of a cold shiver ran through the young man’s frame; he stumbled over the outspread root of a gnarled old oak, and fell, making more noise than he liked.

The owl flew away, hooting ominously as it seemed to his strained nerves, and the hooting was answered as from the very heart of the dell, if dell it was, mingled with many other strange and fierce sounds. Cuthbert rose to his feet and crept forward with a beating heart, and as he did so he heard a shout of demoniacal laughter which chilled the very blood in his veins, and seemed to raise the hair upon his head, so unearthly was the sound.

But making the sign of the cross upon his brow, and striving to keep his presence of mind and his courage unimpaired by ghostly terrors, Cuthbert still pursued his way downwards into this dim, strange place. He felt more and more certain that this was the pixies’ dell of which the verses spoke—the dell wherein some deed of darkness had been committed that caused it to be shunned of all; and it needed all his native stoutness of heart to enable him to conquer his fears and pursue his way, as he reflected on the foul murders that had been committed not far off, and wondered if indeed the restless souls of those to whom Christian burial had been denied hovered by night about the ill-omened spot, to fright away all travellers who strove to pass that way.

For a while the fearful sounds of hooting and laughter continued, under cover of which he crept nearer and nearer to the centre of the dell. Presently they ceased, and a death-like silence ensued. Cuthbert dared not move, and scarcely dared to breathe. This was the most trying experience he had yet had. He had felt far less fear on the darkly-flowing river and in that strange underground cellar, against both of which the wise woman had warned him.

But after a long pause of silence he heard another and a different laugh—a laugh in which he recognized the sardonic intonation he had recently heard from the lips of Long Robin.

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“I trow that has been enow,” spoke a voice nigh at hand, though the speaker was invisible owing to the thick growth of bushes. “If that sound were caused by aught but a rabbit or wildcat, I wager the hardy traveller has taken to his heels and fled. But I misdoubt me that it was anything human. There be sounds and to spare in the forest at night. It is long since I have been troubled by visitors to this lone spot. The pixies and I have the dell to ourselves. Ha, ha!”

“Robin’s voice again!” whispered Cuthbert to himself, creeping forward with the cautious, snake-like movement that he had learned when snaring birds or rabbits to furnish the scanty larder at the Gate House. He advanced by slow degrees, and soon gained what he desired—a view of his quarry and of the heart of the dell.

In the fading light he could see both plainly. Long Robin was seated upon a low stone wall overgrown with moss, that seemed to be built around a well; for it was of circular construction, and to the listener was borne the faint sound of running water, though the sound seemed to come from the very heart of the earth. Round this well was a space of smooth greensward—sward that appeared to have been untouched for centuries. All around, the sides of the dell rose up, covered with a thick growth of wood and copse. It was a lovely spot in all truth, but lonely to the verge of desolation. Cuthbert dimly remembered having heard fragments of legends respecting a pixies’ dell in the heart of the forest—a dell avoided by all, for that no man who ventured in came forth alive. Most likely this was the place; most likely the legend of fear surrounding it was due to some exaggerated version of old Robin’s ghastly crime in bygone years.

Cuthbert gazed and gazed with a sense of weird fascination. He fully believed that in some spot not many yards from where he stood lay hidden the lost treasure of Trevlyn, and that the secret of that resting place remained known to one man only in the whole world; and that was the man before him!

A wild impulse seized Cuthbert to spring upon that bowed figure, and, holding a knife to the man’s throat, to demand a full revelation of that secret as the price of life. Perhaps had he not seen but an hour before how upright, powerful, and stalwart that bending figure could be, he would have done it then and there. But with that memory clear in his mind, together with his knowledge of the perfectly unscrupulous character of the gipsy, he felt that such a step would be the sheerest madness; and after gazing his fill at the motionless figure, he softly crept away once more.

He lay hidden in the bushes till he heard Long Robin leave the dell and go crashing through the underwood with heavy steps, cursing as he went the two women who stood between him and his desire. It was plain from his muttered words that he was going back to the camp now. Plainly he had paid his visit to the hoard and found all safe and undisturbed. Cuthbert was more and more convinced that the treasure lay here, as Esther had always believed; and it would be strange indeed, being so near, if he could not find it in time.

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But he would not search tonight; he had the whole summer before him. Plainly Long Robin was not going to take any immediate step for the removal of the treasure; and during the last hours a great longing had come upon Cuthbert to see Petronella again. He was within ten miles of his old home now, and the thoughts of his sister had been mingling with these other thoughts of the lost treasure. Surely he could find his way to the Gate House from this lonely dell, and once there, by making a signal at his sister's window, he could advise her of his presence and gain a stolen interview.

So taking his bearings from the moon, he struck boldly across the lonely waste of forest that lay between him and his former home, and soon found himself tramping over the ling and moss of the high ridge of common land with which the woody tracts of the forest were frequently interspersed.

As he thus tramped the words of the verses began singing in his head: "Three times three—o'er ling and moss." What was that three times three? The question mingled with his dreams of his sister, and suddenly the thought came to him, Could the three times three be miles—miles from the giant oak from beneath which the treasure had been taken? Three times three—it might well be so. The distance was surely about nine miles. The spot where the Trevlyns had hid their treasure lay directly in Cuthbert's way as he marched steadily towards the Gate House. He saw the giant oak rise up before him in the moonlight, and he hastened to the spot and stood beneath the overhanging branches.

Standing beneath it with the oak behind him, he looked straight along the way he had come across the bog and moss. Surely there were nine miles, and little more or less, between the one spot and the other. And again, with the oak behind there was a beech at his right hand, and straight before him the road to the pixies' dell. Well, it might not be much, yet it seemed like a link in the chain. Esther had perchance heard Robin mutter these numbers in his troubled sleep. Surely he had been thinking or dreaming of that long nine miles' tramp, and the words he had used to direct the men whom afterwards he had foully and treacherously murdered!

"I am on the track! I am on the track!" cried Cuthbert exultantly, as he pursued his way. "The secret lies hid in the pixies' dell. Surely if I have learned as much as that, I cannot be long in finding out the whole!"

And with thoughts of his sister, of Cherry, of Kate, warm in his heart, Cuthbert sped gaily along in the direction of his old home.

Midnight struck from the clock in the turret of Trevlyn Chase as the youth approached the gray walls of the old Gate House. How grim and hoary it looked in the white moonlight! Something of a faint shiver of repulsion ran through Cuthbert's frame as he looked upon the familiar outline of the building. Was it possible that all but the few last months of his life had been spent there? It seemed to him that the old life was already

like a dim and distant dream, and that the fuller life he had enjoyed since leaving was the only one that had any reality about it.

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But he well knew the habits and the sullen ferocity of the grim old man his father, and it was with cautious steps that he approached the walls. No light burned in any window. The inmates of the building were doubtless wrapped in sleep. He well knew his sister's window, and cutting himself a long hazel bough, he gently swept it to and fro across the glass. This had always been a signal between them in their childhood, and many had been their nocturnal rambles taken together when Cuthbert had contrived to escape from the house before it was locked up, and had then called Petronella and assisted her down by the tangled ivy that clung to the gray old walls. He knew she would recognize in a moment who was outside when she heard the tapping of that hazel wand; and it seemed indeed as if she did, for in a moment the window was opened, and a soft tremulous voice asked eagerly:

"Cuthbert, can it be thou?"

"It is indeed I, sweet sister. Canst thou come to me? Hast thou lost thy cunning or thy lightness of foot? I am here to help thee."

"I will come to thee anon; but the little postern door is seldom locked since thou art gone, and I can get out thus. Linger not beside the house, Cuthbert; speed to the chantry—I will meet thee there. He might hear or see thee here. Do not linger; go. I will be with thee anon; I will not keep thee but a few short minutes. But do not tarry; go!"

There was such earnestness in her soft whispers that Cuthbert did not attempt to reply save by a brief nod. He slid away in the darkness and took the familiar but now tangled path to the chantry, looking round the old ruin with loving eyes; for it was the one spot connected with his home not fraught with memories of pain and fear.

"Poor little timid Petronella!" he mused. "Was I right to leave her thus alone with our harsh father? Yet I could do nothing for her; and it seemed as though my presence in the house stirred him up to continual fury. I would I had a home to bring her to. I would I might carry her off with me now. But what could she do in the forest, away from the haunts of men? Nay, she must tarry here but a little while. Then will I come and claim her. Then will she have dowry worthy her name and state. Oh that lost treasure, that lost treasure! what happiness will there be in store for very many when that lost treasure is found!"

And then he paused and held out his arms, for light steps were speeding towards him through the dewy grass, and Petronella, with a little sobbing cry, flung herself upon him, to be enfolded in a strong embrace.

Chapter 15: Petronella.

"Cuthbert, is it—can it really be thou?"

“Petronella—sister! What happiness to see thee once more!”

She clung to him almost sobbing in the excitement of pure happiness. He could feel that she trembled in his arms, and he enfolded the slight frame ever closer and closer.

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“Sweetest sister, fear not! Dost fear I could not protect thee from harm? Believe me, thou hast a wondrous different brother now from the cowed and timorous lad who went forth from these doors but six short months back. Fear not, my sister; look up, and let me see thy face. I would learn how it has fared with thee since we parted that night on this very spot, though it now seems so long ago.”

Petronella heaved a long sigh, and her tremblings gradually ceased. It seemed as though the brotherly clasp of those strong arms stilled her fears and brought comfort and soothing. But as Cuthbert held her closely to him, it seemed to him almost as though he clasped a phantom form rather than one of solid flesh and blood. There seemed nothing of the girl but skin and bone; and looking anxiously into the small oval face, he noted how wistful and hollow the great dark eyes had grown, and how pinched and worn every feature. Had it always been so with her? He scarce knew, for we heed little the aspect of those about us when we are young and inexperienced.

Petronella had always been somewhat shadowy and wan, had always been slight and slim and small. But was she always as wan and slight as she now seemed? or did he observe it the more from the contrast it presented to Cherry’s blooming beauty, to which his eyes had grown used? He asked the question anxiously of himself, but could not answer it.

Then drawing Petronella into the full light of the silver moon, he made her sit beside him on a fragment of mouldering wall, and holding her thin hands in a warm clasp, he scanned her face with glances of earnest scrutiny.

“My sister, hast thou been ill?”

She shook her head with a pathetic little smile.

“Alas, no! Methinks I am a true Trevlyn for that. Sickness passes me by and seizes upon others who might so much better be spared.”

“Why dost thou say ‘alas’ to that, sweet sister?”

“Verily because there be times when I would so gladly lay down my head never to lift it more. For me death would be sweeter than life. The dead rest in God’s peaceful keeping—my good aunt at the Chase has told me so, and I no longer fear the scorching fires of purgatory. I have a little New Testament now of my own, full of sweet promises and words of love and peace. When I read of the pearly gates and the streets of gold, and the city into which nothing unholy may enter, I long sorely to leave behind this world of sin and sorrow and find a refuge there.

“But I would know more of thee, Cuthbert, and of what thou hast seen and done since thou hast left the Gate House. For me I have naught to tell. Life here is ever the same.

But thou must have done and seen so much. May I not hear thy tale? May I not learn how it has fared with thee?”

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Cuthbert was willing enough to outpour his story to her, sitting beside her in the old chantry, where so many happy hours of their shadowed childhood had been spent. He told of his adventures by the way, of his night with the gipsies, of his timely rescue of Cherry and his admittance to his uncle's house. He told of his uncle's wonderful story of the gold that was to be all for his sister; told of the life at the bridge house, and his attachment to his cousin Cherry. The only matter he named not was that of his meeting with Master Robert Catesby, and all that had followed in which he was concerned. Petronella would only be bewildered by so many strange things. It was enough to tell her of his recent adventures in the forest, and his growing hopes of coming upon traces of the lost treasure.

Petronella listened to the whole of this tale with parted lips and wide-open eyes, as a child listens to a tale of fairy romance and wonder. She could scarce believe that all these strange things had befallen her own brother; but as she questioned and he answered, she gradually began to understand, to enter into his feelings, and to obtain a clearer comprehension of the situation of affairs. Her intercourse with the Trevlyns of the Chase had done something to widen her knowledge of life, and Cuthbert found that her mind had matured and expanded in a fashion he had hardly expected. He wondered where she had picked up some of the bits of experience that fell from her lips from time to time, and he looked somewhat searchingly into her face.

"Methinks, my sister, that time has not stood still with thee since I went away. Thou art wondrous wise for thy years. Who has been thy instructor?"

Even in the moonlight he could see the sudden flush that dyed her cheek and neck at the question.

"I have been to the Chase as much as our father would permit—indeed, I fear me I have been oftener; but I was very lonely, and they were all so kind. And Philip, he has been often here. He has been in very truth a—a—brother to me in thy place. Methinks but for him I should almost have died. But, O Cuthbert, it is hard, it is hard!"

The last words were spoken with such sudden passion and vehemence that the youth started and looked once again at his sister. Of old, Petronella had always been so gentle, so meek and yielding, that to hear such an outburst from her startled him not a little.

"What is hard, sweet sister?"

"To be the daughter of—of—such a father as ours," she answered, lowering her voice and speaking with infinite sadness now. "Heaven knows I have striven to love him, have striven to obey him, have striven to be all a daughter should!"

“Ay, verily thou hast!” answered Cuthbert warmly. “I have chidden thee many a time before this for the meekness that raised no protest let him be never so harsh. Thou hast done more than thy share, sweet Petronella. None can blame thee for rebellious thoughts or words. If he will none of our love or service, the fault is his, not ours—thine least of all, for thou wast ever gentle and meek.”

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“I have tried,” repeated Petronella sadly; “and when thou hadst gone and the tempest had something subsided, I tried as never before to be a loving daughter, and make up to him for the loss of his son. But he would have none of my love. He drove me from his presence with bitter words. I had perforce to seek others, if I were to live at all; and though he hurled taunts and harsh speeches at me oftentimes, he did not forbid me that house, albeit he scarce knew perchance how oft I was there, since he shut himself up more and more, and sometimes saw me not from one week’s end to the other.”

“What a lone life for thee, my sister!”

“Yes, it was lone, save for the comradeship of our cousins. But that was better, far better, than what followed.”

Cuthbert looked quickly at her, and his eyes darkened.

“And what did follow, Petronella?”

She bent her head a little, that he might not see the expression of her face. Her words were falteringly spoken.

“It was not many weeks since—it was when the days began to lengthen out, and the forest paths to grow decked with flowers—that some evil thoughts of suspicion came into his head, I know not how, and he dogged my steps as I wandered in the woods; and twice—nay, thrice—he came suddenly upon us as we walked together in the woodland dells.”

“’We? who was with thee, sister?”

“Philip,” she answered very softly, and there was something in the tender intonation with which she spoke the name that told a tale Cuthbert was not slow to read. He had guessed as much before, but this made assurance doubly sure; and with the sympathy of the ardent young lover, he put his hand on Petronella’s and pressed it tenderly. She understood the meaning of that clasp, and looked gratefully at him, going on with more confidence afterwards.

“It was with Philip that he found me; and the sight filled him with a sullen fury—the fury that thou knowest, brother, which brooks no opposition, no words. He would not hear Philip speak. He struck him on the mouth—a cruel blow that caused the blood to spring forth; and he dragged me away by main force, and locked me up in the pillared chamber, vowing to keep me a prisoner all my life an I would not promise never to speak with Philip again.”

“And thou?”

“I told him I would promise naught save to meet him no more in the forest. I was glad to promise that; for I feared our savage father might kill him in a fit of fury were he to find us again together. I should have been terrified to wander forth with him more. I promised that, but I would promise no more.”

“And did that satisfy him?” asked Cuthbert breathlessly. “Tell me all, my sister. He did not dare lay hands on thee?”

Petronella smiled faintly.

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“Methinks he would dare anything he wished; but he let himself be satisfied with that pledge. Only he kept me many days in that dim place of terror, and gave me but scant prisoner’s fare the while. Cuthbert, as thou art free and thou art nigh, wilt thou to Trevlyn Chase for me ere thou goest back into the forest, and tell Philip what has befallen me, and that I may no more hope to meet him in our favourite haunts? Tell him all I have told to thee, and bid him keep himself from this house. It is an ill place! an ill place! Ah, Cuthbert, were I but a man like thee, I would fare forth as thou hast done. I would not stay beneath yon roof to be starved in soul and body and spirit. O father, father!”

The cry was one of exceeding bitterness, and yet in it spoke a patience that moved Cuthbert strangely.

“Sister, my sister!” he cried, in accents of suppressed agitation, “I know not how to leave thee here. Petronella, why not forth with me to the forest? Sure I could protect thee there and give thee a better home beneath the greenwood trees than our father does beneath yon grim walls. And, sister, I could take thee to our uncle, Martin Holt. Sure he would give thee asylum with him, as he gave to me. Thou wouldst have Cherry for a sister. Thou—”

But Petronella shrank away a little, and looked scared at the thought. Hers was one of those timid natures that find it easier to endure even a terrible wrong than to take a bold step to escape from it. The life of the forest might have attracted her, for she loved the freedom of the woodlands, and had no fears of loneliness or privation. But she had heard from Cuthbert of the bands of outlaws and gipsies, of Long Robin and his murderous hatred; and of other perils which she felt she had scarce courage to face. She feared that if she let Cuthbert carry her off she would but prove a burden and a care, whilst the thought of London and the strange relations there filled her with distaste and dread.

“Nay, nay, my brother; I have borne much—I will bear a little more. I love the old Gate House as thou hast never loved it; and perchance after this storm there may be a lull of quiet peace. I should but hamper thee, and hold thee back from that great purpose; and—”

“But Martin Holt, he would welcome thee; and once beneath his roof—”

“Nay, Cuthbert, it might well be that our father would guess whither I had fled, and would come and drag me back. I am not of an age to resist him. And I am a helpless woman, not a man. I have thought many times of flight, but I fear me it would but lead to worse.”

“I know not that,” answered Cuthbert thoughtfully. “Our uncle Martin is a good man; and, Petronella, remember that whether or no thy brother finds the lost treasure, he holds in his keeping a dowry for thee that will make thee no unworthy mate for Philip

Trevlyn when the day comes for him to claim thee as his bride. Nay, hide not thy face, sister."

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“Alas, alas, my brother! that day will never come! My father—”

“Nay, courage, sweetheart; our father’s power lasts not for ever, and we will be happy yet in spite of him. And, sister mine, we must have kinsfolks somewhere of the house of Wyvern. Our father never speaks to us of any such matters; but hast thou heard aught at the Chase?”

Petronella looked quickly up at him.

“Ay, I have heard them speak of kinsfolk of that family, albeit I heeded not greatly what they said. Are they our kinsfolk likewise?”

“Ay, verily, inasmuch as our grandam was a Wyvern; and there have been Wyverns of two generations that have wed with the Trevlyns, as thou hast heard in the story of the lost treasure, which I have told to thee. Sister, it might be that thou mightest find a refuge with them safer than with mine uncle of the bridge, who might perchance think I asked too much were I to bring my sister to him, albeit he is a kind man and a just; but —”

“But I trust I may not have to flee,” said Petronella, with the same air of shrinking that she had shown before. “I have borne so much; surely I can bear the rest, until thou hast found the treasure, and all is changed for us. When thou art rich and great, and high in favour with all, then perchance thou canst prevail even with our stern father, and win his leave to carry hence thy poor little sister. Till then I will strive to remain.”

Cuthbert took her hand and held it between his.

“Petronella, I like it not—I like not to leave thee here; but it must be as thou desirest. Only, remember one thing, my sister. I am nigh at hand. I am in the forest, not many miles away; and if things should become worse with thee, thou canst fly to me thither; thou wilt find me, doubtless, in or about the pixies’ dell, of which thou hast heard me speak, for it is there that my closest watch will be held. Thinkest thou that thou canst find the place?”

“I trow so; thou hast told me how to do so. Nine miles across the open forest, starting from the Trevlyn oak, with the great beech to the right. If I am forced to fly, I will fly thither by night, and the stars will be my guide. Brother, it is good to feel that thou art near.”

“Ay, Petronella, I am glad indeed; for I fear me sometimes that our father—”

“What, Cuthbert?”

“That he must surely be going mad. It is hard to believe he could so persecute his children were it not so, and it is not fitting that thou shouldest dwell beneath the roof of a madman.”

The girl shivered slightly, and her dark eyes dilated.

“Thinkest thou so, Cuthbert? Sure I had thought it was his wrath at finding that we loved not the faith in which he has brought us up; that first thou and then I have learned to find comfort in the holy Book he has denied to us, and to find that there be other holy things than our priests have taught us, and purer truths than methinks they know themselves. I thought that was why his anger burned so hotly against us. That was his quarrel with thee, and methinks he must have suspected me, else would he scarce have dogged my steps as he did.”

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“It may be so,” answered Cuthbert; “but I fear me he has brooded over his wrongs and his sins until he is well-nigh beside himself. My sister, let not thy patience lead thee into peril. Remember what I have said, and whither I may be found. I will take thy message to Philip. He shall be bidden not to anger thy father further by seeking thee. After that it is for thee to decide whether thou canst still live in such solitude as must then be thine at the Gate House, or whether thou wilt fly to me in the forest.”

“I will remember,” answered Petronella, rising to her feet; for even here, and at this hour, and with her brother for her companion, she dared not linger long. “Tell my kind aunt that the Testament she gave me is the solace and happiness of my life. I think of her words every day, and they are written on my heart. Though I see her not, my blessing rests upon her. I would that she could know what peace and joy she has helped to bring into my lonely lot.”

“I will tell her,” answered Cuthbert, as he took the slight form into his arms. “She will be rejoiced to hear it, I doubt not. I too, my sister, have shared some of that peace myself. I have found that the faith in which we were reared, albeit it holds much of golden truth, has been so overlaid by artifice of man that the gold is sadly tarnished. I have some deep love for it yet, but I love better the purer faith that I have learned from the written Word of God, and have heard from the lips of godly men of the Established Church of the land. I have seen and heard much in yon great city, and methinks that all creeds have much that is true—much that is the same; but it seems the nature of man to fight and wrangle over the differences, instead of rejoicing in the unity of a common faith; wherefore there be misery and strife and jealousy abounding, and the adversaries may well blaspheme. But I came not to talk such matters with thee, sweet sister; they baffle the wisdom of the wisest. Keep fast hold of the peace thou hast found, and let no man take it from thee. I would I lived not in the midst of such weary war of words. There be times when the heart sickens at it, and one is fain to lay all aside sooner than have to own allegiance to any one party, when one sees the bad as well as the good of all.”

Petronella’s eyes were wide with astonishment and perplexity. She felt as though she had a very Solon for a brother when Cuthbert talked after this serious fashion. But she too had heard from the Trevlyns of the Chase somewhat of the burning questions of the day, and she was not wholly uninstructed in the matter.

“That is one boon granted to us weak women,” she said, with a shadowy little smile. “We are not called upon to take part in the world’s battlefield. We may think our own thoughts, and go our quiet way in the main unheeded and unmolested. But I am glad that thou dost see as I do, my brother. It is sweet to find accord in those we love. And now I must be gone; I dare not linger longer. Heaven bless and keep thee ever! I shall carry my daily load more lightly for this happy hour spent together.”

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Cuthbert kissed her many times before he let her go, reminded her again of the place where he himself might be found, and then walked slowly with her towards the old Gate House, only letting her go when she desired it, and watching her glide towards the little door with a sense of sinking at heart which he could hardly explain.

As for Petronella, she stole within the door, which she bolted behind her, as she had found it, and felt her way up the narrow winding stairs that led to the ground floor of the house. The postern door was below that level, and had a little stair of its own leading to the house, from which it was again shut off by another door at the top. When Petronella had stolen out to meet Cuthbert, she had left this door open, so as to avoid all needless noise; but when she reached the head of the stairs she found it closed, and her heart gave a sudden throb of dismay as she stood quite still listening and wondering.

Surely she had left it open? her memory had not deceived her! No; she remembered debating the matter with herself and deciding to do so. Could it have shut by itself afterwards? She could scarcely believe it. It was a heavy oaken door, that moved ponderously on its hinges; and the night was calm and breathless. No current of air could have blown upon it. Had some person from above come down and shut it after her? and if so, who could that person be? and had he suspected that she had slipped out into the night, and for what purpose?

With a wildly-beating heart and a frame that felt ready to sink into the ground with fear, Petronella tried the latch of the door, and found it yield to her hand. She pressed it open and then stood suddenly still, a gasp of terror and dismay escaping her; for there, in the middle of the hall, the moonlight falling full upon his tall rugged figure, stood her father, waiting with folded arms for his truant daughter, a look upon his stern face that she shivered to behold.

“So, girl!” he exclaimed, making one stride forward and catching the frail wrist in a vice-like grasp which almost extorted a cry of pain—“so, my daughter, thou hast come in from this midnight tryst with thy lover! And what dost thou think is the reward a father bestows upon a daughter who leaves his house at this dead hour of the night to meet the man he has bidden her eschew for ever?”

Petronella’s agitation was so great that she was well-nigh swooning. Her nerves had been on the strain for some time. The excitement of seeing Cuthbert again, of hearing his story and telling her own, had been considerable. And now to be confronted by a furious father, and accused of having broken her solemn pledge, and of having met her lover at an hour of the night when no virtuous maiden would dream of such a tryst, was more than she could bear. Slipping to her knees, she laid her hand upon her father’s robe, and clutching hold of it, as if for support, she gasped out the one word:

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“Pardon! pardon!”

“Thou mayest well sue for pardon, false jade; but to win it is another matter. Say, vile girl, whom I blush to call my daughter—say how oft hast thou thus gone forth to meet thy lover?”

“Father—father, revile me not thus!” cried the girl, beside herself with agitation, fearful of betraying Cuthbert’s near presence to the Gate House, lest the angry man should contrive to do him some injury or gain some hold upon him, yet terrified at the accusations levelled at her own head, which seemed to bear some show of reason. “Father, have pity; drive me not to despair, as thou didst drive my brother. I am so lonely and so miserable. Pity me! pardon me!”

“Answer my question, base girl. How oft hast thou done this deed before tonight?”

“Never before, my father, never before! Ah, do not be too hard upon me! I have done no wrong—I swear it!”

“Keep thy false oaths for thy false lover!” cried the angry man; “I will have none of them. Thou hast passed me thy word once, and I believed thee, and thou hast played me false. I will never believe thee again—never, never! Thou hast made thy bed, and thou shalt lie upon it.”

And with that the angry man flung the kneeling girl from him with such violence that she fell against the wall, and striking her head sharply, sank stunned and unconscious at his feet.

“Serve her right well, the false minx, the evil jade!” spoke the heartless father, as he strode back to his own room without so much as going across to the girl to know if she were severely hurt. “She will be safe enow for this night. She will not seek to go forth again. She shall smart for this bare-faced defiance. I will not be set at naught by both of my children. I will not—I will not!”

When Petronella awoke from what seemed to her a long dream, she found herself in her own bed, tended by the deaf-and-dumb servant, who was sitting beside her and watching her with wistful glances. A glad smile lighted up the woman’s face as Petronella made a sign that showed she recognized her; but no speech was possible between them, and the girl was too weary to care to ask questions by means of the series of signals long since established between them. She turned her eyes from the light, and fell asleep again like a tired child.

For several days her life was more like one long sleep than anything else. It was some while before she remembered any of the events immediately preceding this mysterious

attack of illness; and when she did remember, the events of that night seemed to stand out in fearful colours.

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Yet there was one thought of comfort: Cuthbert was not far away. Since her father had openly accused her of vileness, deceit, and treachery; since he had struck her down so cruelly, and had not even come to see her in her helplessness and weakness, must not Cuthbert's surmise be the true one—must he not surely be mad? She could see by the old woman's cowering looks if the door moved on its hinges, how much she feared the terrible master; and when Petronella was sufficiently recovered to be able to enter into the kind of conversation by means of signals which in some sort resembled the finger talking of more modern times, she learned that indeed her father was in a more black and terrible mood than ever before, and that old Martha herself went in fear of her life.

Bit by bit the old woman made the girl understand what had happened. Shortly after the day upon which she had found her young mistress lying cold and insensible on the stone floor of the hall, Philip Trevlyn had come to the Gate House, and had demanded an interview with the owner. Right well did both the women know the nature of that errand, though none had been present but the young lover and the enraged father. There could be no manner of doubt but that, incited to it by Cuthbert's tale, he had come to make a definite offer of marriage, and doubtless had tried to bribe the avaricious old man by some tempting offer of gold or land. But whatever had been the terms in which the proposal was couched, anger had proved a stronger passion with Nicholas than greed. Philip had been driven from the house with a fury that threatened actual violence, and for hours afterwards Nicholas had raged up and down the house like a wild beast in a cage. He had once gone up to his daughter's room with a face so full of fury that the old woman had feared he meant to fall upon her then and there; but even he had been calmed by a glance at the still, unconscious face upon the pillow, so white and bloodless and death-like; and the man had gone down with a quieter footfall than he had mounted, but had been brooding in sullen fury ever since, so that the old servant had feared to approach him even to bring him his needful food. She had spent almost all her time up with her young mistress, afraid to leave her by night or day lest some mischance should befall her.

All this the girl gradually understood as she became strong enough to take in the silent talk of the old woman. She knew that she must have lain some days in this state of unconsciousness, for the trees were greener than they had been when she had seen them last, and the sunlight was fast gaining its golden summer-like glow. There was something exhilarating in the beauty and richness of reviving nature, and even Petronella's wan cheek kindled into a flush of pleasure as she looked forth once again upon the fair world around her dismal home.

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Home? no, that was no longer the word for it. Slowly but surely the knowledge had come to her that Cuthbert had been right, and that this house could no longer be a home to her. Right well did she credit now, what had never entered her mind before, that her father had brooded and brooded until his very mind had become unhinged. He was not master of his words when he spoke to her as he had done upon that terrible night; he was not master of his actions when he had flung her away and left her lying unconscious on the stone floor. There was even some slight comfort in this thought, though it settled for ever the doubt in her mind. She must leave the Gate House so soon as she was strong enough to walk, and she must find her brother in the forest, and place herself beneath his care.

The old servant approved the plan. She herself could find a refuge at Trevlyn Chase; but that house would be no shelter for her young mistress. Her father's authority would be enough to carry her back into captivity; and what her fate would be, were she to have escaped him once and be again brought back, was a thought to shudder at.

"I must go back to Cuthbert," she said to herself, as she looked over the fair landscape, and thought longingly of the cool, dim woods, and the free life of the forest. Her own home was nothing now but a prison house. She knew that if she presented herself before her father sound and whole, she would at once be placed under some close restraint that would effectually hinder her from carrying out her plan. He would sooner kill her, as she verily believed, than permit her such liberty as might enable her to meet by accident or design any member of the household from the Chase. If she were to succeed in her escape, the attempt must be made whilst her father still believed her too feeble to stir from her bed; after that she would be too closely watched for it to be possible.

The old woman entered into this scheme with alacrity and zeal. Petronella kept to her bed; and when Nicholas Trevlyn demanded by signs how it fared with his daughter, he was answered by solemn shakings of the head. If he mounted the stairs to see with his own eyes how she was, he saw her lying upon the bed with closed eyes and wan face, and would smile with an evil smile and mutter that she was safe enough now—safe enough now.

Yet each day hope and the good food the shrewd old woman contrived to provide for her did its work upon Petronella's frail body, and she grew better every hour. Indeed, after some while she felt stronger than she had done for many weeks before her illness; and in due time even the fond old woman began to see that there was no need to postpone longer the scheme of escape.

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It was a simple little scheme, yet one which promised success if carefully carried out. Nicholas Trevlyn was accustomed to take night by night a posset of mead, brewed in some particular way by Martha. She was, upon the night planned as the one for the escape of Petronella, to add to this posset some drops of a concoction prepared by herself from herbs, which would infallibly produce sound and deep sleep within two hours. The master of the house asleep, all would be simple. The two women would sally forth by the postern door, and make for the forest. With the first light of the dawn, Martha would seek the shelter of Trevlyn Chase, whilst Petronella sought her brother in the pixies' dell. Nicholas Trevlyn would awake the next morning to find himself alone in the old Gate House that he had made intolerable for any other inmate.

Chapter 16: The Pixies' Dell.

After leaving Petronella close to her home, and watching the slight figure vanish within the postern door, Cuthbert turned his own steps towards the Chase, resolved to see Philip and tell him what had passed between him and his sister before returning to the forest dell where he had resolved to keep his watch.

He would not make any disturbance at the house at this dead hour of the night; but as he was familiar with the place, he quickly found his way to a small pavilion in the garden, the door of which was not locked at night, and stretching himself upon a wooden settle which stood there, he quickly fell asleep, and slept soundly and well until awakened by the sound of a startled exclamation.

Springing to his feet, bewildered for a moment, and unable to remember where he was, he found himself confronted by the eager, startled face and big lustrous eyes of his cousin Kate.

"Cuthbert! thou here!" she exclaimed in amaze. "Thou surely hast not brought me ill news of my—of Culverhouse!" and a deep flush overspread her face as she spoke.

Cuthbert hastened to reassure her. He explained that he had not seen Culverhouse since they parted in the forest, and that his own errand was of a private nature, and concerned himself and his sister.

"Ah, poor Petronella! methinks a hard lot is hers, Cuthbert. My brother does what he may; yet that is but little, and of late he has not been able so much as to get sight of her. Yet I see not what thou canst do for her. Thy father is even more incensed against thee than against us!"

"I came but to see with mine own eyes how she fared, and to breathe a word of hope in her ear. Kate, sweet coz, let me breathe that same word in thine; for thou wast the one to give me hope and confidence when all besides looked on me as a wild dreamer.

Methinks I am on the track of the lost treasure. Methinks with patience and care I shall find it yet."

Kate's eyes kindled and glowed.

"Nay, now, that is good hearing! Said I not ever that the old saws spake sooth? And is not the luck to return to the house of Wyvern through its daughters' sons? Cuthbert, tell me more—tell me all! how is it thou hast succeeded where all besides have failed?"

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“I cannot lay claim to success as yet,” answered Cuthbert, smiling. “I have not said the treasure is mine, only that I trow I know where soon I may lay hands upon it. Sweet Kate, when all that gold is brought back to the halls of Trevlyn Chase whence it was taken, sure thy dowry will be fair enough to win Lord Andover’s smiles. Sure thou wilt not then be afraid to own—”

But Kate laid her soft hand upon his lips and glanced round with startled eyes. Courageous as she was to carry out a bold resolution, she was not free from nervous timidity, too.

“Speak not the words, good Cuthbert, neither here nor yet within the walls of the Chase. I have not dared to breathe to them at home the thing I have done. Heaven pardon me if it were a sin; but I may not wish it undone. It is so sweet to feel myself his; and if it be as thou sayest, we may not have long to wait ere he may claim me before the world. But if thou findest the treasure thyself, will it not be all thine?”

“I trow not, and I trust thou hast no such evil thoughts of me, fair cousin, as to think that I would keep all, when but a portion was my father’s share, and that will scarce be mine whilst he lives. I do but hope to restore it to those to whom it rightfully belongs. I trow there will be enough to make all glad and happy, and I doubt not that something of good hap may come to me thereby. But to lay claim to all—why, that would be a scurvy thought, unworthy a man of honour.”

Kate’s bright face was full of eager sympathy and approval.

“I like thee, Cuthbert,” she cried; “I like thy honest thoughts and words. Thou art in sooth a very proper youth. Thou art worthy of thy Wyvern blood, which I hold to be purer than that of Trevlyn, which has times and again been stained by acts of malice, greed, and violence. But see, the sun is rising in the sky! We must back to the house for the morning meal. And, Cuthbert, good Cuthbert, thou wilt keep my secret? Thou wilt not tell of our meeting on May Day in the forest?”

“Never a word an thou biddest me not,” answered Cuthbert, with a smile. “So that is to be a secret, Lady Culverhouse?”

She recoiled with a little start, her eyes dancing, her cheeks aglow.

“O Cuthbert, I had not thought that my name was changed. Lady Culverhouse! What a pleasant sound it has! But oh, not a word at home! I dare not tell them aught till Culverhouse be by my side. I misdoubt me that I did right to let him persuade me thus; and yet I could not say him nay, and I longed to hear the words spoken that should bind us to each other. But I dare not tell my father! I trow both he and my mother would chide full sternly. In truth, I fear me it were scarce a maidenly act. But, O Cuthbert, love is so strong—so hard a task master. Where he drives, it seems that one needs must

go;" and she looked up at him with such arch appeal that he felt those glances would go far to soften the sternest parental heart.

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“In truth, I believe thee, fair coz, and I will keep thy secret faithfully. It is safe with me; and I trust that all will end happily when the lost treasure shall return to the house of Trevlyn.”

And talking eagerly upon this theme, which was also to be kept secret from all the world besides, the cousins walked towards the house. Cuthbert received a warm and hearty greeting from all his kinsfolks there, who were pleased that he should have kept his promise and have come to see them with the long days of early summer.

Sir Richard and his wife were both pleased with the fashion in which the youth had developed; his intelligence and information were now plainly apparent, and had taken a fresh impetus from the new surroundings in which he had found himself. He could talk with discrimination and insight on all the leading topics of the day, had plainly lost much of his old rusticity of thought and speech, and had become an interesting and self-possessed youth.

But his errand was really to Philip, and to him he spoke in private of his sister’s story, and how she had promised to obey her father and to see him no more. Cuthbert could assure the disappointed lover that this was no indication of coldness on Petronella’s part, but that it was done from a sense of filial duty, combined with a fear of some violence on her father’s part towards her lover should he be provoked too far. Cuthbert was as certain as Philip could wish that Petronella’s heart was entirely his. He had read the girl’s secret in the tones of her voice and in the shy glances of her soft eyes. He told Philip, too, of the gold that was awaiting the girl in her uncle’s keeping, and added that he was certain sure that Martin Holt would be glad enough to give it over to his niece if she had a sturdy husband of the Reformed faith to take care of her and it. His only fear was of its falling into the hands of the Papists, which thing would have been abhorrent to the grand sire whose legacy the money was. That fear laid to rest, he would be glad to be rid of the charge, and to give over the gold to its rightful owner.

Philip’s heart was with Petronella, and he had not concerned himself as yet with any thoughts as to her poverty and his own somewhat impecunious position as his father’s heir, but with three sisters to be provided for out of the revenues of the impoverished estate. He was man of the world enough to know that this dowry would do much to smooth his path when the time should come for making known his case to his parents, but for the moment his thoughts were all with the lonely girl shut up so relentlessly by her father.

“I will see Nicholas Trevlyn,” he said, with stern decision. “Things have gone too far not to go further. I will see him, and make formal application for his daughter’s hand. He can but refuse me, and I shall tell him plainly that I decline to give her up at any word of his. I can wait with patience till she is of age to judge for herself; but she is the woman of my choice, and her alone will I wed if she will have me.”

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Cuthbert's face was grave and troubled.

"And waiting for that, she may well be done to death within those walls, as I should have been had I not fled. I am in trouble of heart anent my sister. I pray she may find her way to me yet in the free forest!"

Philip started and looked surprised.

"Is there likelihood of that?"

"I know not. I bid her come if our father should grow more harsh, and told her where I likeliest might be found. I purpose to dwell for a while myself in the forest, albeit thou wouldst mock me if thou knewest the wherefore."

"To search for the lost treasure, I doubt not," said Philip with a smile, remembering the talk of the autumn previous. "Marry thou hast my best wishes for a happy quest. But what couldst thou do with a tender maid out in the woods with thee?"

"I scarce know that myself; but anything would be better than life with a madman—as I trow our father is like to become an he change not his habit of life. Belike I would take her to mine uncle on the bridge; yet perchance he would not thank me for adding to his charges.

"If we had other relatives—"

"Why, and so ye have, even as we have. Hast never heard of my Lady Humbert and Mistress Dowsabel Wyvern? They must be kinsfolk of thine as well as of ours, and they dwell not very far distant from here, albeit I myself have never visited them."

Cuthbert raised his head and looked eagerly at Philip.

"I would know more of that," he said.

"It is not much I can tell thee. This Lady Humbert is a widow, and is sister to that Gertrude Wyvern who was my grandam and thy aunt. Mistress Dowsabel is her younger sister; and albeit they are both now of a good old age, they dwell together, with only servants for company, in a house thou wouldst have passed on the road to London hadst thou not taken the lonelier way across the heath. My father and mother go each year to see after their welfare, and a letter comes now and again from them with greetings or questions. We of the younger generation have never been to visit them, since they are too old to wish for the presence of the young, and love not to see the changeless current of their lives interrupted. I remember that of old, when we were in disgrace for some prank, our grandam would shake her head at us and vow we should be sent to her sister Dowsabel for chastisement, and stay with her till we learned better manners. So we have grown up in the fancy that these kinswomen be something stern

and redoubtable ladies. Nevertheless, if thou wast to put thy sister beneath their care, I trow they would receive her with kindness and treat her well, and she would scarce regret the Gate House were the captivity never so hard. Nor would Nicholas Trevlyn be like to seek her there, though at the Chase he would find her at once, were we to strive to aid her flight as we aided thine."

Cuthbert saw this plainly, and asked a few more eager questions about these ladies and where they might be found. He hardly knew whether or not he expected Petronella to flee away to him, but at least it would do no harm to be prepared in case she did so.

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Philip told him all he knew, which was not much. The house would be easily found, as it stood upon the highroad just a mile from a large village, its gates opening straight upon the road, although at the back were gardens and pleasaunces and a clear trout stream. It seemed to Cuthbert as he listened that such a place as this might prove a safe haven of refuge for his sister should one be needed, and he resolved that if she once came to him he would persuade her to place herself beneath the protection of these ladies.

He would well have liked to see her again, to have whispered something of this new plan into her ears. But though he lingered much about the house during the two short weeks he spent at the Chase, he saw no glimpse of his sister, and he did not dare to summon her out to meet him at night, lest haply the suspicions of the grim old tyrant should be aroused.

Leaving Philip fully determined to see Nicholas Trevlyn ere long, to lay before him his formal proposal for Petronella's hand, and confident that all at the Chase would befriend her as far as it was possible; Cuthbert, afraid to linger longer in the immediate vicinity of the Gate House, took his departure for the forest, resolved to give himself over heart and soul to the search after the missing treasure, and not to give it up until every nook and corner of the pixies' dell had been subjected to the closest scrutiny.

It was easy to obtain from Philip all such tools as would be needful for the task of excavation. Although the young man himself had small hopes of Cuthbert's success, he was interested in spite of himself in the proposed plan, and would have been more so had he known how much had been already discovered. But Cuthbert kept much of that to himself, not willing that tattling tongues should spread the rumour. Only to real believers in the hidden treasure did he care to speak of the gipsy's strange words and the visit to the wise woman of Budge Row. Philip, he thought, would smile, and perhaps he would speak of the matter to his father, who in turn might name it to some one else, and so it might come round, through the gipsy spies and watchers, to the ears of Long Robin himself. That, as Cuthbert well knew, would be well-nigh destruction to all his cherished hopes; yet one who believed not would smile at his fears, and could scarce be expected to observe the needful caution.

As Cuthbert started for his nine miles' tramp in the cool of the evening, with his tools slung across his shoulders, he was glad to think that he had resisted the temptation to speak openly of this matter to any but Petronella and Kate. With them he well knew the secret was safe, for they entertained for Long Robin just the same suspicious fear as he did himself, and their lips were sealed even as his own.

The walk was nothing for his strong young limbs; but as he approached the lonely dell, he instinctively slackened his speed, and proceeded with greater caution. The thick growth of the trees made the place dark in spite of the moon, which hung low in the sky and shone between the trees in long silvery beams; and the tangled path which once

had led to the forest well had been long overgrown with a mass of bramble and underwood, through which it was hard to force a way.

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But Cuthbert cautiously proceeded, listening intently for any sounds of life to indicate the presence of Long Robin, the only being likely to be near at such an hour; but all appeared to be intensely still, and presently he commenced his cautious descent into the dell itself, and at last stood beside the old stone wall that guarded the mouth of the well.

Cuthbert had heard something of that well since he had been at his uncle's house. Some of the old servants at the Chase knew the forest well, and he had been told the story of the pixies' dell: how it had once been a noted spot in the forest, and how travellers turned aside to drink the waters, which were not only fresh and clear and cold, even on the most sultry summer's day, but were reported to possess healing properties, especially if taken at certain hours of the night and in certain phases of the moon. Long ago there had been a monastery near the well, and the monks had dispensed the waters to the applicants who came. But the monastery had fallen into ruins and had disappeared, and after that the pixies were given the credit of the healing waters. People came to drink them, though less frequently than before; and as the place grew more lonely and deserted, rumours began to float about that the pixies were inimical to man, and that the waters no longer possessed their old power. Later on still, a more terrible thing was discovered: it was said that it was death to approach that dell and drink the waters. Men's bones had been found in great numbers close about that spot, and it was plain that they must belong to the unhappy wights who, disregarding cautions, had ventured to the place, and had died before they could get away from thence.

After that, as may well be guessed, no sick folks had cared to trouble the dell again. Travellers made a wide circuit to avoid it, and it was held to be the place of most evil repute in the forest.

All this story was well understood by Cuthbert, who felt no fear of the spot, only a little natural awe as he recollected the deed that had once been done there. The moon was going down as he looked about him; the dark hour before morning was about to fall upon the world. He looked about for a resting place in which to conceal himself till he could commence his search, and found the place he desired in a hollow tree, just beyond the circle of smooth sward that surrounded the well itself.

Plainly this tree had been used before for a like purpose. The leaves had been carefully raked together within, and were covered by a warm rug, in which Cuthbert was not sorry to wrap himself, for the night air was sharp and chilly though the days were hot.

"Long Robin's rug, or I greatly mistake me," he said with a smile. "I trow he would be sore amazed were he to come and find me here. Howbeit he would but take me for a passing wayfarer, since he knows not my face, and I misdoubt me if he come tonight. He fears too much Joanna's watchful eyes and Miriam's jealous ones. I will sleep in peace till daylight dawns, and then I will begin my search."

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Sleep came quickly to the lad's eyes, but it was only light, for with the first blush of dawn he awoke and prepared to commence his work.

His tools he had hidden away beneath the heap of leaves which had formed his bed, and he did not disturb them for the time being, but walked forth and examined the dell for himself before making any excavation.

First his attention was given to the patch of greensward around the well; but this was so smooth and even that it seemed as if it had not been disturbed for ages. Such soft emerald turf, as Cuthbert well knew, was the growth of centuries, and there was no sort of trace or seam to indicate the handiwork of man.

Round and round the open space he paced, his eyes fixed upon the ground beneath his feet, his quick glance shifting from spot to spot, as he strove for some indication, however faint, of the existence of some hidden hoard.

"Yet it is certain to be well hid. It were strange if I did light upon it in the first hour," he said to himself at length, covering his disappointment with a smile. "I will break my fast with the good fare given me by my fair cousin Kate, and will taste the waters of the magic well. I trow I shall take no harm from them. Long Robin will scarce have poisoned the spring from which he himself must ofttimes drink."

Whilst he partook of his simple meal, he looked about him with keen and eager glances, wondering where he should next search, and striving to see traces of footsteps in the sandy sides of the dell, or breaks in the tangled growth of underwood that would indicate some track used by Robin. Cuthbert shrewdly suspected that he would not be able to resist the temptation of going frequently to the spot where the buried treasure lay, to see if the ground remained undisturbed, and he thought that the surest way of discovering this spot was to seek for traces likely to be left by him; or, failing these, to watch patiently from some obscure spot till the gipsy came again to the dell, when it was probable he might betray the secret by his own movements.

"If I dig and delve before the clue is mine, I may chance to put him on his guard, and find nothing. No; I will be patient—I will be very cautious. Success comes to him that can wait. Long Robin is a foe not to be despised or trifled with; I can tell that from his own words and Joanna's. He would take a hundred lives to save his golden secret. He is cautious and cunning and wary. I must try to be the same."

All that long summer's day Cuthbert prowled up and down the dell, searching for some trace, however slight, which should give him the clue, and searching in vain. The only path where the undergrowth was in any way trodden was the one by which he and Robin alike approached the well, the old, half-obliterated track that once had been so freely used. All around the sides of the dell, fern and bramble, hazel and undergrowth of all kinds, grew in wild confusion. Search as he would, Cuthbert could find nothing like

a path of any kind. Did Robin indeed trust to that tangled undergrowth to keep his secret hid? And if so, what chance was there of its being found unless the whole dell was dug up?

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A short while back it seemed so much to have found out this dell. When he had been resolved to search the whole forest through, no wonder the task had been practically impossible; but when he had had indications of a confined locality, he had looked upon his work as well-nigh accomplished, and had come here with a heart full of high hopes. And now he was confronted by difficulties that appeared almost as insurmountable as before; for he plainly saw the hopelessness of attempting single-handed to delve the whole dell over. Robin would return before the task was more than begun. He would guess the import, would set a close watch, and would slay the bold invader of his haunted dell without pity or remorse. Whilst the only other plan, that of bringing a gang of men to work strong enough to be a guard to themselves, was simply out of the question for Cuthbert. He had no money himself. His uncle Martin would certainly not give him the gold in the box for any such hare-brained scheme; whilst to appeal to Sir Richard, with nothing to back his statements but what would be looked upon as old wives' fables and gipsy delusions, would only be to provoke ridicule and scorn. The Trevlyns had long given up the treasure as lost beyond recall. They had no sort of hope of recovering it, and the present owner of the Chase and his lady were in particular very greatly averse to any sort of dealings with occult magic and gipsy lore.

Cuthbert had a shrewd notion that there was little enough of magic in any of the words and dark sayings he had heard. He had been let just a very little behind the scenes, and had his own opinions on the subject. His faith in spirits and familiars had been greatly shaken; but he knew that his story would sound wild and improbable, and he was by no means sure that even Joanna would consent to appear before Sir Richard and repeat it all to him. She was anxious to do her part towards making restitution; but, having put the clue in Cuthbert's hands, would very likely consider that part done, and decline to be questioned further by any one.

"What I do I must do alone," said Cuthbert to himself, with a sigh, at the close of that day of toil and discouragement. "Well, I should have been mightily surprised had I lighted on the treasure at the close of the first day. I ought not to be thus discouraged, and yet I am. Still there is one more thing to do. If I can but watch Long Robin, surely I shall learn somewhat from him. I vow that that is better far than prowling aimlessly about the dell. Let me spend my time and strength in building for myself some nook high up in one of yon trees, from which vantage ground I may spy upon his doings. If I can but get me up high enough, I can watch him from spot to spot. Sure I should be stupider than a daylight owl an I could not learn somewhat from his looks and actions on his next visit. And it will be safer for me to have mine own perch. I will venture to sleep one more night in the tree; but after that I will sleep by day and watch by night, for it is plain that he is a night bird in his visits here."

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The next day Cuthbert set to work with a better heart. It was not difficult to find the sort of nook he wanted high up in the branches of a great sycamore. The oaks were hardly thick enough yet to conceal him, and the foliage of the elm was somewhat scanty still, for all that the season was forward. But by good hap there chanced to be, amongst the tall trees that fringed the round of sward, a noble sycamore in full leaf and very thick; and by skillful contrivance, and with the help of his tools, Cuthbert quickly built himself up there a small but secure and commodious platform, upon which he could perch himself at ease and watch the whole of the dell. Even if he fell asleep, he was in no danger of falling; and if he could obtain the needful supplies of food, he could keep watch there unseen for an indefinite time. He had plenty of provision so far, for he had been supplied with dry and salted provisions enough to last a week. These he took up to his nest, and also his tools, which he resolved to keep beside him for safety; and having spent the best part of the day in this labour of ingenuity and patience, and having then quenched his thirst by long draughts of clear cold water, he ascended to his perch with an armful of dried bracken—the eighth such load he had carried up—and as he arranged his riding cloak upon the soft and fragrant cushion thus prepared, he said to himself with a smile that he could afford to be patient now, for he had a commodious castle all his own, and could await with patience the advance of the foe.

His patience was not, however, destined to be very sorely taxed. He had fallen into a light sleep, and was dreaming of a hand-to-hand struggle with Long Robin, when some unwonted sound smote upon his ears, and he started up all alert on the instant.

He knew that sound; he had heard it before. It was the wild, unearthly noise made by Robin to increase the fear of this dell in the hearts of any chance wayfarers who might haply be within hearing. In a few more seconds Cuthbert, peering down from his leafy canopy, saw the tall form thrusting itself through the underwood; and Robin, with a loud laugh, threw himself upon the low wall of the pixies' well.

He was talking and muttering to himself, but Cuthbert could not catch the words. He seemed in a merry mood, for he laughed aloud once or twice, and drank of the well and laughed again. Once Cuthbert thought he caught the words "treasure" and "safe," but of that he could not be certain; and it was not easy to see how Robin could know this, seeing he had not stirred three paces from the well.

And then a sudden flash came into Cuthbert's soul like one of inspiration. Suppose the treasure was in the well itself? What more likely? Would not that be the safest place of all? For the precious metals would not hurt through contact with the water; and had he not heard that the waters of this well possessed peculiar properties for preserving anything thrown into them?

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Cuthbert's heart beat so fast that he almost feared Robin would hear his deep breathing; but the man was looking down into the well, laughing to himself in the peculiarly malevolent fashion that Cuthbert had heard before. He never moved from the side of the well for the long hour he remained; and Cuthbert, waiting in feverish impatience till he should be gone, felt as though he had never known an hour so long.

But it ended at last. The tall figure reared itself upright, and he heard the voice distinctly now.

"I must be going—I must be going. Miriam will be asking questions. That hag is the plague of my life. All safe—all safe. And now I will depart."

The tall figure put on its stooping gait, which appeared to be second nature, and went slouching away through the underwood along the narrow track. Cuthbert waited till there had been a long spell of perfect silence, and then he glided with cat-like caution to the ground.

"I may not be able to see anything by this light, not even the glint of gold beneath the clear waters. But he seemed to see. He looked down and muttered, 'Safe—safe!' Beshrew me but I trow I have the secret now! The pixies' well—the hidden secret it guards so well. All is true! all is true! Why did I not think of it before?"

Creeping to the side of the well, Cuthbert peered over the edge and gazed fixedly into the dark water. What was it he saw? Was that moonlight shining and glinting there; or was it—could it be—Hold, what is this?

With a stifled cry Cuthbert strove to spring to his feet; but the attempt was vain. He was encircled in the bear-like grip of a pair of arms that were strong as bands of iron around him. He felt as though all the breath were being pressed out of him, and in his ear there rang a hideous laugh, the sound of which he knew but too well.

"Fool!" cried a hoarse voice, hissing the words in his ears—"fool of a mad boy to trust a treacherous gipsy tale! So thou thoughtest to outwit Long Robin! Thou thoughtest to win back the lost treasure to the house of Trevlyn! Mad boy—fool of a hardy knave! But yet thou shalt have thy wish—thou shalt have thy will. Thou shalt see with thine own eyes that long-lost treasure."

There was a cruel sneer in the man's eyes, a mocking inflection in his voice, that sent a thrill of cold horror through Cuthbert's veins. He was absolutely powerless in that merciless clasp. He felt the strength leaving his limbs and his head turning giddy. He only just knew it when he was laid upon the grass, his captor's knee firmly planted on his chest; and then he felt his hands and feet being tightly and securely bound, whilst the stars in the sky seemed to reel and dance before his eyes, and he said to himself, without realizing the import of his own words:

“He is going to kill me; he is going to kill me.”

“Yes, I am going to kill thee, mad boy,” said Long Robin coolly, as though he had heard the spoken word. “I am going to kill thee, as I kill all those who dare to thwart my will or cross my path. I shall kill thee; but thou shalt first have the desire of thine eyes and of thine heart. Thou shalt see and thou shalt touch the long-lost treasure! Thou shalt learn the secret ere thou diest, and thy ghost can impart it to thy friends.”

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With a brutal and almost diabolical laugh, Long Robin rose to his feet and leaned over the well. He seemed to be raising from it some heavy weight, and Cuthbert heard a heavy thud fall upon the grass.

“Now, thou shalt go to join the lost treasure. The Trevlyns when they find it will find their lost kinsman, too! Ha, ha! they are welcome to that find; they are welcome to it!” and the man stooped to lift the bound and helpless Cuthbert in his strong arms.

Cuthbert closed his eyes. He knew well what was coming. A fall, a sullen splash, one brief ineffectual struggle, and then black darkness. He tried to breathe a prayer, but could form no words. He thought of Cherry, of Petronella, and sharp stabs of pain seemed to run through him. One minute more and all would be over. But what an endless minute that was, whilst he felt the grip upon his body growing firmer as the giant prepared to lift him.

What was that?

“Crack!”—a sudden flash from the dark underwood, and with a loud cry his captor dropped him, and staggered backwards, to fall a few paces farther on, where he lay rigid and motionless. Then from the thicket there came the sound of a quick sharp cry, and a slim figure rushed forward with the gasping question:

“Is he dead? Oh, have I killed him?”

And Cuthbert, raising his head, and scarce believing aught of this could be anything but a fevered dream, uttered the one word:

“Petronella!”

Chapter 17: Brother And Sister.

“Petronella! thou here!”

“Brother—brother mine—art thou hurt?”

“Never a whit, though I looked to be a dead man ere this. Sister, take my knife and cut my bonds; yon man may rise again, and I must be free to defend myself and thee.”

Petronella cast a scared and fearful glance at the long dark figure lying face downwards upon the sward, showing signs of life only by a spasmodic twitching of the limbs; and then drawing Cuthbert’s long hunting knife from his belt, she cut the cords that bound his hands and feet, and in another moment he sprang up and shook himself, keeping a wary eye all the while upon the prostrate foe. But he did not go to his side at once; he was too keenly aroused and interested by this sudden appearance of his sister.

“Petronella! I can scarce credit my senses. How comest thou here, and at such an hour?”

“I am doing as thou biddest me,” she answered in a low voice: “I am flying from our home, even as thou wast forced to fly. I verily believe that thou art right, and that our father is well-nigh mad. I dared not remain. Even old Martha feared to linger longer under that roof. She has found safe refuge, I trust, at Trevlyn Chase. Thou didst go there, my brother, after parting from me?”

“Ay, verily I did, and stayed there a matter of some two weeks, ever hoping to see thy face again, and to hear how it fared with thee. But thou camest not.”

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“I could not,” answered the girl, in the same low tone; “I was in my bed, unable to move hand or foot, unable to know night from day. Cuthbert, the night I went forth to thee in the chantry our father missed me from the house. He thought I had gone to meet Philip in the wood at night. He reviled me cruelly, and I feared to tell him it was thou I had gone to see. Then, I know not how, but I fear he struck me. A great blackness came before mine eyes; and when I opened them again a week or more had passed, and I knew, as I began to understand what had chanced, that I could no longer remain beneath the roof of the Gate House.”

Cuthbert ground his teeth in sudden fury.

“Struck thee, my gentle sister! Nay, I can scarce credit it; and were he any other than my father—”

“But he is our father,” answered the girl gently. “And truly methinks, Cuthbert, that his lonely brooding has something unhinged his mind. Let us think of him only with pity.”

Cuthbert put his arm about her tenderly.

“Tell me the rest of thy story, sister. How camest thou here so opportunely, to play the part of Amazon and save thy brother’s life?”

She shivered a little, as if afraid even to think what she had done, but her words were quietly and clearly spoken.

“That is soon told. Old Martha nursed me back to health again, and our stern father hindered her not in her tendance of me. And this very night we made our plans, and she put a concoction of herbs into his nightly potion, which caused him to sleep too sound to awake for any sound within or without the house. Then we softly stole away without let or hindrance—she to go to the Chase, I to walk across the moorland and forest as thou hadst bidden me, to find thee here.”

“And thou didst arm thyself ere thou wentest forth?”

She looked up with strange earnestness into his face.

“I know not if the thought were sin, Cuthbert,” she said, “but as I slipped through the dark house ere our flight, my eyes fell upon that pair of heavy pistols always loaded that our father keeps ever on the mantle shelf of the hall. I thought of the lessons thou hadst given me in old days, and knew I could pull the trigger were I so minded, and send the bullet whizzing through the air. I had no thought of harming any man as I put forth my hand and took one of the weapons. I was thinking rather of myself. I had heard men speak of perils worse than death that may beset weak and helpless women alone in the world. I knew not if I might find thee as I hoped. I could not but fear that some mischance might keep us sundered. I thought of my father’s cruel wrath should he

discover my flight, and pursue and overtake. It seemed to me, standing in the darkness of the old Gate House, that it would be better to perish than to be dragged thither again to die of misery and harsh captivity. I said within myself, 'Sure, if it be sin, it is one that God would pardon. It is not well for me to go forth without some weapon which might end all, were it to be the less peril to die than to live.' And so I took the pistol and carried it in my girdle."

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“And then?”

“Then we went forth together, and Martha walked with me awhile. But as I felt the clear fresh air of the night fanning my cheek, and the dewy sweetness of the grass beneath my feet, I grew strong and full of courage. I felt certain by what thou hadst told me that I was on the right track. The moon and the stars shone in the sky and guided my steps. I sent Martha away, and journeyed on alone. It was sweet to find myself free, to see the heavens above my head, and to hear the soft night breezes. In the clear brightness of the night I could see far about me, and I knew that I was alone and had naught to fear. Thanks to Martha’s good nursing and the food she had contrived for me, I was stronger than I had been for many long days and weeks. It was happiness to use my limbs, and I was not wearied by my journey. I entered the forest track at last, and quickly found the path that thou hadst spoken to me of. I knew then that I was near my journey’s end, and my heart was light within me.”

“Didst thou not fear the dark wood and the many strange sounds of the night?”

“I feared somewhat, but chided myself for that fear. But it was well I felt it, else might I not have crept along as I did with such mouse-like stillness; and but for that, yon man”—with a shuddering glance at Long Robin on the ground—“would surely have found me.”

Cuthbert started and asked her how that was.

“I will tell thee, brother. I was drawing very nigh this dell, and I felt as by some instinct that it was close at hand, when I heard the sound of footsteps coming thence, and I well-nigh ran forth calling thee by name, for I felt assured it must be thou. But then some impulse of fear possessed me, and I trembled in every limb, and instead of running forth to meet him who was coming, I hid myself within the shadows of a deep hollow tree, scarce daring to breathe lest I should be discovered. And scarce had I done this before a tall figure crept out along the path, and halted so close beside me that I well-nigh screamed aloud in my terror, for I thought for sure I was discovered. But no: he had not paused for that, and as he stood scarce three ells from my hiding place I heard him mutter to himself; and I knew by what thou hadst told me, and by his tall form and long white beard, that it was Long Robin who was so near.

“And couldst thou hear what he said?”

“I could hear many words, and fierce ones, too—words that made my flesh creep, and turned me sick with fear for thee, my brother. He muttered that he was watched and spied upon. He spoke of other footfalls than his own in the dell, and cursed Joanna for striving to outwit him, vowing he would slay her if once he found that she had dared to set others to watch him. He spoke the name of Trevlyn once or twice. It was as if he

had heard somewhat of thee and of thine errand to the Gipsy Queen—something he must surely have heard, else could he not have

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spoken of the ‘Trevlyn spawn,’ and what he would do if one of that ‘brood’ dared to come betwixt him and his design. And then he leaned against a tree and waited, listening with an intentness that showed a deep suspicion; and he must have heard sounds that I could not—for my heart beat so wildly I feared he would hear it where he stood—and he smote his hands softly together and laughed a low laugh like that of a demon.”

“I have heard that laugh; I know it well,” whispered Cuthbert. “It is indeed what thou callest it. Doubtless he heard my cautious descent from the tree. What did he then?”

“I heard his next words plainly, and they sent a thrill of cold horror through me, for too well I divined their import.

“‘He is there!’ he hissed between his teeth—’he is there! I shall catch him red handed in the act. Good! He shall not leave the dell alive; he shall join the seven who strove before to know too much. Long Robin’s hand has not lost its cunning, and it will strike the more heartily when aimed against one of the false, hateful brood.’

“And then, Cuthbert, I saw it all in a moment. I knew that thou wert in the glen, and that he was going forward to kill thee. And for a moment my head swam, and I well-nigh swooned with terror, and could not even lift my voice to shout to thee and warn thee to fly for thy life.”

“It was well thou didst not,” answered Cuthbert; “for I should scarce have heard or understood, and he would but have turned his destroying hand against thee ere he went forward to slay me. Thou didst do better than cry aloud, my sister.”

She shivered slightly and pressed close up to him.

“When the mist passed from my eyes and I could see, Long Robin was no more there, and in awful fear what might even then be happening, I stole down as fast as my trembling limbs would carry me towards the centre of the dell. Ere I could see aught I heard thy voice raised in a sharp cry, Cuthbert, and then I heard fierce, cruel words spoken, mingled with that laugh that makes the blood run chill in the veins. I crept as fast as I could through the tangled underwood, and then I saw before me a terrible sight. Yon man was binding thee hand and foot with bonds that thou couldst not break, and I knew that he would kill thee without mercy, even as he had threatened. It was then that I remembered for the first time the weapon I carried at my side, and as I took it in my hands I felt a strange coldness come upon me. I trembled no longer. I felt calm and resolute and fearless. I crept cautiously out of the brushwood, though I kept still in the shadow of the trees, and I drew nearer and nearer, expecting every instant to be seen. I dared not fire till I was very close. It was long since I had discharged such a

weapon, and I knew well that thy life and mine both hung upon that one charge. Robin rose suddenly to his feet after binding thee, and I thought for certain I was seen. But no; he turned and leaned

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over the well, and drew forth from it yon huge round slab of stone, which he flung there on the grass as thou seest it. When his back was thus turned I crept nearer yet. I would have fired then, but still feared to miss. Then he bent over thee and lifted thee in his arms. He could not see me then, he was too much engrossed in his task. I saw well what he meant to do—to fling thee bound and helpless into the well, where the lost treasure, methinks from his words, must lie.

"The rest thou knowest. Coming up close behind, I fired my pistol. He dropped thee and fell himself, and I feared that he was dead. Brother, it is something fearful to have killed a man, though it was to save life. Wilt thou not go to him and see if he yet lives? We ought to show charity even to our foes."

Cuthbert was willing enough to do this since he had heard his sister's story, which had not taken many minutes in the telling. He went across to the spot where Long Robin lay, and turned him gently over.

Although the sight of death was by no means familiar to Cuthbert, it took only one glance to show him that this man was dying or dead. His face was ghastly and drawn, and his limbs were already growing rigid and motionless. The heavy charge of the pistol had done its work surely and fully: the bullet had passed through the spine, and had entered the vital organs. There was little effusion of blood, but death was delayed only a few minutes. Even as Cuthbert looked at him, the man gave a deep groan. His eyelids flickered a few moments, and then his jaw dropped, a quiver passed through his frame, which then became absolutely still.

Cuthbert shook his head.

"He is dead!" cried Petronella, in a voice of compunction and awe—"he is dead; and I have killed him!"

She put her hands before her eyes and shivered. It was something of a terror to her that she should have done this thing. She shook in every limb.

"I did not mean to kill him—I never thought of killing him; I only thought of how to save thee, Cuthbert. O brother, brother, what shall I do? Will they hang me for it?"

"Never," cried Cuthbert, throwing his strong arm about her and smiling at her words. "Sweet Petronella, thou hast naught to fear. This man has long been an outlaw and a robber. He has many lives to answer for himself, as well as innumerable acts of violence with robbery. Even were it not so, thou couldest not be held in any wise guilty by law either of God or man. May Heaven forgive me if I sin, but I am right glad thy bullet did its work so well. Our enemy thus removed from our path, the secret of the lost

treasure lies with thee and me. Petronella, I doubt it not for a moment now, that treasure lies at the bottom of the pixies' well. My only wonder is that none have thought of this before."

Petronella pointed to the circular slab lying wet and sparkling in the moonlight upon the sward beside the well.

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“Look there!” she said: “it is that that has helped to hide the secret so long. Robin is cunning. He is deep, he is full of artifice. He has given to the well a false bottom, of which perchance none knows but himself. He knows how to raise it from the well, as I saw him do; but all the world beside would hold it in truth to be the well’s bottom. Beneath yon slab the treasure lies. Cuthbert, thou hast found the secret. Thou wilt be the one to restore the fortunes of our house.”

“Methinks it will be more thou than I, sweet sister,” answered Cuthbert, gladly and proudly, as he leaned over the low stone wall and gazed eagerly into the deep, dark water. “And right glad am I that we should be together when we find the treasure trove. Canst see aught in yon deep hole, Petronella?”

She shook her head.

“Nor I neither. We must wait for daylight for that, and then perchance it will not reveal itself to our eyes. Yet it is there. I am certain sure of it; and although it may be something difficult to rescue even now, I doubt not that with patience and time we may succeed. Petronella, I will tomorrow to the village nighest at hand, whilst thou dost rest up in yon tree out of the way of all harm, where I have prepared a place of comfort. I will purchase there a suit of boy’s clothes for thee to wear whilst thou dost share my forest life; it will be safer for thee, and more commodious likewise. I will also buy us victuals and a coil of rope. Then we twain can set to work over our task, and it will be strange indeed if we be balked in it, seeing that the hardest part is already accomplished. The secret is ours!”

Petronella’s eyes sparkled beneath their heavy fringes. There was a spice of adventure and romance about this that could not but be delightful to any young spirit.

“Thou wilt not then tell our kinsfolk at the Chase, and ask their aid in this?”

Cuthbert shook his head.

“I will tell no man aught. I will ask for nothing till the treasure is in mine own hands!” he cried, with a gesture of triumph and pride. “They would believe naught when I spoke of the treasure before. They might even yet laugh us to scorn were we to tell our tale and point to the well as the place. No: we have done all alone thus far; let us do all alone even to the end. Time presses not. We have the summer before us. We have possession of this dell, where no foot but that of yon dead man ever dared to tread. He thus removed from our path, none else will spy upon us nor hinder us. We are safer here than in any other spot in the forest.

“Say, sister, wilt thou be my helper in this labour, be it small or great?”

She laid her hand trustingly in his; her dark eyes glowed.

“Gladly, gladly will I share the labour and the toil, my brother. O Cuthbert, it seems a happy and a fitting thing that the luck of the house should return to the Trevlyns of the Chase through the two poor cousins whom they befriended in their hour of need. They were kind to us when our life was darkest; it will be sweet to think that they will win happiness through us.”

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“Ay, and Philip’s bride will be no longer a portionless damsel, but will have gold enough and to spare. Sweet sister, Philip hath spoken to me openly of his love. He hath been ere this to ask thee at thy father’s hand.”

“Ay, and was driven forth with blows and curses.”

“Thou hast heard it? But thinkest thou he will take that for an answer? Nay, Petronella, thou wilt one day be his bride; and I will give thee to him with a joyful heart, for he loved thee in the days of our poverty and distress; so that one knows his love is for thee and thee alone, not for the fair dowry thou wilt presently bring.”

Petronella hid her happy, blushing face on her brother’s shoulder, and thus they stood awhile, till the girl drew back with a light shiver and said:

“Cuthbert, can it be right for us thus to stand thinking of our own happiness, whilst he lies there so still and cold?”

“I was just about to bid thee give me leave to bury him, whilst thou dost rest thyself awhile. We will not grudge him that last service; and it will be safer and better to do it here than to give notice of his death to the gipsies and outlaws, and so bring them down upon us in this place, provoking perchance their vengeance upon ourselves. I have here a spade, brought to dig after the treasure. I little thought it would first be used to dig Long Robin’s grave. But the task had better be done, and that quickly. The man is dead as a stone. We will bury him away out of our sight ere we do aught beside.”

Petronella assented with a slight shudder. She could not regret the death of the giant gipsy, who himself made so light of human life, and would have slain her brother before her eyes without a qualm. But she shivered each time she looked at the motionless form, and was glad when, after some hours of hard work beneath the trees, Cuthbert succeeded in dragging the corpse away and in covering it up from sight. Kneeling beside the rude grave, the girl breathed a prayer for the soul of the departed man, and repeated many an ave and paternoster, in the hope of smoothing for him his passage into eternity (being still considerably imbued with the teachings of her early life, which the newer and clearer faith had by no means eradicated), and then she rose comforted and relieved, feeling as though a dark weight had passed from her spirit.

Daylight had now come, and the girl was very weary. She looked so wan and white that Cuthbert was alarmed, and fed her tenderly with the best his wallet could supply; after which he took her up to his nest in the sycamore, first bringing the rug that was lying in the hollow tree to wrap around her. There he succeeded in making her so comfortable and secure that she fell asleep almost at once, and he was hopeful she would sleep the whole time of his absence, for she was worn out with fatigue, and only just recovering from an illness. How she had borne the fatigues of that night he scarce knew; but she

possessed her share of the Trevlyn tenacity of purpose, and her strong will had conquered the feebleness of her frame.

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It was a satisfaction to see her sink into a tranquil sleep, and secure in the certainty that she could not be seen by any person entering the dell. Certain that none but a chance traveller ever did come nigh this haunted spot, he was not afraid to leave her; and after studying the simple contrivance by which the round slab was raised and lowered in the well, he dropped it to its former position, and went on his way to the village with a light heart.

The secret of the lost treasure, he was fully certain, was now his; and though the work of rescue might require time and patience and labour, he was convinced it could be accomplished, and that he, with the help of his sister, should find himself competent for the task.

It was evening before he returned, but he found Petronella where he had left her. She had slept almost unbrokenly throughout the day, and was now greatly refreshed and invigorated. The air of the forest and the sweet breath of the pines were enough, as she said, to give her new life; and she descended eagerly to meet and greet her brother, and to examine the purchases he had made.

The first excitement was the ass who bore the heavy load. Cuthbert had had some trouble in making a way for the creature to pass down into the dell; but once here, he would never stray away of his own accord. Indeed, he appeared to have no disposition that way, for he began at once to crop the emerald sward around the well with an air of great contentment, whilst Cuthbert unloaded him and displayed his purchases to his sister.

“There is thy suit, young Peter,” he said with a smile. “I trow thou wilt make a pretty boy, and wilt find thyself more fitted for our new life thus habited, and canst rove in the forest thus clad, an thou hast a mind that way, more safely than thou couldest in a maid’s dress. And here is wine to put some colour into thy pale cheeks, and food to last us many a day, and blankets to wrap about us by night when the wind blows chill, and this heavy cloak to keep the rain from thee when the skies weep. And see, here is a rope which I trow will let me to the very bottom of the well, an we can once turn the water some other way; and the ass can drag me forth again—and the treasure likewise—-when once this matter has been accomplished. The hot, dry weather is coming apace. Men say already that the springs be something low. All this favours our plans; and if I can find the spring that feeds this well, as like enough I may, then will I make shift to turn its waters another way, and the pixies’ well shall be dry!”

Petronella gazed at him in surprise.

“Brother, whence comes all this knowledge to thee? I should never have dreamed such a thing might be!”

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“But I have read of such things being done ere now,” answered Cuthbert eagerly. “I have spent many an hour at Master Cole’s shop upon the bridge reading of such matters—how men mine and counter-mine, and dig and delve, and sink wells and drain them, and do many strange things of which we never dreamed in past days. In times of war it is wondrous how many shifts of that or like kind they think of and perform. I little thought how soon I myself should want some such thing accomplished; but I read all eagerly, and Master Anthony Cole explained much that perplexed me; and I trow I might e’en do some such thing myself, with thee and this patient beast to help me in my toil!”

It was with undisguised admiration that Petronella regarded her brother, and very happy and merry was the meal taken together beside the well under the green-wood trees. It was hard to realize that this smiling girl, with the faint pink bloom in her cheek, and the bright eager eyes, was the cowed and sorrowful Petronella of a few days back. Cuthbert looked at her with glad pride as she talked to him and petted the docile ass, who came and stood beside them and got a full share of such things as were pleasant to his palate. Petronella had never had the care of a live thing before, and was delighted with the affection shown towards her at once by the gentle creature.

Her sleep that night in the tree was sound and refreshing; and when she joined Cuthbert, dressed in her suit of boys’ garments; laughing, blushing, and delighted with the freedom of motion that they gave her; he found it hard to believe it was really Petronella, and vowed it would not be hard to call her Peter, for that there was little enough of the Petronella of old days to be found in her.

And from that day forward a happy life began for the brother and sister thus strangely located in the pixies’ dell. Each day saw the girl growing stronger, brighter, and happier, till she could scarcely believe it was so short a time since she had fled from her father’s house; whilst Cuthbert, intent upon his plans and his engineering operations, grew brown and muscular and self reliant, watching carefully and tenderly over his sister, but spending his time in healthful toil, and in working out self-imposed problems, confident that these would in the end succeed in enabling him to carry out the purpose of his heart.

The pixies’ well proved very deep. Soundings taken by the rope showed that only too clearly. The water flowed three feet over the false bottom Robin had contrived the better to conceal his hiding place, whilst below that there was fully ten feet of water; and Petronella’s face grew long as she saw the result of the sounding, for she could not imagine how any treasure could be got at that lay thirteen feet below the surface of the water.

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“Never mind that, sister mine,” said Cuthbert. “Belike it is to that very fact that it owes its long safety. Even Robin must have known that to bring it forth again must be a matter of time and patience. He could not visit it in a moment of haste or fright, and filch a piece away as he would. Doubtless the place was chosen by the old Long Robin of past days for the very difficulty there must be in bringing forth the prize. I have often thought that no buried treasure could so long have escaped prying hands and covetous spirits. Bit by bit some would have gone. It is the water that has been the best protection.”

Petronella saw the force of that argument; but as she leaned over the wall, trying to peer into the dark depths whilst Cuthbert talked of his scheme for draining it dry, she heaved a little sigh, and said:

“And what if, after all that long labour, there be no treasure there in spite of all we believe?”

He looked a little taken aback, but was struck by the practical nature of the suggestion. He pondered awhile, and then he spoke.

“That is a thought worthy of consideration,” he said. “It were a foolish thing to waste the whole summer only to be deceived in the end.

“Peter,” he added suddenly, as if struck by a new idea, “I am no fearer of water. I can dive and swim, and I have long wind, and can hold my breath a great while. Thinkest thou that if I were to leap into the well and dive to the bottom, thou couldst give me the rope when I reappeared, and with the aid of the ass pull me forth again? I can dive through the water, I trow, albeit the well is none too wide. But I could not climb the steep stone sides; thou and the ass must help me there.”

Petronella was a little timid of the experiment lest harm should befall her brother, and persuaded him at last to tie the rope about him ere he dived, so that in the event of his striking his head, or in any other way hurting himself, she would have power to pull him up and out, even if he should have lost consciousness. After making her promise not to use this power unless she were fully persuaded he was in some difficulty and unable to help himself, Cuthbert consented to this amendment; and when all preparations were complete he balanced himself for a moment on the edge of the well, and then launched himself downwards in a line as straight as an arrow.

Eagerly and breathlessly Petronella watched for his reappearance, holding her own breath the while, as though in some way that would help the diver. He was long gone, as it seemed to her. She had been forced to take one deep respiration, and was almost tempted to pull at the rope in her hand, when the water suddenly became again disturbed and full of bubbles, and a head appeared above it again.

“Cuthbert!” she exclaimed, in a tone of glad relief, “O Cuthbert, what hast thou found?”

He was clinging to the rope with one hand; the other was beneath the water out of sight. He raised his eyes, and said between his gasping breaths:

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“Draw me up; the water is chill as ice!”

From the sound of his voice she could not tell whether success had crowned the attempt or not. She turned without another word, and led the donkey onwards, gently drawing Cuthbert from the depths of the well. As she did so he gave a sudden shout of triumph, and springing over the side of the wall, flung at her feet a solid golden flagon richly chased, with the arms of the Trevlyns engraved upon it.

“I scarce dared to look at what I had got as I came up!” he cried, as he sprang high into the air in the exuberance of his spirit; “but that will lay all doubt at rest. The lost treasure of Trevlyn is lost no longer, and Cuthbert and Petronella have found it!”

Chapter 18: “Saucy Kate.”

“Wife, what ails the child?”

Lady Frances Trevlyn raised her calm eyes from her embroidery, and gave one swift glance around the room, as if to make sure that she and her husband were alone.

“Dost thou speak of Kate?” she asked then in a low voice.

“Ay, marry I do,” answered Sir Richard, as he took the seat beside the glowing hearth, near to his wife’s chair, which was his regular place when he was within doors. “I scarce know the child again in some of her moods. She was always wayward and capricious, but as gay and happy as the day was long—as full of sunshine as a May morning. Whence come, then, all these vapours and reveries and bursts of causeless weeping? I have found her in tears more oft these last three months than in all the years of her life before; and though she strives to efface the impression by wild outbreaks of mirth, such as we used of old to know, there is something hollow and forced about these merry moods, and the laugh will die away the moment she is alone, and a look will creep upon her face that I like not to see.”

“Thou hast watched her something closely, Richard.”

“Ay, truly I have. I would have watched any child of mine upon whom was passing so strange a change; but thou knowest that Kate has ever been dear to me—I have liked to watch her in her tricksy moods. She has been more full of affection for me than her graver sisters, and even her little whims and faults that we have had to check have but endeared her to me the more. The whimsies of the child have often brought solace to my graver cares. I love Kate right well, and like not to see this change in her. What dost thou think of it, goodwife?”

Lady Frances shook her head gravely.

“Methinks the child has something on her mind, and her sisters think so likewise, but what it is we none of us can guess. She keeps her secret well.”

“It is not like Kate to have a secret; it is still less like her to hide it.”

“That is what I feel. I have looked day by day and hour by hour for her to come to me or to thee to tell what is in her mind. But the weeks have sped by and her lips are still sealed, and, as thou sayest, she is losing her gay spirits, or else her gaiety is over wild, but doth not ring true; and there is a look in her eyes that never used to be there, and which I like not.”

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“I know the look well—one of wistful, unsatisfied longing. It goes to my heart to see it there. And hast thou noted that the bloom is paling in her cheeks, and that she will sit at home long hours, dreaming in the window seat or beside the hearth, when of old she was for ever scouring the woods, and coming home laden with flowers or ferns or berries? I like it not, nor do I understand it. And thou sayest her sisters know not the cause? I thought that young maidens always talked together of their secrets.”

“Kate doth not. I have talked with Cecilia anent the matter, and she knows not the cause. Bess has opined that this change first appeared when it was decided that we went not to London this year, as we had talked of doing earlier in the summer. Bess says she noted then how disappointed Kate appeared; and she is of opinion that she has never been the same since.”

Sir Richard stroked his beard with meditative gravity, and looked into the fire.

“It is true that the change has come upon her since that decision was made; and yet I find it something difficult to think that such was the cause. Kate never loved the life of the city, and was wild with delight when she first tasted the sweets of freedom in these woods and gardens. She loves her liberty right well, and has said a thousand times how glorious a thing it is to range at will as she does here. Capricious as the child has often shown herself, it is hard to believe that she is pining already for what she left with so glad a heart. It passes my understanding; I know not what to think.”

Lady Frances raised her eyes for a moment to her husband’s face, and then asked quietly:

“Hast thou ever thought whether some secret love may be the cause of all?”

The knight started and looked full at his wife.

“I have indeed thought some such thing, but I can scarce believe that such is the case with our Kate.”

“Yet it is often so when maidens change and grow pale and dreamy, and sit brooding and thinking when erst they laughed and played. Kate is double the woman she was six months gone by. She will sit patiently at her needle now, when once she would throw it aside after one short hour; and she will seek to learn all manner of things in the still room and pantry that she made light of a short while back, as matters of no interest or concern to her. She would make an excellent housewife if she had the mind, as I have always seen; and now she does appear to have the mind, save when her fits of gloom and sadness be upon her, and everything becomes a burden.”

Sir Richard looked aroused and interested. A smile stole over his face.

“Our saucy Kate in love, and that secretly! Marry, that is something strange; and yet I am not sorry at the thought, for I feared her fancy was something too much taken by her cousin Culverhouse; and since his father must look for a large dower for his son’s bride, our Kate could never have been acceptable to him. Nor do I like the marriage of cousins so close akin, albeit in these times men are saying that there be no ill in such unions.”

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Lady Frances shook her head gravely.

“I would sooner see daughter of mine wedded in a lowlier sphere. My heart shrinks from the thought of seeing any child of ours in the high places of this world. There be snares and pitfalls abounding there. We have seen enough to know so much. There be bitter strivings and envyings and hatreds amongst those of lofty degree. I would have my children wed with godly and proper men; but I would sooner give them to simple gentlemen of no high-sounding title, than to those whose duties in life will call them to places round about the throne, and will throw them amidst the turmoil of Court life.”

Sir Richard smiled at this unworldly way of looking at things; but the Trevlyns had suffered from being somewhat too well known at Court, and he understood the feeling.

“Truly we live in perilous times,” he said thoughtfully, “and obscurity is often the best security for happiness and well being. But to return to Kate. If she is truly forgetting her girlish fancy for her cousin, as I would gladly believe—and she has not set eyes on him this year and more—towards whom can her fancy be straying?”

“Thou dost not think she can be pining after her cousin?”

“Nay, surely not,” was the quick and decided answer. “Had she pined it would have been at the first, when they were separated from each other, and thou knowest how gay and happy she was then. It is but these past few months that we have seen the change. Depend upon it, there is some one else. Would that it might be good Sir Robert Fortescue, who has been here so much of late, and has paid much attention to our saucy Kate! Wife, what thinkest thou of that? He is an excellent good man, and would make a stanch and true husband. He is something old for the child, for sure; but there is no knowing how the errant fancy of maidenhood will stray.”

“I would it might be so,” answered Lady Frances. “Sir Robert is a good and a godly man, and I would gladly give our restless, capricious Kate to one who could be father and husband in one. But I confess the thought had not come to me, nor had I thought that he came hither to seek him a wife.”

Sir Richard smiled meaningly.

“Nor had I until of late; but I begin to think that is his object. He pays more heed to the girls than he did when first he came to visit us, and he has dropped a word here and a hint there, all pointing in one direction. And dost thou not note that our Kate is often brightest and best when he is by? I had never thought before that her girlish fancy might have been caught by his gray hair and soldier-like air; yet many stranger things have happened. Wife, dost thou think it can be?”

"I would it were; it would be well for all. I will watch and see, and do thou likewise. I had not thought the child's fancy thus taken; but if it were so, I should rejoice. He would be a good husband and a kind one, and our headstrong second daughter will need control as well as love in the battle of life."

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So the parents watched with anxious eyes, eager to see some indication which should encourage them in this newly-formulated hope. When once the idea had been started, it seemed to both as if nothing could be better than a marriage between their high-spirited but affectionate and warm-hearted daughter and this knight of forty summers, who had won for himself wealth and fame, and a soldier's reputation for unblemished honour and courage in many foreign lands. If not exactly the man to produce an immediate impression on the heart of a young girl, he might well win his way to favour in time; and certainly it did seem as though Kate took pleasure in listening to his stories of flood and field, whilst her bright eyes and merry saucy ways (for she was still her old bright self at times, and never more frequently so than in the company of Sir Robert) appeared very attractive to him.

When we are increasingly wishful for a certain turn in affairs, and begin sedulously to watch for it, unconsciously setting ourselves to work to aid and abet, and push matters on to the desired consummation, it is wonderful how easy it is to believe all is going as we wish, and to see in a thousand little trifling circumstances corroboration of our wishes. Before another fortnight had sped by, Kate's parents had almost fully persuaded themselves of the truth of their suspicion. They were convinced that the attachment between their child and their guest was advancing rapidly, and a day came when Sir Richard sought his wife with a very happy expression of countenance.

"Well, wife, the doubt will shortly be at an end. Sir Robert has spoken openly at last."

"Spoken of his love for our Kate?"

"Not in these words, but the meaning is the same. He has asked me if I am willing to entrust one of my daughters to his keeping."

"One of our daughters?" repeated Lady Frances. "And did he not name Kate? He cannot love them all."

"He spoke of Cecilia and Kate both," answered Sir Richard. "Sir Robert is not a hot-headed youth, full of the fire of a first passion. He wishes an alliance with our house, and he sees that Cecilia, with her four years' seniority, would perchance in the eyes of the world be the more suitable wife; and he admires her beauty, and thinks well of her dutifulness, her steadiness, and her many virtues. Yet it is Kate that takes his fancy most, and if he could hope to win the wayward fancy and the warm heart of our second child, she is the one whom he would fain choose as his own. He has spoken freely and frankly to me, and it comes to this: he would willingly marry Cecilia, and doubtless make her an excellent husband, and value the connection with the house of Trevlyn; but if he could succeed in winning the love of our saucy Kate, he would sooner have her than the more staid sister, only he fears his gray hairs and his wrinkles will unfit him as a suitor for the child. But we, who suspect her heart of turning towards him, have little

fear of this. Kate's sharp eyes have looked beneath the surface. She has shown that she has a wise head upon her shoulders. So I told Sir Robert—"

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“Not that the child had loved him unbidden, I trust, my husband? I would not have him think that!”

“Verily no, goodwife; but I told him there was no man living to whom I would more gladly give a daughter of mine; and that I would sound both of the maidens, and see how their hearts were set towards him. But I trow he went away happy, thinking he might win Kate after all. I could not but whisper a word of hope, and tell him how wondrous tame the wild bird had latterly become, and how that her mother had wondered whether thoughts of love had entered into her head.”

Lady Frances smiled, half shaking her head the while, yet not entirely displeased even with such an admission as that. She had been watching her daughter closely of late, and she had tried to think as she wished to think; the consequence being that she had reached a very decided conclusion in accordance with her desires, and had small doubts as to the state of her daughter’s heart.

“I verily believe the child’s sadness has come from the fear that her youth will stand as a bar to her happiness. She knows Sir Robert is old enough to be her father, and fears that his attentions are paid as to a child. Thus has she striven to grow more wise, more womanly, more fit to be the mistress of his house. Methinks I see it all. And what is the next thing to be done? Must we speak with the child?”

“Ay, verily; for I have promised an answer to Sir Robert before many days have passed. He is to come again at the week’s end, and his bride is to be presented to him. Thinkest thou that Cecilia will be grieved to find her younger sister preferred before her? Does she, too, think aught of Sir Robert?”

“I trow she likes him well, though whether she has thought of him as husband or lover I know not. She is more discreet than Kate, and can better hide her feelings. I doubt not were her hand asked she would give it gladly; but more than that I cannot say.”

“Then let us hope her heart has not been deeply touched, for I should be sorry to give her pain. But let us incontinently send for Kate hither at once to us. I shall rejoice to see the light of untroubled happiness shining once again in those bright eyes. I would fain see my saucy Kate her own self again ere she leaves us as a wedded wife.”

So Kate was summoned, and came before her parents with something of timidity in her aspect, looking furtively from one to the other, as if a question trembled on her lips that she did not dare to utter.

She had changed in many ways from the gay, laughing girl of a few months back. There were the same resolution and individuality in the expression of the face, and the delicate features had by no means lost all their old animation and bloom; but there was greater depth in the dark eyes, and more earnestness and gravity in the expression of

both eyes and mouth. There was added sweetness as well as added thoughtfulness; and mingling strangely with these newer expressions was one still stranger on the face of Kate—a look of shrinking, almost of fear, as though she were treading some dangerous path, where lurked hidden perils that might at any moment overwhelm her.

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The swift look of wistful questioning, the nervous movements of the slim hands, the parted lips and quickly coming breath, were not lost upon the parents, who were watching the advance of their daughter with no small interest and curiosity. But the smile upon both faces seemed to reassure the girl; and as her father held out his hand, she came and stood beside him willingly, looking from one to the other with fluttering breath and changing colour.

“You sent for me, my father?”

“Yes, Kate; we have somewhat to say to thee, thy mother and I. Canst guess what that something is?”

A vivid blush for a moment dyed her cheek and as quickly faded; but she did not speak, only shook her head.

Sir Richard gave his wife a quick smile, and took Kate’s hand in his.

“My child,” he said, with unwonted tenderness, “why hast thou been keeping a secret from thy mother and me?”

Kate started and drew her hand away, moving a pace farther off, and regarding her father with wide open, dilated eyes.

“A secret!” she faltered, and grew very pale.

Sir Richard smiled, and would have taken her hand once more, but that she glided from his reach, still watching him with an expression he found it hard to read. Her mother laid down her embroidery, and studied her face with a look of aroused uneasiness; but the father was utterly without suspicion of approaching any hidden peril, and continued in the same kindly tones.

“Nay, now, my girl, thou needest not fear!” he said. “All young maidens give their hearts away in time; and so as thou givest thine worthily, neither thy father nor thy mother will chide.”

Kate gave one or two gasps, and then spoke with impassioned earnestness.

“O father, I could not help it! I strove against it as long as I might. I feared it was a thing that must not be. But love was too strong. I could not fight for ever.”

“Tut—tut, child! why shouldest thou fight? Why didst thou not speak to thy mother? Girls may breathe a secret into a mother’s ear that is not to be spoke elsewhere. Thou shouldest have told her, child, and have spared thyself much weary misery.”

Kate’s head was hung very low; neither parent could see her face.

“I did not dare,” she answered softly; “I knew that I was wrong. I feared to speak.”

“Thou art a strange mixture of courage and fear, my saucy Kate. I would once have vowed that thou wouldst fear not to speak aloud every thought of thy heart. But love changes all, I ween, and makes sad cowards of the boldest of us. And so thou didst wait till he declared his love, and fretted out thy heart in silence the while?”

Kate lifted her head and looked at her father, a faint perplexity in her eyes.

“Nay, I ever knew he loved me. It was that I feared thy displeasure, my father. I had heard thee say—”

“Nothing against Sir Robert, I warrant me,” cried Sir Richard heartily; whilst Kate took one backward step and exclaimed:

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“Methought Sir Robert was Cecilia’s lover! Why speak you to me of him, my father?”

Sir Richard rose to his feet in great perplexity, looking at his wife, who was pale and agitated.

“Cecilia’s lover—what meanest thou, child?” he asked quickly. “I was speaking to thee of thine own lover. Sir Robert would fain wed with thee, and methought thou hadst already given him thy heart.”

“No—no—no!” cried Kate, shrinking yet further away. “I had no thoughts of him. O father, how couldst thou think it? He is a kind friend; but I have thought him Cecilia’s knight, and I trow she thinks of him thus herself.”

Lady Frances now spoke to her daughter for the first time, fixing her eyes upon her, and addressing her with composure, although visibly struggling against inward agitation.

“Listen to me, daughter Kate. Thou hast spoken words which, if they refer not to Sir Robert, as thy father and I believed, have need to be explained. Thou hast spoken of loving and of being beloved; what dost thou mean by that? Who is he that has dared—”

“O mother, thou knowest that; thou hast heard it a hundred times. It is Culverhouse, my cousin, who—”

But Sir Richard’s face had clouded suddenly over. He had set his heart on marrying Kate to his friend Sir Robert, who would, he believed, make her an excellent husband; and he had long ago given a half pledge to Lord Andover to thwart and oppose the youthful attachment which was showing itself between Kate and Culverhouse. The Earl wished a grand match for his son, and the Trevlyn pride was strong in Sir Richard, who would never have had a daughter of his wed where she was not welcome. He also disliked marriages between first cousins, and made of that a pretext for setting his face against the match, whilst remaining on perfectly friendly terms with the Viscount and all his family. He had hoped and quite made up his mind that that boy-and-girl fancy had been laid at rest for ever, and was not a little annoyed at hearing the name of her cousin fall so glibly from Kate’s lips.

“Silence, foolish girl!” he said sternly. “Hast thou not been told a hundred times to think no more of him? How dost thou dare to answer thy mother thus? Culverhouse! thou knewest well that he is no match for thee. It is wanton folly to let thy wayward fancy dwell still on him. Methought thou hadst been cured of that childish liking long since. But if it has not been so, thou shalt soon be cured now!”

Kate shrank back, for her father had seldom looked so stern, and there was an inflexibility about his aspect that was decidedly formidable. No one knew better than his favourite daughter that when once the limit of his forbearance was reached, there was

no hope of any further yielding, and that he could be hard as flint or adamant; so it was with a look of terror in her eyes that she shrank yet further away as she asked:

“What dost thou mean, my father? what dost thou mean?”

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“I mean, Kate,” answered Sir Richard, not unkindly, but so resolutely that his words fell upon her ear like a knell, “that the best and safest plan of curing thee of thy fond and foolish fancy, which can never come to good, is to wed thee with a man who will make thee a kind and loving husband, and will maintain thee in the state to which thou hast been born. Wherefore, prepare to wed with Sir Robert Fortescue without delay, for to him I will give thy hand in wedlock so soon as we can have thee ready to be his bride.”

Kate stood for a moment as if transfixed and turned to stone, and then she suddenly sank upon her knees at her father’s feet.

“Father,” she said, in a strange, choked voice, that indicated an intense emotion and agitation, “thou canst not make me the wife of another; for methinks I am well nigh, if not altogether, the wife of my cousin Culverhouse.”

“What?” almost shouted Sir Richard, making one step forward and seizing his daughter by the arm. “Wretched girl, what is this that thou sayest? The wife of thy cousin Culverhouse! Shame upon thee for so base a falsehood! How dost thou dare to frame thy lips to it?”

“It is no falsehood!” answered Kate, with flashing eyes, springing to her feet and confronting her parents with all her old courage, and with a touch of defiance. “I would have kneeled to ask your pardon for my rashness, for my disobedience, for the long concealment; but I am no liar, I speak but the truth. Listen, and I will tell all. It was on May Day, and I rode forth into the forest and distanced pursuit, and joined my cousin Culverhouse, as we had vowed to do. We thought then of naught but the joy of a day together in the forest, and had not dreamed of such a matter as wedlock. But then to the church porch came one calling himself a priest. They say he comes every year, and weds all who will come to him. And many did. And Culverhouse and I stood before him, and he joined our hands, and we made our vows, and he pronounced us man and wife before all assembled there. And whether it be binding wedlock or no, it is to us a solemn betrothal made before God and man; and not all the commands thou couldst lay upon me, my father, could make me stand up and vow myself to another as I have vowed myself to Culverhouse. I should hold myself forsworn; I should be guilty of the vilest crime in the world. Thou wilt not ask it of me. Thou canst not know, even as I do not know, whether that wedlock is not valid before man, as it is before God.”

A thunderbolt falling between them could scarcely have produced more astonishment and dismay. Lady Frances sank back in her seat white with horror and bewilderment, whilst Sir Richard stood as if turned to stone; and when at last he was able to speak, it was to order Kate to her room in accents of the sternest anger, bidding her not to dare to leave it until he brought her forth himself.

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Kate fled away gladly enough, her mind rent in twain betwixt remorse at her own disobedience and deceit, triumph in having stopped Sir Robert's suit by so immovable an obstacle, and relief that the truth was out at last, even though her own dire disgrace was the result. The secret had preyed terribly on her mind of late, and had been undermining her health and spirits. Terrible as the anger of her parents might be, anything to her open nature seemed better than concealment; and she dashed up to her own room in a whirl of conflicting emotions, sinking down upon the floor when she reached it to try to get into order her chaotic thoughts.

Meantime husband and wife, left alone to their astonishment, stood gazing at each other in blank amaze.

"Husband," said Lady Frances at last, "surely such wedlock is not lawful?"

"I cannot tell," he answered gloomily; "belike it is not. Yet a troth plight made in so solemn a fashion, and before so many witnesses, is no light thing; and the child may not be wedded to another whilst the smallest shadow of doubt remains. Doubtless Culverhouse foresaw this, the bold knave, and persuaded the child into it. Well it has served his purpose. Sir Robert must be content with Cecilia. But the artfulness of the little jade! I never thought Kate would so deceive us—"

"It is that that breaks my heart!" cried the mother—"that, and the thought that she should be willing to go before some Popish priest and take her vows to him. Oh, it cannot be binding on the child—it cannot be binding! And Sir Robert is stanch in the Reformed faith; he is just the husband that wild girl needs. Husband, can nothing be done?"

Sir Richard looked very grave.

"That would be hard to tell without strict inquiries. I doubt me if we could learn all before next May Day, when we might get hold of the man himself and find out who and what he is. Such wedlock as his cannot be without flaw, and might be made invalid by law; but, wife, there is no getting over this, that the child took her vows in the name of God, and I dare not act as though such vows were unspoken. Her youth and ignorance may plead in part for her. She scarce knew the solemnity of the step she was taking. Culverhouse won upon her and over persuaded her, I do not doubt. I do not seek to excuse her. I am grievously displeased and disappointed. But I cannot and I will not give her to Sir Robert; Cecilia must be his wife."

"Then Kate must be sent away," said Lady Frances, gravely and severely; "I cannot and will not have her here, mixing as before with her sisters with this cloud hanging upon her, with this secret still shadowing her life. She has proved unworthy of our confidence. I am more pained and displeased than I can say. She must go. She must not be able to tell Cecilia that she might have been Lady Fortescue but for her marriage with Culverhouse. She is no longer to be trusted. She must go forth from home as a

punishment for her wrongdoing. I feel that I cannot bear to see her about the house, knowing how she has deceived us. She shall go forth this very day."

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Sir Richard stood considering. He too was deeply displeased with his daughter, though he had some sympathy with the ardent and impulsive lovers, who had got themselves into a queer plight, and had thrown much perplexity upon others. But he decidedly agreed with his wife that it would be better for Kate to go—and to go in disgrace, that she might feel herself punished by being severed from her sisters when the first wedding of the family was taking place (save her own woodland nuptials). And it would doubtless save some natural embarrassment to Sir Robert himself to have one of the sisters out of the way before he formally espoused the other; though, to be sure, such a proposition as his had been was a common enough thing in those days.

“It would be good to send her away; but whither can she go?”

“Where better than to Lady Humbert and Mistress Dowsabel, who have ofttimes asked us to send a daughter to enliven their dull solitude? We have ever excused them on account of their youth and high spirits, fearing they would be moped to death in that dismal place; but it will be the very house for our wayward Kate to go to repent of her ill deeds. If you will write a letter to them, we will send it forthwith by a mounted messenger, and the answer will be back before dark. If she is to go, she can start with the first light of tomorrow morning, and we can get her mails packed ready tonight; for she must not disgrace her state, but must be furnished with all things fitting to her condition.”

Sir Richard thought that no other plan better than this could be devised for his erring daughter; and though he could not but feel some compassion for the girl, condemned to be the companion of a pair of aged and feeble gentlewomen such as his aunts had long been, was nevertheless of opinion that the captivity and dullness would be salutary, and despatched his letter without delay.

That same night Kate, who had passed the long hours in weeping and rejoicing, and in all those conflicting phases of feeling common to the young, heard with a mixture of’ pleasure and dismay that she was to be sent in disgrace to the keeping of her great aunts, and that without delay; also that she was not even to say goodbye to her sisters, or to see them again until something had been decided as to her future and the validity of her wilful espousals. She was made to feel that she had committed a terrible sin, and one that her parents would find it hard to forgive; yet she could not help exulting slightly in the thought that they had been obliged to take the matter so seriously; and she had a dim hope that her aged relatives, when she did come to them, might not prove altogether so crabbed and cross as she had always been led to suppose. Perhaps she might find a warm corner even in their old hearts.

Chapter 19: The Cross Way House.

With the first light of day the start was to be made. Kate, who had slept little, was ready betimes, had dressed herself in her riding suit long before she was sent for, and was employing herself in wondering if she would after all be permitted to say farewell to her sisters, and whether she should have an opportunity of asking her mother's pardon for her wrongdoing in this matter of her secret espousals.

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The girl had suffered a good deal during these past months. She had not realized when yielding to Culverhouse's persuasions how hard it would be to live beneath her parents' roof with this secret preying on her mind. She had not realized what a weight it would become in time, and she had looked for a speedy meeting with her cousin and betrothed in London, whither Sir Richard had intended taking his family for a while before the autumn set in. Kate had looked forward then to making her confession to her parents and his, and winning pardon for them both, as she felt sure of doing when she had his support in the telling of the tale. But the change of her father's plans, and the absence from England of Lord Culverhouse, who had been sent on a mission to France by his father, put an end to all these hopes, and she had felt the burden of her secret heavy indeed. Moreover, she was fearful lest Culverhouse should in some sort repent him of the step he had taken and wish it undone. Kate had but a small share of vanity, and only a very modest appreciation of her own attractions, and it seemed to her as though her cousin, moving as he did in the gay world of fashion, must surely see many other maidens tenfold more beautiful and graceful. Suppose he were to repent of his secret betrothal; suppose his troth plight weighed heavy on his spirit? what misery that would be for both! And during these long months of silence such thoughts and fears had preyed upon the girl's spirit, and had produced in her the change that both her parents had observed.

Wherefore now that the confession had been made, and the burdensome secret was a secret no longer, a reaction set in that was almost like relief. She felt certain, since all was known, that Culverhouse would come forward and stand boldly beside her and lay claim to her hand before the world as he had talked of doing when he had led her to the troth plight on that May Day that seemed so long ago now.

Even the thought of the journey and the visit to her father's great aunts was not altogether distasteful. She was more afraid of meeting her mother's sorrowful glances than stern ones from strangers. Kate had no lack of courage, and the love of variety and change was implanted in her as strongly as it is in most young things; so that when Philip knocked at her door as the first rays of the October sun were gilding the trees and fields, it was with a smiling face that she opened to him, whilst he looked at her with something of smiling surprise in his glance.

"Art ready, my sister? the horses will be at the door in a few short minutes. I am glad to see thee so bright and happy. I had feared to discover thee bathed in tears of woe."

"Perchance I ought to be heavier hearted than I am," answered Kate, with a swift glance at Philip through her long lashes. "I do repent me that I have angered our father and mother. I know that I have been wrong to keep the secret; perchance I was wrong to let Culverhouse persuade me. But that the thing is done I cannot truly repent; the only thing which would make me wish that vow unsaid would be if Culverhouse were to wish to be free of his troth plight."

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“Which I trow he never will be,” answered Philip warmly, as he laid his hand on Kate’s shoulder.

Those two were very near akin in spirit and in sympathy. Kate knew all his love for Petronella, and his anxiety for her since her flight (though he fully believed her to be in hiding with Cuthbert in the forest, albeit he had not been able to discover them), and he had strong fellow feeling with the impulsive lovers.

“He has never loved any but thee, my sister, since the days we played together as children. Save that concealment ever leads to trouble, and that wedlock vows are too sacred to be made playthings of, I could find it in my heart to wish that Petronella and I were wed in like fashion. But our mother is sorely grieved at what thou hast done—-going before a tonsured priest, with none of thine own kindred by, to take vows which should have had the sanction of thy parents before they passed thy lips, and should have been made in different fashion and in a different place. Howbeit no doubt time will soften her anger, and she will grow reconciled to the thought. When we have made all inquiries anent this priest and his ways, my father and I will to London to speak with Lord Andover of this business. I trust all will end well for thee, sister. But thou must learn in thy captivity to be a patient and discreet maiden, that they do not fear to give thee to Culverhouse at last, since it must needs be so.”

Kate looked up gratefully, comforted by the kind tone of her brother’s words.

“In very sooth I will try, Philip. I thank thee for thy good counsel. I will be patient and discreet towards my great aunts. I will strive to show them all due reverence, that they may satisfy my mother when she makes inquiry of them.”

Kate long remembered the ride with her father and brother through the forest and across the heath that day. Her father was stern and grave, and scarcely addressed a single word to her. Philip and she talked a little, but were affected by this silence of displeasure, and observed a befitting decorum and quietness. Sir Richard made his daughter take him to the spot of her troth plight, and show him exactly how and where it had taken place. As they stopped to bait the horses at the little hostelry, he made various inquiries concerning the priest and his annual visitation to the wake on May Day, and his face looked none the less severe as he heard the replies.

“Methinks the knot hath been something tightly tied—too tight for it to be easily unloosed,” whispered Philip to his sister as he lifted her to the saddle after the noontide halt; and she could not but answer by a bright smile, which she saw reflected in his face.

The day, which had been bright and fine, turned dull and lowering as the riders neared the Cross Way House, as the residence of Lady Humbert was called; and Kate looked

curiously at the house as they approached it, wondering what sort of a life its inmates led.

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To her eyes, accustomed to the seclusion of park and grounds, the most striking feature of this house was that it stood actually upon the road itself. It occupied an angle of the cross formed by the junction of four roads, and its north and east windows looked out straight upon these two highways, with nothing intervening between them but some twenty feet of paved walk enclosed behind walls ten feet high, and guarded by strong gates of wrought iron.

Doubtless to the south and west there were gardens and grounds. The walls seemed to run a long way along the road, and Kate felt certain that she should find seclusion and privacy there. She could see tall trees rearing their heads above the wall, and was certain from the aspect of the house, which was sufficiently imposing, that she should find within the ease and luxury to which she was accustomed.

On the whole, she rather liked the prospect of looking out upon the roads. If Culverhouse were to ride by, she could signal to him from the windows. She could watch the fine folk passing to and fro on their way to London. Possibly a belated traveller might ask shelter at the house, and amuse them with tales of adventure and peril. Kate had time to think of many things as their horses stood at the gates awaiting admittance; and when these were thrown back at last, and they rode through an archway and into a centre courtyard round which the house was built, the girl was delighted with everything; for the quadrangular structure was a novelty to her, and a novelty which took her fancy not a little. There were servants to look after the horses; and it was plain the travellers were expected, for they were quickly ushered into the house by one of the great doors which opened on a wide flight of steps leading down into the court, and were there met by an aged majordomo, who greeted them with ceremonious solemnity.

“My lady is looking for you, sir,” he said to Sir Richard; and turning to Kate, he added, in the same mechanical fashion, “Your maid will show you to your room, madam. My lady will see you after you have recovered from the fatigues of the journey.”

Kate was not in the least fatigued, but she was too well brought up to remonstrate in any way. The maid was hovering in the background; an elderly woman with a capable face and slightly repellent manner. It was plain to Kate that her relatives would not receive her till they had learned more of the details of her banishment from home from her father, and had made up their minds how to treat her. She felt that even the serving woman regarded her somewhat in the light of a culprit, and it was with a mind divided betwixt amusement and girlish shame that she followed the attendant into the bed chamber that had been prepared for her.

This was a more sumptuous apartment than her room at home, and looked comfortable enough in the glow of the great fire of logs. The hangings of the bed were dark and heavy, and the carved oak furniture was also sombre in its polished blackness; but there was a thick square carpet on the floor, which was a luxury Kate had never possessed in

her bed chamber before, and the mirrors and silver sconces for the candles all bespoke an ease and luxury that reminded Kate of what life would be like when she lived as a Countess or Viscountess in her own house, with Lord Culverhouse as lord and master.

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“This is your room,” said the woman. “Your mails arrived earlier in the day, and your things have been put away in the cupboard there and in the bureau yonder. My lady gave orders you were to be served with something to eat and drink in your own room, and that she would visit you later. There is another young lady visiting in the house; she will come and see you if you will permit her.”

“Very willingly,” answered Kate, who was always ready for company, and very curious to know something about these great aunts of hers, whom she had never seen as yet. “I shall be glad of food, as I liked not what they served us with at the inn in the forest. As for the young lady, albeit I know not who she can be, I should gladly welcome her. I have no love for too much of my own company; wherefore the sooner she comes the better shall I be pleased.”

The woman withdrew, and Kate removed her hat and gloves, and looked about her with quick, searching glances.

“A good room in sooth, and no bad prison, if prisoner I am to be. And since I may have company, I can scarce be in such dire disgrace as that. I wonder who this visitor may be? Some Wyvern, belike; but doubtless we shall learn to take pleasure in each other.

“Soft! are those steps without? Yes; and some one knocks at the door.

“Enter, enter, I pray. I am right glad—What! do my eyes deceive me? Sure I am in some strange dream! Petronella! Surely it cannot be Petronella! The features are the same; but the Petronella I once knew was wan and frail as a fair wood lily, and thou—-nay, but it cannot be!”

“But it is—it is!” cried the girl, making a bound forward and flinging her arms round Kate’s neck in an ecstasy of happiness; “and, O Kate, I have seen him again! I saw him ride to the door by thy side! Perchance I shall even have words with him ere he journey forth again! Ah, how rejoiced was I when I heard that thou wert coming! O Kate, I have such news for thee—such news, such news!”

The two girls were folded in each other’s arms. Between every few words they paused to kiss and laugh in the very exuberance of their happiness. It seemed like a dream to Kate; she could scarce believe her eyes.

“Petronella—but how earnest thou here?”

“I came when the weather grew so inclement that Cuthbert would no longer let me share his forest life. He brought me to this house, and our aunts, when they heard our story, opened their doors to me; and I have been here three whole weeks—ever since the summer’s heats broke in storms of rain. But here I go by the name of Ellen Wyvern, lest haply it should come to my father’s ears that I am here, and he should fetch me

away. But I have almost ceased to quake at that thought; I have had my freedom so long."

"I scarce know thee, thou art so changed—so full of sunshine and courage," cried Kate. "Erstwhile thou wert like a creature of moonlight and vapour; a breath seemed as though it would blow thee away. What has befallen to change thee so? What hast thou been doing all this while? And where is Cuthbert?"

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“Cuthbert is yet in the forest,” answered Petronella, sinking her voice to the merest whisper, as if afraid that even the walls would have ears. “His task is not yet finished. It is one that takes great skill and patience and watchfulness. But it is being accomplished by slow and sure degrees. Ah, Kate! what news thinkest thou that I have for thee? The time has not yet come when the world may know all; but I trow that thou mayest know, for thou hast ever been with us in the secret of the quest.”

Kate’s face flushed and paled; her heart beat fast with hope and wonder. She well knew what difference to her future would be made by the restoration to the house of Trevlyn of that lost treasure. She could scarce frame the words she longed to speak, but her eyes asked the question for her; and Petronella, putting her lips close to her cousin’s ear, whispered the wondrous news that the lost treasure was found.

“Found—really found!” and Kate gave a great gasp. “Nay, but, Petronella, tell me how.”

Petronella laid a warning hand upon Kate’s lips.

“Nay, cousin, but thou must call me Ellen here. And we must wait till the household be at rest, and we share the same bed, ere I dare to pour into thine ears all the tale. And thou must promise to breathe no word of it, bad nor good, till the moment has come for the world to know. It will not be long now, I trow; but we are pledged, and were it not that I know well thou art stanch and true, I dared not have shared the joyful secret with thee.”

“It is safe with me,” cried Kate; “I will never betray it. O Ellen, how I long to hear the whole! But since that may not be now, tell me more of these great aunts of ours. What treatment am I to look for beneath their roof? Am I to be received as kinswoman or as prisoner? for marry I know not myself.”

Petronella’s face kindled into smiles, those bright happy smiles that gave it a charm never seen in past days. She bent an arch glance upon her cousin, and then made reply.

“The Lady Humbert is a fine stately dame, before whom my heart quailed mightily when first I stood before her. Her voice is sharp; her eyes look you through and through; her frown sets you quaking, and makes you wish the earth would swallow you up. But for all that, when once you get to know her, you find that a warm heart beats beneath her stiff bodice, and that though she will speak sharply to you before your face, she will do you many a kind act of which you know little or nothing. Mistress Dowsabel is younger, smaller, less fearsome to the eye; indeed she is timorous and often full of fears herself. She too is kind, though I truly think that Lady Humbert has the larger heart. They love each other well, and are willing to befriend all who have claims of kindred. For the rest, they live much secluded from the world, and think that the times are sadly changed for the worse since the days when they were young.”

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“And what think they of me?” asked Kate, with natural girlish self consciousness.

Petronella repeated her arch glance.

“To me they say that thou art a wilful maid who needest watching and stern guarding. They shake their heads at such loose marriage, and tell me to take warning and not fall into like folly and sin through overmuch love of my own way. But I heard them talking together of thee when they forgot that I was by; and then there was something different in their words, and I could scarce forbear to smile.”

“What said they then?” asked Kate eagerly.

“My Lady Humbert, she said that Lord Andover was a good man and stanch, and that all spoke well of his son. They added that if thou wouldst one day be Countess of Andover, they would gladly think that thou wouldst worthily fill that place. Aunt Dowsabel asked if thou hadst made a good beginning in this hasty marriage or troth plight of thine; whereat Lady Humbert gave a laugh, and said she was glad that thou hadst had the spirit of thy ancestors in thee, and that for her part, if you were both true and stanch in your love, she saw small harm in letting love have the mastery over prudence. And then it turned out, as I learned from their talk, that she herself had run away to be married when she was a girl, and that she had never for one hour repented the act. So she plainly felt that thou wast her own kinswoman in all faith; and although she may speak to thee with stern rebuke, thou mayest know in thy heart that she thinks kindly of thee, and that she will stand thy friend with thy father, and make the peace with thy mother if she may.”

Kate’s face flushed happily.

“Nay, now, that is good hearing! Why did we not know these good aunts before? I can go before them with a light heart now. I repent me of nothing save that I displeased my parents, and hid the matter from them all this while. I trow I shall never repent that I let Culverhouse persuade me to plight my troth to him.”

Kate was glad of the assurance Petronella’s words had given her when she was presently summoned before her relatives, and stood in the dim panelled room before their straight-backed chairs, feeling the stern eyes of Lady Humbert fixed full upon her, whilst she heard that her father and brother had already left, since it was only pain and grief to them to be beneath the same roof as their obdurate and disobedient daughter and sister.

Kate received the lecture addressed her by the mistress of the house with all becoming humility, and without that sinking of heart that she might otherwise have felt at the cold stern tone; and she gladly passed her word, when desired to do so, not to go beyond the precincts of the great walled garden without special permission. In her walks and rides abroad she was always to be attended, and was to promise never to slip away

from her escort. If she would faithfully promise this, she might be allowed the companionship of Ellen Wyvern, now a guest beneath the roof of Cross Way House; and to give this promise cost Kate no pang, for she had no feverish desire after unfettered liberty, but was content to await the time she knew must shortly come now, when Culverhouse would come to claim her for his own, and would find her no longer the portionless maiden she once had been, but dowered with some of the rich spoil from that long-lost hoard.

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Supper was served in solemn state in the dining parlour, and the two girls sat with their aged relatives to partake of it. Petronella was a little sad that Philip had gone without even knowing of her presence beneath that roof: but she was certain their meeting would not be much longer delayed, and was content to wait. The Wyvern sisters did not keep a great establishment, as their means were not large, though they clung to the old house which had come down to them, and would have sacrificed much rather than sell it. But Kate soon discovered that the largest rooms were shut up and partially dismantled in order that comfort should reign in those parts of the house that were habitually used; that the staff of servants was but small; and that of these nearly all were old men and women who had grown gray and enfeebled in the service of the family, and were kept on by the present mistresses, who themselves disliked any changes in their establishment, and who could hardly see their way to finding the wages that able-bodied servants would look to receive. So they lived in this very quiet fashion, surrounded by retainers almost as aged as themselves, and led on the whole a happy and a placid life. Petronella was proving of so much use that the burden of her maintenance was not felt, and Sir Richard Trevlyn made generous arrangements for the cost of his daughter. But there was something altogether quaint and curious in the life of the house, and Kate thought it exceedingly interesting even before the first evening had passed.

Yet all the while she was longing to hear Petronella's tale, and was glad when the tapestry work was put away, and formal good nights had been exchanged. The girls ran up to the guest chamber prepared for Kate, which they had agreed to share together from that time forth. It did not take them long to slip into bed; and old Dyson, the waiting woman, who also acted as housekeeper, came quickly in to see that the lights were safely extinguished, after which only the glow of the fire illuminated the darkness of the big room; and Kate in an eager whisper begged Petronella to lose no time in telling her tale.

With breathless eagerness she heard of the girl's flight from home, and of her rescue of Cuthbert from the very jaws of death. She could not understand Petronella's shuddering horror at the thought of having killed a man.

"I would have killed fifty, and been glad to rid the earth of them were they such wretches as Long Robin!" she cried.

Then in deep silence she heard of Cuthbert's dive into the well, and of the golden flagon he had brought up as an earnest of what was to come. Petronella went on to say that, having made absolutely sure of the presence of the treasure in the well, Cuthbert had then directed all his energies to detecting the sources of the hidden springs that fed it, and after long search and patience had satisfied himself that it was filled by two, both rising in the high ground not far distant.

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He had then set to work to see how these waters could be diverted so as to leave the well dry at his will; and though it had taken months to perform this feat, and had only been done at the cost of immense labour and trouble, still it had been done, and one day in early September the brother and sister had stood together to see the water ebbing slowly and more slowly away, until at last their eyes beheld a vast quantity of silver and gold lying exposed at the bottom of the well, and knew that the lost treasure of Trevlyn was theirs indeed.

But their labours were not yet ended. It was plain to both that they must quickly find some safe spot whither they could transport it all, else some passing traveller might even now see and report what he had seen, and so rob them of the fruit of their toil.

Afraid to go to Trevlyn Chase for help, lest the news should in some way leak out to Nicholas at the Gate House, and also because the brother and sister had set their hearts on accomplishing the task entirely alone, it suddenly entered Cuthbert's head to take his sister to the Cross Way House, and ask of its owners protection for her through the approaching inclement season; and then, if satisfied that these Wyvern kinswomen were to be trusted, and were friendly of disposition towards them, to whisper the secret of the treasure trove in their ears, and ask leave to deposit it all within the great strongroom underground, that the Wyvern house had always boasted, and of which the secret was known to very few.

This was the plan that had been carried out. His reception by Lady Humbert, and her kindness to the lonely Petronella when her pitiful story was told, quite decided Cuthbert to confide the golden secret to her. She listened in amaze, but was highly pleased at being the first person to know it. She laid her hand on Cuthbert's head, and spoke to him of the old saw which predicted that fortune should return to the Wyverns through the daughters' sons, and declared that he was fulfilling the prophecy she had longed to live to see come true. Cuthbert trusted that such indeed would be the case, but did not know whether the Wyverns had any lot or share in the treasure trove. Whereat the old lady smiled, and said that she laid no claim to the gold—it was none of theirs, and never would be; but still, with her hand on Cuthbert's head, she declared that after herself and her sister he should reign at the Cross Way House, and that his share of the treasure, which in all sooth should be a large one, since but for him it might never have been found, would go to restore the fallen fortunes of the house, and to fulfil in very truth the fondly-cherished prediction.

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Cuthbert's amazement had naturally been great; but this fair prospect held out to him had but given greater zest to his enterprise. Not to a single soul in the house would Lady Humbert confide the secret, lest amongst themselves the faithful old servants should gossip, and rumour get abroad that the lonely house was worth attacking. In the dead of night, upon appointed dates, Cuthbert brought to a certain iron-barred window the laden ass bearing his costly burden, and Petronella and Lady Humbert themselves received the treasure and bore it piece by piece to the secret room. Not a creature slept on that side of the house—not a living being knew what was passing in the dead hours of the night; and in this fashion the treasure was being brought, Cuthbert descending the well, into which a little water had now filtered—enough to conceal the treasure from a passing observer if such there should chance to be—and with the assistance of their four-footed friend, drawing up as much as the patient beast could carry, and transporting it by night to this very house.

"When all is done," concluded Petronella—"and every load we think must surely be the last, there is so much of it—then he will forth to seek the gipsy in the forest, and tell her that the task is done. After that he will to London, to see how it fares with his cousins there, and to tell my uncle something of his tale, demanding, as I right well believe, the hand of our cousin Cherry in wedlock, since he may now support a wife in all comfort and ease. When that is done he will hither again, and Lady Humbert will ask to her house a gathering of kinsfolk for the Yuletide festival. And then the great secret will be told. The treasure will be divided between the Trevlyns assembled beneath this roof; and I trow, sweet Kate, that my Lord Culverhouse will contrive to be here, and that when the good news has been told to all, he will have small work in getting the parental blessing for those nuptials that will be celebrated anew with pomp and rejoicing, and will make thee in very truth, and without shadow of a doubt, the Viscountess Culverhouse."

Kate, laughing and quivering, clasped Petronella in her arms, as she cried between laughter and tears:

"And when that good hap befalls me, sweet Petronella, I will warrant that Philip will be in no wise behind in claiming his bride, and that thou as well as I shalt find that the recovered treasure of Trevlyn has smoothed our path to wedded happiness!"

Chapter 20: How It Fared With Cherry.

"Gramercy! what next, I wonder! Here's a pretty kettle of fish! I always did say that no good came of letters. I wish folks had more sense than to spend their time writing! I never get a letter but what it brings a peck of bother with it."

Mistress Susan Holt was the speaker. She held in her hand a piece of paper which she was eying with many a scornful sniff. It had been left at the bridge house by a courier

riding through to Westminster from the south country, and Martin Holt had called his sister down to his business parlour to open and read the missive.

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He now looked up from his books with a pardonable curiosity to say:

“Well, sister Susan, letters do not trouble thee oft. And what may be the news in this one? and from whom comes it?”

“From Prudence Dyson.”

“Prudence at the Cross Way House? And what says she? it is long since we had news of her.”

“So long that I had almost forgot where she was: and I marvel she should trouble us thus. Thy daughters are not serving wenches, Martin. What can Prudence be thinking of?”

Martin smiled slightly. It seemed to him that beneath his sister’s iron rule his daughters did little but toil after the fashion of serving wenches from morning to night. As for Susan herself, she worked harder than any servant she had ever had beneath her sway.

“What says the letter?” he asked briefly; “what is the matter that angers thee?”

“I am not angry,” answered Susan sharply. “I trust I know my duty better as a Christian than to be angered over trifles. I am but surprised at such a request. Prudence Dyson asks if I can spare one of my nieces and thy daughters to dwell for a while at Cross Way House, to help her with her duties there.”

Martin Holt did not appear to see anything very unreasonable or extraordinary in that request.

“What has caused her to wish it?” he asked quietly. “Is she in any way ill or disabled?”

“It is not that; it is that there be two young ladies of gentle birth dwelling now beneath Lady Humbert’s care. Prudence desires to give them all due tendance and service; but as thou knowest, Martin, the household purse there is not deep, and Prudence strives might and main to do all she can to save her kind mistress from needless cost. She is striving now to attend herself upon all four ladies; and she says that the young maidens are very kindly and gentle and helpful. But she likes not to see them wait upon themselves, and she knows that my Lady Humbert would wish them to have all needful service. Wherefore she asks if thou couldst spare a daughter to go thither for a while to help her by waiting on the young damsels. And I—”

“Well, and wherefore not?” said Martin, stroking his chin thoughtfully. “Prudence is a good woman, and my dead wife loved her best of all her family. I know that Lady Humbert is a woman into whose house any father might trust his daughter without a fear. As for the question of serving wenches, I trow the wench who goes will have an

easier time than the sisters who abide at home. Susan, I think it only right to help Prudence in this matter; I can see no reason against so doing."

Susan seldom opposed the master of the house, but she looked a little sour and displeased.

"We shall have Christmas upon us right soon; we can ill spare any hands then," she said.

"O—ho! So it is the thought of thine own pies and stuffed meats that weighs with thee!" said Martin with a laugh. "Then I will tell thee what I will do. I will send Cherry, whom thou art ever chiding for being useless to thee. She shall go to wait upon the two young madams and help good Prudence at the Cross Way House, and thou shalt keep thy two useful nieces at home with thee."

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Susan's brow cleared somewhat, but she made a movement of her bony shoulders indicative of scorn.

"Cherry may go with all my heart, for she is idler and more useless than ever, and does naught from morning to night but sit at the window, watching the folks in the street, and turning from red to pale and pale to red as though she were a bride looking for the arrival of her bridegroom. I have no patience with such ways. I knew no good would come of always spoiling the child. I can do naught with her now; she heeds not a word I say. Ofttimes she does not even know that I am speaking to her. She may go, and welcome! but I misdoubt me that Prudence will thank thee for the loan. Much good and much service she will get out of Keren Happuch!"

Martin Holt looked thoughtfully at his sister.

"That is partly why I am glad the child should go. I too have seen a change in her. Methinks she is feeling the long hot summer in the city. There be many that have told me that she is not looking as she should do. This idleness shows something of indisposition, I take it. Doubtless she will receive benefit from a change of air and occupation. She loves to be in the open air, and at the Cross Way House there will be gardens and pleasaunces and orchards where she may perchance be suffered to wander at will. Prudence will be kind to her, and I shall send her gladly."

Susan again made her peculiar gesture, as much as to say that she washed her hands of responsibility in the matter.

"She is thy daughter—do as thou wilt, Martin; but I warn thee that no good will come of it. Going amongst ladies will make her think herself a finer lady than ever: and now as it is she will scarce deign to soil her dainty hands with anything coarser than the making of light pastry. Thou wilt spoil her for a city man's wife; and I know not how Abraham Dyson will take it. Prudence is his sister, to be sure, and it is to do her a kindness; but Jacob wants a useful wife—and, as I understood, they were resolved not to delay the marriage beyond Christmas. Rachel has been six months wed, and the house wants a mistress who can move about and look to things."

Martin was looking very thoughtful. He did not reply for a while, and then he said slowly:

"Send the child to me, Susan; I will speak to her of this myself."

"Ay, thou hadst best do so, for I might as well speak to the walls as to Keren Happuch," said Mistress Susan as she went on her way up the stairs, by no means pleased at the easy fashion in which her brother took this matter.

Susan loved a grand fuss and talk and discussion over every trifle in the day's round, and this was more than a trifle. Her tongue was as active as her hands, and she would talk by the hour as she worked, until those about her grew weary of the very sound of her voice.

Martin Holt, who was fully alive to his sister's many virtues and valuable qualities, did find her something of a trial also, and it never struck him as at all inexplicable that the self willed and impetuous little Cherry should often be at loggerheads with her aunt.

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As she stole down the staircase and stood before him with a wondering, questioning look in her big eyes, he eyed her keenly, and could not but see that some of the bloom had faded from her cheeks, and that she had in some way changed during the past months.

“Cherry,” he said, taking her small hand in his and speaking in an unwontedly gentle way, “has thy aunt told thee wherefore I want thee?”

“No, father; she said that thou wouldst tell me.”

“And so I will; but tell me first if there is aught amiss with thee. I have missed thy laugh of late, and thou hast lost some of thy roses. Does aught ail thee, child?”

Sudden tears welled up in Cherry’s eyes; her lip began to tremble.

“I know not, I know not,” she answered, with a little sob. “It only seems sometimes as though I could not bear the life any longer; it is all so drear, so dull, so dead! one day like another—always the same. Sometimes I think the narrow house will stifle me! O father, chide me not; I have struggled against the feeling, but the life is killing me! I know not how to bear it—alone.”

The last word was almost a whisper, and escaped Martin’s ears. He was regarding his child with a thoughtful and perplexed countenance. He fancied that he was somewhat in the position of a mother hen who sees its foster brood of ducklings take to the water for the first time. He did not understand this outburst in the least. Cherry’s restless discontent was an enigma to him. But he saw that it was real, and that it was a source of trouble and suffering to herself; and he wisely resolved neither to rebuke nor condemn her, but simply to treat it as the symptom of a malady of the body which might be cured by a few months’ change and relaxation.

The child was half frightened at her own boldness, and stood trembling before him, Her aunt would have boxed her ears and sent her to bed for such a confession; but her father only looked at her as though he were trying to read her very soul, and Cherry instinctively dropped her eyes, as if fearful that another secret would be read there—a secret which she kept locked up closely in her breast, and would not for the world that any other should know.

“Cherry,” said Martin Holt, speaking slowly and quietly, “I know not what to think of thy words, save that thy disordered fancies come from a disordered health. Thou hast been looking less robust than I like to see thee; wherefore I think it well that thou shouldest have some change in thy life, and see if that will cure thee. Thy good aunt Prudence Dyson, a younger sister of thy mother, has sent to ask me if I will spare her one of my daughters to help wait upon some young madams staying with my Lady Humbert. Thou hast not been brought up to such duties, but thou hast quick hands and eyes, and, I

trust, a willing heart, and I have resolved to send thee. Thou wilt be in the country, and the change will doubtless be good for thee. I shall look

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to receive thee back restored to thine old self again. The Cross Way House stands south from this by some seventeen miles, and is not very far away from the forest of which Cuthbert used to talk, and Trevlyn Chase where his kinsfolk live. Thou mayest hear somewhat of him there, for methinks the ladies Wyvern are in some sort his kinsfolk, too. I marvel that all these months have gone by without a word or a sign from him. Thou canst ask if aught has been heard of him. I trust no mishap has befallen the lad. He promised us news of himself ere now."

Had the room been less dim and dark, Martin might have seen the sudden alternations of red and white in Cherry's cheek as these last words were spoken; but the twilight was drawing in apace, and she kept her face down bent. But her heart was beating fast with throbs of gladness as well as astonishment. The idea of being sent away from home to the house of strangers was something fearful, but the last clause had given her food for eager anticipation. Where would she not go for news of Cuthbert, for whom she was now pining, and pining all the more sadly because she might speak to none of her anxiety and trouble?

Cuthbert had said he should be some months away; but she had looked for him at Michaelmas, and now October was speeding along, and yet there was no sign. Cherry had all a London girl's terror of the forests and their perils. She remembered how he had spoken of danger when last he had ridden through, and how nearly the terrible old gipsy had fulfilled her vow of vengeance by wreaking it upon his head. Might she not have found him and have slain him when he lived hidden away in the forest? Might not his search for the lost treasure have led him into many deadly perils? If living and free, why had he not written or appeared to her by this time? Could it be—oh, could it be—-that he had forgotten her, and was keeping purposely away? Almost sooner would she believe him dead; but either fear filled her with dread and dismay.

And now a new throb of hope was in her heart. Once near the forest and what might she not hear or see? Might she not even find him herself? In her ignorance and inexperience anything seemed possible if only she might escape from the trammels of city life, and from the Argus eye of her aunt Susan.

"And am I to go and help my aunt Prudence, father?"

"Yes; I think it is but right and kind that thou shouldst do so. Thou art willing thyself?—-and wilt thou be docile and teachable?"

"I will strive in all things to please her."

"That is well. I shall trust thee to do credit to thy name."

“And when am I to go, father?”

“So soon as I can find escort for thee; and that methinks will not be long, since the house stands directly on the road betwixt London and Southampton. Thou hadst best look to thy clothes and such things as thou mayest need there; for I would not lose a chance of sending thee safely guarded. I shall to Abraham Dyson this very evening, to ask what business is doing by road with Southampton just now.”

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“And how long shall I be away, father?”

“Nay, child, that I know not. Prudence makes no mention of that. Haply, I take it, a matter of three months or so, since had the ladies been leaving shortly she would scarce have sent so urgently for thee. Thou wilt not be home for thy Christmas, I fear; but thou wilt be in a good and a godly house, with thine own aunt to watch over thee; and I trow that thou wilt so act and comport thyself as to bring credit and not disgrace upon the name thou bearest.”

“I will try, good father,” answered Cherry with great meekness; and her father kissed her and bid her begone, for that he was about to go forth and talk to Abraham Dyson on this matter.

Cherry went up to her room feeling bewildered, half frightened, and yet elated and pleased. Something had come to break at last the long monotony of the life which she felt was crushing the spirit out of her. She was going to a place where it seemed that she must surely have news of Cuthbert, and where, if she did not pass him on the road, she would certainly be nearer to him.

Her sisters, greatly astonished, could scarcely believe their ears when told that Cherry was really going away; and Keziah hung over her with wistful eyes, assisting her to get her clothes ready, and wondering what the house would seem like without its rebellious and most attractive member.

“Methinks it will be duller than ever,” she said. “Jacob will scarce care to come if thou art gone.”

“Jacob! why, I trow he will but come the more,” answered Cherry, with a saucy gleam in her eye as she looked in Kezzie’s grave face. “He will come to thee for comfort, my sister, and I trow that thou wilt give it him in full measure.”

Keziah’s grave face lighted up somewhat.

“Thinkest thou that? Indeed I would gladly try. Jacob is a good lad and a kind one. I marvel thou dost not treat him better, Cherry.”

“I like Jacob; he is very good. We are great friends,” answered Cherry hastily, “but—”

There she broke off and busied herself over her trunk, saying as she leaned so far into it that her face could not be seen, “Kezzie, if Cuthbert should come back, thou wilt tell him where I have gone. Tell him I am with his kinsfolk, and ask him if he goes that way to pay a visit to them.”

“I will,” answered Keziah, who had her own ideas about Cuthbert’s sudden and entire disappearance; “but I fear me we shall see Cuthbert no more. He—”

“Why sayest thou so? What dost thou know? What dost thou mean, Keziah? Hast thou heard aught of him?”

“Bless the child—no—” answered Keziah hastily “How should I know aught of him? But, Cherry, my sweet sister, be not angry with me if I say it. Cuthbert is a Trevlyn, for all that our aunt was his mother. He is of rank above ours. He may have made friends in his own walk in life. He may repent him of the friendships he made at the bridge house. Be not wroth with me for saying it, but men before him have gone forth and returned not to those who looked for them. But if he comes I will tell him—I will tell him all. Only do not too greatly count upon it. I grieve so lest thou shouldest be disappointed.”

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Cherry said nothing. She would not even by a word seem to doubt Cuthbert's fidelity. Keziah, if she did not know how matters stood betwixt them, knew enough to have a very shrewd suspicion of it. She had been in some sort Cherry's confidante. Both the sisters had some knowledge of each other's secret.

The next evening, just before it grew dark, as Cherry was sitting alone in the upper parlour, exempt from household toil that she might get her own wardrobe ready, and now having laid her needle aside because she could no longer see, the door opened, and the tall, loose figure of Jacob Dyson appeared framed against the dark background of the staircase behind, and the girl sprang to her feet with a little exclamation of pleasure and welcome.

"I thought that thou wouldst come to see me, Jacob. Thou hast heard that I am going away?"

"Ay, I have heard it. Art thou glad to be going, Cherry?"

"Yes, verily I am. I am sick at heart for news of him, and perchance I may get it where I be going. I shall be near his home and his kinsfolk."

Jacob had sat down, and was turning his cap round and round in those large red hands that were such an offence to the girl. After a few moments of silence he looked up and said:

"Cherry, hast thou ever thought of the things thou hast said to me—of the promise thou hast given?"

She bent her head low, and the whispered "Yes," was barely audible.

"Thou wilt not go back from thy word?"

She raised her head suddenly and said:

"No, Jacob, I will not go back from my word. Thou hast been very good and kind and patient; and if in time to come it should be proved that Cuthbert is dead, or has wed another and been false to me, then I will say naught against thee, but will do as my father saith, and strive to make thee a good wife. But I have never promised to love thee as a wife should love her husband. Thou must not expect that of me, Jacob."

She lifted her eyes to his with a look that sent a quick thrill through him. He put out one of his hands and took hers, saying in very gentle tone, though his gestures were slightly uncouth:

"I will only strive might and main to win thy love, sweetheart. Methinks if thy heart were once free again thou mightest learn the lesson."

She shook her head and answered very low:

“Thou couldst learn to love again, good Jacob; but I—never. I would that thou couldst look around thee, and find a good and useful wife whom thy mother would welcome; who would love thee well, and whom thou couldst love without let. There be such—I am well assured of it. As for me, even though some day thou shouldst gain my hand, my heart can never be thine.”

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Jacob looked at her with a wistful, dog-like devotion, and heaved a heavy sigh. That unselfish and faithful youth was going through a rather hard probation, such as so often falls upon the best and warmest hearted of earth's sons, who have been denied those outward graces that charm the fancy and take the eye. He had long since divined the secret of the attachment betwixt Cuthbert and Cherry; and when urged by his father to press his own suit, had been backward in so doing. On Cuthbert's disappearance he had one day spoken openly to Cherry of his suspicions, and she had frankly told him all, begging him to keep their secret, and to hold off his own suit until Cuthbert's quest should be over, and he could come to claim her as his own.

Truth to tell, Jacob had little belief in the finding of the lost treasure; but he did believe in Cuthbert, whom he loved only second to Cherry, and whom he would any day have set before himself. He made Cherry a promise that it should be as she desired; that he would give her time to test Cuthbert's sincerity before he spoke another word of marriage with her. But he also timidly asked in return for the sacrifice he was making, and as a reward for his championship, that if Cuthbert should never return, if harm should befall him in the forest, or if some other maiden should win his heart and hand, that then Cherry should become his wife, and let him try to comfort her by his own devoted and life-long love.

Cherry had given the promise without overmuch persuasion. What good would life be to her without Cuthbert? she had argued. If she could make any one else happy, she might as well do it as not. Jacob was very good. He would be kind to her and patient with her, whilst her aunt Susan would be just the reverse. Life under such conditions, beneath that unsympathetic rule, would be well-nigh unendurable. It would be better for her own sake to wed Jacob and escape from it all. And when the promise had been given, it seemed so little likely that she would be called upon to fulfil it! Even now she scarcely contemplated it seriously, for her heart was filled with hope. Was she herself not going towards the forest and Cuthbert? Surely she would hear somewhat of him there!

"I shall ask none other woman to be my wife until I know that thou canst never be mine, Cherry," answered Jacob, with gentle obstinacy. "I shall never wish aught of ill to Cuthbert. Thou knowest that I would stand betwixt him and peril an I might. But till he stands at thy side and claims thee as his own, I will not give thee up. I can bide my time—I can wait and watch."

She looked at him with suddenly dilating eyes, as though a qualm of fear had smitten her.

"But, Jacob, if he were to come hither when I be gone, thou wouldst not hinder him from finding me; thou wouldst not do him any ill turn that we might be kept apart? That would not be fair; it would be an ill thing. It would be—"

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She stopped suddenly short, for Jacob had risen, and seemed to stand towering above her, with something majestic in his air that she had certainly never observed there before.

“Cherry! for what dost thou take me?” he asked, his voice quivering with an emotion that showed him to be deeply moved. “Hast thou so vile an opinion of the man thou mayest some day call thy husband, the man who bears the name of thy dead mother, that thou canst think such evil thoughts of him? No, Cherry, I will not hinder him from finding thee. I will in no wise stand between you. I will aid him with all that is in my power to find thee. If peril should menace him and I could stand betwixt him and it, I would do so gladly. I would lay down my life for him, if by so doing thou and he might one day be happy. Dost think that I prize my life so high, since I may not win the crown that would make its happiness? If I may not live for thee, Cherry, methinks I would sooner die for thee, if by so doing I might win thee happiness and love. I love thee and I love Cuthbert. I ask nothing better than that I may in some sort serve and save you twain.”

And with a gesture of rugged dignity of which Cherry was keenly aware, and which raised Jacob to an altogether different level in her mind, he held out his hand as if to seal the compact, and without waiting for her broken words of explanation and apology, turned and walked out of the room.

Two days later Cherry started forth upon her travels. Her father went part of the way with her, and left her but seven miles from the end of her journey. She was escorted by a body of merchants and their servants, who were transporting some merchandise to Southampton, and were a goodly company in themselves for fear of assault from the robbers of the road. As they had quantities of valuables with them, they intended to travel only during the daylight hours, and after leaving Cherry at the Cross Way House, would put up for the night at the nearest town on the southern side of the forest.

How Cherry’s heart beat as her fellow travellers pointed out the wall and chimneys of her destination, and the whole party reined up at the door! The Cross Way House was well known to travellers as being one of the regular landmarks along the road. It was a hospitable mansion for any wayfarers in distress, and its mistress was held in high repute, and had never yet been molested or threatened by the highway bands, who might have been troublesome to the members of any household whose walls abutted so close upon the road. Lady Humbert was reaping the reward for the renowned kindness of heart of the whole Wyvern family towards all the lowly, the unfortunate, and the oppressed; and though many a fugitive fleeing from the robbers had found shelter within her walls, these had proved as safe shelter as the walls of any ancient sanctuary; for once within Lady Humbert’s gates and not even the most hated and hunted foe need fear further molestation.

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Cherry had heard some such words as these as the party had jogged onwards together; and now she found herself standing timidly at the back entrance of the house, her box beside her, and one of her uncle's friends at her side. When the door was opened and her guardian spoke her name and errand, she was quickly made welcome to enter, and after saying a hasty goodbye to the kindly merchant, found herself traversing several long stone passages, till she was finally ushered into a low parlour, where an elderly woman sat brewing over the fire some concoction which looked like one of Mistress Susan's compounds of berries and spice.

"Sure it is my good aunt, Prudence Dyson," said Cherry, as the woman looked quickly round. "Methinks I should have guessed that anywhere, thou art so like to my uncle."

The woman came forward and saluted her niece gravely and kindly.

"Thou art Martin Holt's daughter? What is thy name, child? I could scarce make it out from Susan's letter, for she is no scholar, as she ofttimes says. I am right glad to welcome thee, and I trust thou comest to us with a willing heart?"

"A right willing heart," answered the girl, smiling bravely, despite the strangeness of her surroundings; for there was something home-like and comforting in the aspect of her aunt and in the sound of her voice. "I was glad my father's choice lighted on me, and I will strive to please in all I do. My name is Cherry—at least that is how I am always called. And who are the ladies upon whom I am to wait?"

"The one whom thou wilt chiefly serve is Mistress Kate Trevlyn, a daughter of Sir Richard Trevlyn of the Chase. I know not if thou knowest aught of the family, but most like thou art aware that thy aunt Bridget made a luckless marriage with one Nicholas Trevlyn, whereby she cast herself adrift from all her family. Why, child, what a colour thou hast! What dost thou know of this matter?"

"I know my cousin Cuthbert Trevlyn," answered Cherry, trying to speak naturally, though her heart beat wildly all the while. "He came to us a year ago, and remained beneath my father's roof till the summer had well-nigh come. From him we learned much of the family; and right glad am I to think that I may serve Mistress Kate, who was a kind friend to him in times past. My cousin Cuthbert was much beloved by all our house whilst he remained beneath our roof. We have not heard of him this many a day. Dost thou know aught of him, my aunt?"

Prudence Dyson gave her niece a quick, sharp glance, and then answered a little evasively:

"Thou must ask that question of Mistress Kate, my dear, if she will please to talk with thee. She may have had news of him belike. As for us of this household, we hear but little of what happens in the world beyond. We are all growing old together."

Had it not been for the earnestness with which they were talking, the aunt and niece might have heard a light footfall down the passage. The door was softly pushed open, and a clear voice asked:

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“Is Mistress Dowsabel’s hot posset ready, Dyson? she has asked for it more than once.”

Both women started and turned round, and Cherry uttered a little involuntary cry, whilst the name “Cuthbert” sprang to her lips so fast that she was not sure that she had not uttered it aloud. Her eyes were fixed upon the face of the dark-eyed girl who had brought the message.

“I will take it at once,” said Dyson, hastily lifting it from the fire. “I crave my lady’s pardon for being late with it; but my niece from London has but just arrived, and I was hindered for the moment.

“Cherry, wait here till I return, and then I will speak more with thee.”

Dyson hurried away with the posset, and the two girls stood gazing at each other, a light of welcome and amaze in both their eyes.

“Cherry! did she call thee Cherry? and from London, too? And Kate bath ofttimes said that—Oh, why waste words?” cried the girl, breaking off quickly. “Tell me, art thou Martin Holt’s daughter? art thou my brother Cuthbert’s Cherry?”

“Thy brother? then thou art Petronella!” cried Cherry, in a maze of bewilderment; and even as she spoke the name she felt Petronella’s arms about her, and they were laughing and kissing, questioning and exclaiming, all in the most incoherent fashion, yet contriving to make each other understand some fragments of their respective stories, till at last Petronella drew herself away and laid her hand on Cherry’s arm, saying as she did so:

“But remember that here I am Ellen Wyvern, and not even good Dyson knows more than that. Be on thy guard, good coz, and only speak familiarly to me in secret. O Cherry, how I have longed to see thee—Cuthbert’s Cherry, of whom I have heard so much! And how comest thou hither? Has he sent thee?”

“He? I have not seen him these six months past. Petronella, sweet cousin, give me good news of him.”

“Why, so I can—the very best. He has found the treasure. It is safely lodged here. And he has gone forth into the forest again, first to tell the tale to the gipsy queen, who has been his friend through all, and then to return to London to thy father’s house to seek his Cherry once again, and claim her hand before all the world.”

Chapter 21: The Gipsy’s Warning.

“Thy task is done, and it is well done. But now get thee from the forest with all speed, for there is peril to thee here.”

So said Joanna, standing before Cuthbert in the pixies' dell, her hand upon the low stone wall, her tall figure drawn up to its full height. She had been looking thoughtfully down into the sparkling water, which was now filling the well as of old, whilst Cuthbert told his tale with graphic power. An expression of calm triumph was on her face as she heard how the long-lost hoard was lying safely stored within the house of the Wyverns—a house sacred to the gipsies and safe from any raids of robbers, such was the esteem in which that name was held. She looked like one whose task is done, who feels a heavy load lifted from the mind; but the glance fixed upon Cuthbert's eager face was also one of gravity and meaning.

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“The forest is no place for thee now,” she said; “get thee hence as fast as thou canst.”

“And wherefore so?” asked Cuthbert, surprised. “Methought the peril ceased with the death of—”

“Hush!” said the gipsy, almost sternly; “bethink thee that there may be listeners even now about us in these thick bushes, and guard thy words with caution. Remember the strange links that bind together those of the wild gipsy blood; and remember that Long Robin lies in his bloody grave not far from here.”

She lowered her voice as she spoke, and Cuthbert instinctively followed her example.

“But no man knows that.”

“How canst thou tell?”

“None saw the deed. It was done in the dead of night. Ere morning came he was laid below the earth. Thou thyself knew not what had befallen him till I spoke the word.”

He looked at her as if in momentary distrust; but the calm gaze and the noble countenance of the gipsy seemed to reassure him. Joanna, who had read his thought, smiled slightly.

“Nay, boy, thou needst not fear treachery from Joanna, and the gipsy queen will give thee all protection in her power. Have I not told thee that upon me, when I received that title, was laid the charge of seeing the stolen treasure restored to the house of Trevlyn? To thy courage and resolve and perseverance and skill belongs it that this charge is now fulfilled. Thou needst not fear that any ill will or lack of caution on Joanna’s part will cause evil to light upon thy head. But there are others with whom thou mayest have to reckon. There is Miriam, to whom Long Robin was as the apple of the eye.”

“Yet he was not her husband (he is no aged man), and he can scarce have been her son.”

“No matter. As I have told thee ere this, there be strange bonds betwixt us of the gipsy blood, binding closer and firmer than ever ties of kinship do. Miriam loved yon man with a love passing all others. She has missed him these many weeks. She is frantic with anxious grief. She is convinced that some ill has befallen him. She is rousing to anger and vengeance the whole tribe. They have vowed that they will find Robin, whether he be dead or alive, and that if dead they will avenge them on his murderer. Already suspicion has fallen upon thee. Dost think thy many journeys through the forest have passed unnoted by us?”

“I have never seen a soul; I had not known myself watched.”

“Luckily for thee thou hast not been watched, else would little of the treasure have been placed in safe keeping. Thou hast reaped the benefit Robin hoped to reap himself alone when he surrounded this dell as with a barrier that no man might pass. Even the most daring spirits of our tribe dare not come here; and Miriam, who bids them scour the forest in all other directions, fears to tell them to come hither, albeit I well know she will shortly search the spot herself if Robin come not soon. Then

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she will find the grave; it will not escape her eyes. First she will think the lost treasure lies there, for I am convinced that Robin never told her the full secret. Then when she looks farther, she will find what that grave really contains; and thou hadst best be far away ere that day comes. Thou hast been seen. Thy journeyings in the forest have provoked wonder and curiosity. Let Miriam once learn that Robin lies there, and the whole truth will flash upon her; and then look thou to thyself!"

These words were spoken with such significance that Cuthbert experienced an involuntary qualm of fear.

"I thank thee for the warning," he said; "I will avail myself of thy kind counsel. I had thought of journeying to London ere this. There, it may be, I shall be hidden from their malice."

"Thou wilt be safer there than here," answered the gipsy quietly; "I will not say thou wilt be truly safe in any spot if Miriam's ire be once roused against thee. She has a wondrous fierce spirit, and she has influence with our people second only to mine. And then there hung about Long Robin a mysterious charm. Men loved him not—they feared and distrusted him; and yet, were it to be known that he had met his death by violence, Miriam would have but small trouble in stirring up the hearts of a score of stout fellows vowed to vengeance. In the forest thou wilt have small chance of thy life."

"Perchance they will follow me to London," said Cuthbert; "if so, it will be small use to fly."

"In London our folks have fears for themselves," answered the gipsy queen. "Half of them are outlawed; the other half lie beneath the suspicion of sorcery, which in these days is almost worse. They may hover about the dens of the city, but they will fear to molest thee elsewhere. Thou must take heed how thou venturest beyond the city walls, for Tyrrel and his men may be lurking beyond on the watch."

"Methought Tyrrel and Miriam were no such friends," said Cuthbert, recollecting the night when he had been brought to the mill. "Will he take up her quarrel?"

"If she can make him believe that Robin had the secret of the lost treasure, and that thou didst force the secret from him ere thou laidest him in his grave, he will take up the quarrel in right good earnest, and rest not till he has learned where the treasure has been hid. We of the gipsy tribe have as little believed in that hid treasure as the house of Trevlyn, hence its safety all these years. But let Miriam once tell what she knows—-which is something, I warrant—and there may be many who will then believe that the secret was in Robin's keeping. They will be certain sure that thou wouldst not have killed the man until thou hadst made sure of the treasure. It would be acting like the

fabled yokel who killed the goose that laid the golden eggs. Wherefore be gone. Hide thyself in London town. In a few weeks or months the chase may be over; but for the time being beware of the forest!”

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“I will,” answered Cuthbert. “I thank thee for thy good counsel. I will be speedily gone.”

Joanna stood looking reflectively at him.

“Thou wouldst he safest within the walls that shelter the treasure—with thy kinsfolk of the house of Wyvern.”

“Nay, but I must first go to London,” answered Cuthbert quickly; “I have been long absent. My kinsfolk there will be looking for news of me. And perchance my presence in the house of my kinswomen might imperil them. I would not be a cause of danger to them.”

“Thou art a bold and true-hearted lad,” answered Joanna; “and it may be well that for the nonce thou shouldest keep away from the Cross Way House. Thy presence there might awaken suspicion; though I scarce believe that any lust of gold would drive our people to attack that house. Go then to London, and lose thyself there awhile. Presently thou mayest return and see how thy sister fareth; but not too soon—not too soon!”

Cuthbert started.

“My sister!” he said; “how knowest thou that?”

Joanna smiled her lofty smile.

“Ask a gipsy how she knoweth what takes place within the limits of her domain! Tush, boy! thinkest thou that I do not know all that passes in the forest? Thy sister has done well to find a shelter there. She is safer at the Cross Way House than in this dell with thee.”

“If she is safe I can well look to myself,” answered Cuthbert, with the confidence of youth and strength. “To be warned where the peril lies is half the battle. I will be cautious—I will be wary; and having naught to keep me in the forest, I will start for London town this very day.”

“Ay, do so, and without an hour’s delay. Old Miriam is raging like a fury. Tyrrel may at any moment return, and I trow she will rouse him to bitter enmity towards thee. Fly, before any strive to stay thee. And when thou hast reached the city, go once again to Esther. Tell her that the deed is done, the treasure found, that it lies in the house of the Wyverns, and that the luck has come back to the house, as was always said, through the daughters’ sons.”

“I will,” answered Cuthbert; and bidding a farewell to the gipsy, to whose protection and goodwill he owed so much, he left the dell and made his way rapidly through the forest, till he struck the road which would lead him to London.

He would not turn out of the direct way to go to the Cross Way House, though he would gladly have seen his sister and Kate and his aged kinswomen again. He did not wish them to know of the peril which might threaten his own path, nor did he desire to draw attention to that house by directing his steps thither in broad daylight. Plainly his presence in the forest had already excited remark. He had been seen far oftener than he had known. If he did not linger, but pursued his way to London without delay, he might reach it by nightfall, and that was no small inducement

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to him. Petronella knew that he was bound thither; she would not reckon on seeing him again. And there was Cherry at the other end. The thought of seeing her again that very day drew him onwards like a magnet. During these long weeks of search and hard toil, the thought of Cherry had been the best sweetener of his labour. He had talked of her with his sister, he had dreamed of her when he lay down to sleep at night, and now he was on his way to see her, to tell her all the tale, and ask her at her father's hand. The thought was sweet to intoxication, and his eager anticipation seemed to put wings to his feet.

How different were his feelings as he drew near to the great city this second time! It was just about a year since he had entered it for the first time, a stranger, homeless, well-nigh penniless, and very uncertain of the reception he should receive from his kinsfolk on the bridge. Now he stepped towards the region of shining lights with all confidence and joy. He was rich past his wildest hopes, for the treasure had proved to be far greater than even his fondest dreams had credited; and he knew that when division was made, it would be no niggard portion that would fall to the share of the finder. He had won for himself such goodwill from his kinsfolk as would stand him in good stead in days to come. He had enlarged his scholarship, made for himself a number of friends of all degrees, and, above all, had won the love of his cousin Cherry, and a position which would enable him speedily to ask her at her father's hands. He would fulfil his boyish promise made last Yuletide, when he vowed her that the day should come when she should no longer pine for the innocent gaieties and luxuries of wealth, but should herself be a lady of some degree, and should have her house and her horses and servants, and a bright and happy future with the husband of her choice.

Now he had set foot upon the bridge, and was eagerly traversing the familiar roadway, as the short daylight faded and the lights from the houses shone out brighter and brighter in the gloom. His uncle's house was almost in sight. His heart was beating high with anticipation and delight, when a hand was laid suddenly upon his shoulder, and he turned to find himself face to face with Anthony Cole.

He was about to exclaim in words of pleasure and welcome, when his attention was arrested by the strange expression upon the thin, eager face—an expression so strange that it checked the commonplace words of greeting that sprang naturally to Cuthbert's lips, and he waited in silence for what Anthony should say.

"Thou hast come! it is well," said the latter, in tones that were little above a whisper. "Methought that thou wouldst not be absent at such a time. Well doth it behove every true son of the Church to rally round her at such a moment. I felt assured that thou wouldst be here. Others beside me have been watching for thee. It is well. Keep thine own counsel; be wary, be discreet. And now go. It boots not that we be seen talking

together thus. When thou hast fitting opportunity, come secretly to my house; thou wilt be welcome there.”

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And half pushing Cuthbert from him before the bewildered youth had time to speak a single word, the printer disappeared within his own door, and Cuthbert was left to make his way to his uncle's house.

"Beshrew me if I know what Master Anthony means!" said Cuthbert to himself. "I trow there be matters stirring in London town of which we in the country know nothing. How strange it is that one can hardly set foot in this great seething city without hearing words of mystery—without feeling oneself enwrapped in its strange atmosphere of doubt and perplexity. Something is doubtless astir of which I know naught; but at my uncle's house I shall hear all."

The shutters were just being put up at Martin Holt's as Cuthbert stepped across the threshold. The servant uttered a cry of astonishment as he saw his master's nephew, and Martin himself came forward from the little room behind.

"Bless me, is it thou, Cuthbert?" he exclaimed in surprise. "Well, boy, thou art welcome since thou art come, though we had almost begun to think thou hadst forgot us and thy promise to return. Come upstairs and greet thy aunt and cousins. Hast thou seen aught of Cherry, as thou comest from the south?"

Cuthbert stepped back a pace, and some of the light went out of his face.

"Cherry!" he stammered, taken aback. "How should I have seen her? Is she not here?"

"Not for a matter of four days. She is helping her aunt, Prudence Dyson at the Cross Way House, to wait upon some guests the ladies are entertaining. Methought if you had come that way you might have chanced upon her."

A keen thrill of disappointment ran through Cuthbert's frame. To think how near he had been to Cherry and had never guessed it! If only he had called at the Cross Way House that day!

"I have not been there for the matter of a week. I was last at Trevlyn Chase; but mine uncle and his son have gone to London, as I heard. I had hoped to find Cherry here."

"Well, thou wilt find all but her. Go up, go up! Thou wilt need refreshment after thy journey, and thou shalt hear the news as we sup. Thine old room shall be made ready for thee. I am glad to see thy face again, boy; and would hear thy story anon."

Cuthbert received a warmer welcome than he had looked for from the aunt and cousins upstairs. Perhaps they were all missing the brightness that had left them when Cherry went. Perhaps the vacant place at the board day by day was an offence to the conservative eye of Mistress Susan. But whatever was the cause, there was no denying the cordiality of the reception accorded to him; and after the lonely life of the forest, and all his wanderings there, his strange resting places, and many hours of

watching, toil, and anxious fear, it seemed pleasant indeed to be sitting at this hospitable board, warmed by the friendly glow of the fire, and discussing the savoury viands that always adorned a table of Mistress Susan's spreading, and which did indeed taste well after the hardy and sometimes scanty fare he had known in the forest.

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But his open-air life had done him good in many ways. His uncle smiled, and told him he had grown to be a very son of Anak, and that he was as brown as a gipsy; whilst his cousins looked at him with furtive admiration, and Keziah could almost have wept that Cherry was not there to welcome him.

Cuthbert, however, quickly got over his disappointment on this score, and after swallowing a few sighs, was content to think that it might indeed be best so. Cherry would learn where he was from Petronella, and would hear from her that his heart was still her own, and that success had crowned his search after the lost treasure. He could go to seek her shortly, when the gipsy tribe should have drawn away from that part of the forest into the quarters they preferred during the winter months. Were she to be here, he must surely betray himself, and should have to speak immediately to Martin Holt of his desire to make Cherry his wife. Somehow, when face to face with his uncle, he felt less confident of winning his sanction for this step than he had done when away from him in the forest. There it had seemed perfectly simple so long as he could show the father that he had the means to keep a wife in comfort. Now he began to wonder if this would be enough. Hints were dropped by both the Holts regarding Cherry's approaching marriage with Jacob Dyson. Mistress Susan openly regretted her absence from home as hindering that ceremony; and although Martin Holt spoke with more reticence, it was plain he was still cherishing the hope of the match when his wilful youngest should be a little older.

It might be that Cherry's absence at this time was fortunate rather than the reverse. Cuthbert, at any rate, was relieved from the necessity for immediate action; and when he had spoken a little of himself, his kinsfolk, and the visits he had paid during his wanderings in the forest (keeping the real object of those wanderings quite out of the talk), he turned his conversation to other matters, and asked what was passing in London, and what was chiefly stirring men's minds.

"Marry it is the opening of Parliament that is the chiefest thing," said Martin Holt. "It is said in the city that his Majesty loves not his good Parliament; and truly it looks like it, since he has put off its opening so many a time. First it was to have been last February, then not till the third of this present month. Now it is again prolongued till the fifth of November next; but I trow his Majesty will scarce dare to postpone again. His people like not those rulers who fear to meet those who are chosen by them to debate on matters of the state. It looks not well for the sovereign to fear to meet his people."

Cuthbert, who knew little about such matters, asked many questions about Parliament and its assemblies. His uncle answered him freely and fully, and explained to him exactly the site of the building where the great body assembled.

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“Thou canst take the wherry thou used to love so well, and row thyself to Westminster one of these days, and look well at the Parliament Houses,” said Martin Holt. “It is a grand spectacle to see the King come in state to open the assembly. Thou mayest see that sight, too, an thou purposest to stay with us so long.”

“I would gladly do so,” answered Cuthbert, who remembered that he was bidden not to return to the forest too quickly. He knew that, now he was safely away, Joanna would allow all search to be made after him there, and that it would soon be ascertained that he had fled. But whilst that search was going on, he was safest in London, and was glad enough of the opportunity of seeing any gay pageant.

As he lay in his narrow bed that night, enjoying the comfort of it after his chilly nook in the tree, which had been his best shelter of late, and somewhat disturbed by the noises that from time to time arose from the street below, he recalled to mind the strange greeting he had received from Anthony Cole, and wondered anew at his mysterious words.

And then his fancy somehow strayed to the great Parliament Houses of which his uncle had spoken. He remembered that strange dark journey across the river from Lambeth and the lonely house there to Westminster and its lofty palaces. He recalled the locality of the house he had entered, where Catesby and his friends were assembled at some strange toil, and the terrified aspect these men all wore when some unexpected sound had smitten upon their ears. He recalled the sudden fierce grip of Catesby’s hand upon his arm before he recognized the face of the stranger within their midst. He recollected the threats he had striven to speak binding him to the silence he was so willing to promise.

What did it all mean? what could it mean? Lying in the dark, and turning the matter over and over in his mind, Cuthbert began to feel some fearful and sinister suspicions.

The month when all this had happened had been early in the year; was it January, or early February? He could scarce remember, but he knew it was one or the other. And had not his uncle said that Parliament was to have met in February? Now that it was about to meet soon again, had not Anthony spoken words implying that some muster of friends was looked for in London; and had not Anthony and his son always regarded him in the light of a friend and ally?

Cuthbert was by this time aware that he had but little love left for the creed in which he had been reared. It seemed to him that all, or at any rate far the greater part, of what was precious in that creed was equally open to him in the Church established in the land, together with the liberty to read the Scriptures for himself, and to exercise his own freedom of conscience as no priest of the Romish Church would ever let him exercise it. With him there had been no wild revulsion of feeling, no sense of tearing and rending

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away from one faith to join himself to another. His own convictions had been of gradual growth, and he still felt and would always feel a certain loving loyalty towards the Church of his childhood. Still, he was increasingly convinced of the fact that it was not within that fold that he himself could ever find true peace and conviction of soul; and though no ardent theologian, and by no means given over to controversy and dogmatism, he had reached a steady conclusion as to his own faith, and one that was little likely to be shaken.

At the same time he was kindly disposed to those of his countrymen who were still beneath the Papal yoke, and were suffering for their old allegiance. He honoured their constancy, and felt even a boyish sense of shame in having, as it were, deserted the weaker side when it was in trouble and undergoing persecution. He felt a qualm of uneasiness when he thought of this, and would gladly have shared the perils if he could have shared the convictions of those who had striven to make him their friend. Cuthbert was a little in advance of his times in the facility with which he set aside matters of opinion in the choosing of his friends. Those were days in which men were seldom able to do this. They still divided themselves into opposing camps, and hated not only the opinions embraced by their rivals, but the rivals themselves, without any discrimination at all. To be intimate and friendly with those of hostile opinions was far more rare then than it has since become; and Cuthbert, who possessed that faculty, was liable to be greatly misunderstood, and to run into perils of which he little dreamed.

Thinking of those things he had seen that strange night led him to wonder more and more what it could all mean; and, accordingly, upon the morrow the first visit he paid was to Anthony Cole on the bridge, hoping that through him this curiosity might be in some way satisfied.

Cuthbert took the privilege accorded him in old times, and walked through the house and up the narrow staircase without pausing in the shop below. It was still early, and business had not yet begun. The house was very silent; but he heard low-toned voices above, and pursued his way towards them. As he did so a door, the existence of which had never been discovered by him before, though he thought the house was well known by him from attic to basement, suddenly opened from the staircase, and a head appeared for a single instant, and was as suddenly withdrawn. The door closed sharply, and he heard the click as of a spring falling back to its place. He passed his hand across his eyes as he exclaimed beneath his breath:

“Sure that was Father Urban—”

But he began to feel doubtful as to his right to come and go in this house at will, and was about to descend the stairs quietly again, when a door opened from above, and some one came hastily down the stairs. Cuthbert fancied he saw the gleam of some

weapon in the hand of the advancing figure, and felt that he had better be upon his guard.

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“Cuthbert Trevlyn!” exclaimed a familiar voice, and a hand was slipped beneath the doublet, and there was no further gleam of cold steel. “I am right glad to welcome thee. It is well for friends to muster at such a time. Comest thou with news?”

Walter Cole was the speaker. His face too wore something of the look which Cuthbert had observed on the father’s the previous evening—an expression of strained expectancy, as if with long waiting mind and spirit had alike grown worn and over anxious. The bright eyes scanned his face eagerly. Cuthbert felt half ashamed of his ignorance of and indifference to the burning questions of the day.

“I have heard naught, I know naught. I have been living the life of the forests these past months,” he answered, following Walter into a small room where they had often worked together. “I have heard no word of what was passing in the world; I come to learn that here.”

The eagerness faded from Walter’s face. He spoke much more quietly.

“Belike thou wert right to hide and live thus obscure; many of our leaders have done the like. It is ofttimes the best and the safest plan. But the time is at hand, and we must rally around them now. When the hour has struck and when the deed is done, then will it be for us to work—then will our hour of toil come. East and west, north and south, must we spur forth with the tidings. The whole nation must hear it and be roused. The blow must be struck whilst the iron is hot. Thus and only thus can we be secure of the promised victory.”

Walter spoke quietly, yet with an undercurrent of deep enthusiasm that struck an answering chord in Cuthbert’s heart. All true and deep feeling moved him to sympathy. His friend was talking in riddles to him; but he felt the earnestness and devotion of the man, and his sympathy was at once aroused.

“What hour? what blow? what deed?” he asked wonderingly. “I know not of what thou speakest.”

Walter drew his brows together and regarded him with an expression of intense and wondering scrutiny. When he spoke it was in a different tone, as though he were carefully weighing his every word, as though he were a little uncertain of the ground on which he stood. There was something of evasive vagueness in his tone, whilst his eyes were fixed on Cuthbert’s face as though he would read his very soul.

“Methought thou knewest how cruelly we suffered, and that we trust some stroke of kind fortune’s wheel may ere long make life something better for us. The King meets his Parliament soon. Then is the time when men’s grievances may be discussed, and when there is hope for all that wiser and more merciful laws may be passed. We have gathered together at this time to see what may be done. We are resolved, as thou must

surely know, not to suffer like this for ever. Half the people of the realm be with us. It were strange if nothing could be accomplished. Cuthbert Trevlyn, answer me this: thou dost wish us well; thou art not a false friend—one who would deceive and betray?"

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“Never, never, never!” answered Cuthbert, with all the heat of youth and generous feeling. “I would never betray those who have trusted me, not though they were my foes. And I too hate and abominate these iniquitous laws that persecute men’s bodies for what they hold with their minds and souls. I have suffered persecution myself. I know how bitter a thing it is. I would have every man free to believe that which his conscience approves. I would join with any who would implore the King to show mercy and clemency to his persecuted subjects.”

Walter’s face relaxed; he looked relieved and pleased.

“Methought that we could trust thee, Cuthbert. Thou art a Trevlyn; it must needs be thou art stanch. I am right glad that thou art here. There may be work yet for thee to do. Thou wilt abide in thine uncle’s house until—”

“Until Parliament opens at least,” answered Cuthbert quickly. “I have said as much to him, I would fain be there then and see it all. And my presence in the forest is known by foes; it is no place for me longer.”

Then breaking off, for he had not meant to say so much, and had no wish to be further questioned on the subject, he asked in a low tone:

“Sure it was Father Urban whose face I saw on the stairs but now?”

“Hist! silence!” whispered Walter, with a glance enforcing caution; “do not breathe that name even within these walls. He is here at risk of his life; but at such a moment he will not be away. A warrant is out against him. He may not venture abroad by night or day. But he can be useful in a thousand ways, for he knows more than any other man of some matters appertaining to the state. And if our hopes be realized, then he will emerge from his prison and rove the country from end to end. He has friends in every place. To him we shall look for guidance in a hundred ways.”

Walter’s eyes glowed. He looked like one to whom triumph is a certainty—one who anticipates success and already tastes the sweets thereof. Cuthbert was growing uncomfortable. He felt as though he were hearing more than he ought to do. True, the Coles had talked in very much this fashion all through the dark days of the previous winter when he had been so much with them. They were always looking for a day of release, always dwelling on the bright prospects of the future. But some instinct told Cuthbert that there was a difference now in the fashion of their talk, and he was made uncomfortable by it though he scarce knew why.

He rose to go.

“I have but just returned. I have many visits to pay. I will come again anon,” he said.

“Ay, but come not too openly. Let us not be seen consorting together. And as thou walkest the street, keep thine eyes and thine ears open and attent, and learn ever what men say and think. If thou hearest aught of moment, bring it to us. Every whisper may be of value. And now farewell. Come not again by day, but slip in by the door in the archway when all be wrapped in gloom. So it is safest.”

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Cuthbert drew a deep breath of relief when he stood once again in the fresh air. He walked rapidly through the familiar sunny streets and strove to forget the impression made upon him by the recent interview.

“Plots, plots, plots!” he muttered—“nothing but dark plots, and the hope that things will thus be set right. I misdoubt me if it will ever be by such means. Poor souls! I pity them with all my heart; but I like not their ways. They are not the ways of truth, of uprightness, of equity. Methinks I had better hold aloof and have no dealings with them. They seem to think because I like them—the men themselves—and mislike these persecutions even as they do, that I am one with them and understand their ways and their deeds. But I do not, I do not, and I think not that I ever shall. I will go mine own way, and they must go theirs. It were best not to meddle too much in strange matters. Now I will go and seek honest Jacob. From him methinks I shall get as warm a welcome, but a welcome that is not tinged with these mysteries and dark words.”

Chapter 22: Whispers Abroad.

“Have naught to do with them, Cuthbert! I like them not.”

“Yet they be good men, and stanch and true. Thou hast said so thyself a score of times in my hearing, good Jacob. Why should I avoid them now? What have they done amiss?”

Jacob passed his large hand across his face, and looked at Cuthbert with an expression of perplexity.

“They are Papists,” he said at last, in a slightly vague and inconclusive fashion.

Cuthbert laughed aloud.

“Why, that I know well; and I am not scared by the name, as some of your Puritan folk seem to be. Papists, after all, are fellow men—and fellow Christians too, if it comes to that. It was a Christian act of theirs to take to their home that hunted priest whom we rescued that foggy night, Jacob. Many would have made much ado ere they had opened their doors to one in such plight. Thou canst not deny that there was true Christian charity in that act.”

“Nay, nay, I would not try to deny it,” answered Jacob, in his calm, lethargic way, still regarding Cuthbert with a look of admiration and curiosity, somewhat as a savage regards a white man, scarce knowing from moment to moment what his acts will be. “Yet for all that I would warn thee to keep away from that house. Men whisper that there be strange doings there. I know not the truth of what is spoken. But we walk in slippery places; it were well to take heed to our steps.”

Cuthbert returned Jacob's look with one equally tinged with curiosity.

"Nay now, speak more openly. What dost thou mean, good Jacob? What do men say anent these Coles?"

Jacob glanced round and instinctively lowered his voice.

"It is not of the Coles alone that they speak; it is of the whole faction of the Papists. I know not what is said or what is known in high places; but this I know, that there be strange whispers abroad."

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Cuthbert's eyes lighted. A slight thrill ran through him. He recalled the words recently spoken to him by his whilom friends. But all he said was:

"Verily men are ever whispering. It was the same cry when I was here a year agone, and no great thing has happened; wherefore this new fear?"

Jacob shook his head. His answer was spoken in a slow, ponderous fashion.

"Men will speak and whisper; yet the world wags on as before, and men well-nigh cease to listen or heed. But mark my word, Cuthbert, there be no smoke where there is not fire; and these Papists, who are for ever plotting, plotting, plotting, will one day spring some strange thing upon the world. There be so many cries of 'Wolf!' that folks begin to smile and say the real wolf will never come. But that follows not. I like not this ever-restless secret scheming and gathering together in dark corners. It is not for their religion that I hate and distrust the Papists. I know little about matters of controversy. I meddle not in things too high for me. But I hate them for their subtlety, their deceitful ways, their lying, and their fraud. Thou knowest how they schemed and plotted the death of good Queen Bess; we citizens of London find it hard to forgive them that! We love not the son of this same Mary Stuart, whom of old the Papists strove to give us for our Queen; yet he is our lawful King, accepted by the nation as our sovereign; and failing him I know not whom we might choose to reign over us. Wherefore say I, Down with these schemers and plotters! If men wish their grievances redressed, let them work in the light and not in the dark. We Protestants know that it is Bible law that evil must never be done that good may come; but the Papists hold that they may do never so many crimes and evil deeds if they may but win some point of theirs at last. Thou dost not hold such false doctrine, I trow, Cuthbert? thou art a soul above such false seeming."

Cuthbert drew his brows together in a thoughtful reverie.

"I trow thou hast the right of it, Jacob," he answered. "I love not dark scheming, nor love I these endless plots. Yet in these days of oppression it must be hard for men to act openly. If they be driven to secret methods, the fault is less theirs than that of their rulers."

"There be faults on both sides, I doubt not," answered Jacob, with calm toleration. "But two evils make not one good; and the Puritans who suffer in like fashion do not plot to overthrow their rulers."

"How knowest thou that the Papists do?" asked Cuthbert quickly.

"It has always been their way," answered Jacob; "and though I know but little of the meaning of the sinister whispers I hear, we have but to look back to former days to see how it has ever been. Think of the two plots of this very reign, the 'Bye' and the 'Main'!

What was their object but the subversion of the present rulers? What they have tried before they will

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try again; and we who live beside this great river, and mingle with those who come from beyond the seas, do see and hear many things that others would not know. There have been comings and goings of late that I have not liked. It may be that mine eyes have played me false, but methought one dark night I saw a figure strangely like Father Urban land at the wharf, and he was incontinently joined by Walter Cole, who took him hastily and secretly away."

Cuthbert started slightly, and Jacob continued:

"And yet when I whispered a question to Walter a few days later concerning the priest, of whose welfare I have asked from time to time since I had a hand in his rescue, he told me that he was still beyond the seas, and that it was not like he would ever set foot on English soil again."

Cuthbert was silent. But he presently asked a question.

"But who is this Father Urban? and why should his appearance mean aught, or disturb thee?"

"Father Urban is a Jesuit, and one of those they call seminary priests, and all such are held in detestation and suspicion above all other Papists. When men lay hands on them they show them scant mercy. It is a saying in this land that when treason and murder and wickedness is abroad, a seminary priest is sure to be the leading spirit. When those two last plots were hatching, this Father Urban was in the country. He has returned now, and many men are looking abroad with fear, wondering how soon the calm will be interrupted. I like it not; I like it not; and I caution thee to keep away from yon house, and to have no dealings with the Papists. They be treacherous friends as well as wily foes. It were best and safest for thee to keep away from all such. Thou art not one of them; why shouldest thou consort with them?"

"I do not consort with them," answered Cuthbert; "but I have none of thy hatred for the name, and these men have been kind and friendly to me. I owe much to the lessons Anthony Cole has taught me. I have no knowledge of their secrets, but I cannot see why I may not speak a friendly word with them; even my uncle does that."

"Ay, but he goes not to their house—and his name is not Trevlyn."

"But what of that? the Trevlyns are now a stanch family, in favour with the King and his counsellors."

"Ay, but the name is not forgotten in many quarters as belonging to a race of persecuting Papists. It takes long for old memories to die out. Thou hadst better take

heed, Cuthbert. A whisper against thee would soon spread and take root. I prithee meddle not in such matters, lest some ill befall thee!"

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Cuthbert thanked honest Jacob for his goodwill and for his warning, but he could not see that it was needed. He was but an obscure youth, of no note in the world. He had no dealings with any of those plots of which men were whispering, and he could not see how any act of his could raise suspicion of any sort against him. He was growing intensely curious about the seething fire beneath the outer crust of quietness and security. If some great plot were hatching, if some great upheaval were at hand, why might not he scent out something beforehand? Why might not he discover what was baffling the sagacity of others? He had no wish to be a spy or an informer; he had too much generous sympathy with the oppressed for that. But he was intensely curious about it all, and he felt as though his youth and obscurity would be his best protection if he chose to make some investigations on his own account.

The old eager thirst for knowledge was coming upon him. The old love of adventure, which had run him into many perils already, had not been quenched by his recent experiences. Success had crowned his labours in the forest; why should that success desert him now? And then the thought came to him that he might by chance discover something which might be of use to his own kinsmen. He knew that Sir Richard Trevlyn and his son Philip—Petronella's lover—were in London. Might it not be possible that they had better be elsewhere at such a time? Jacob's words about the Trevlyns might perchance be true. He had heard his uncle say the same before. If any possible peril should be menacing them, how gladly would he find it out and warn them in time! It began to appear to the youth in the light of a duty to pursue his investigation, and it was just such a task as best appealed to his ardent and fiery temperament.

But he scarce knew what the first step had better be; so he gave up the day following to seeking out Lord Culverhouse, and learning from him what was the feeling in high quarters.

Culverhouse greeted him warmly, and at once begged him to ride out with him into the pleasant regions where the parks now stand, which were then much larger, and only just taking any semblance of park, being more like fields with rides running across them. Each succeeding king did something for the improvement of this region, though the open ground became considerably diminished as stately buildings grew up around it.

"Cuthbert," said the Viscount, when they had left the busy streets and were practically alone and out of earshot of any chance passers by, "dost thou know that the matter of our secret wedding is now known?"

"I heard so from Mistress Kate, who has been sent away from home in disgrace, but is bearing her captivity cheerfully, with my sister for her companion."

Culverhouse was eager to hear everything Cuthbert could tell him, and was delighted that his lady love was happy in her honourable captivity. When he had asked every question he could think of, he went on with his own side of the story.

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“There was a fine coil when Sir Richard brought the news, and I was rated more soundly than I have been since I was a little lad and lost my father’s best falcon through letting it loose when the falconer was not by to whistle it back. There has been a mighty talking and arguing as to whether such wedlock as ours be lawful, and no man seems rightly to know. That we must be wed again in more orderly fashion all agree, if we are to live together as man and wife; but none will dare to say that we may break the pledge we gave each to the other that day. My father talked at first of moving some high court to set us free; but my mother shook her head and said that vows so solemnly spoken before God and in His name might never rightly be annulled by man. She was grieved and as angered as she knows how to be at our hot-headed rashness, and spoke to me words which hurt me more than my father’s ratings. Yet she holds steadfastly to this—-that we are betrothed too firmly to be parted; and what she holds she can generally make my father hold, for he thinks much of her piety and true discernment.”

“So that thou art out of thy trouble for the nonce?”

Culverhouse laughed and shrugged his shoulders.

“I say not that, for they tell us it will be many years ere we can hope to be wed again in due form; and waiting is weary work.”

“And why should you wait?”

Culverhouse laughed again.

“That is soon answered. My father has always told me that I must wed a lady of wealth if I am to wed young. Our estates are encumbered. We have more state to keep up than we well know how to manage. We have had troubles and losses even as the Trevlyns have. I have known this well. I cannot complain of my father. Nevertheless I chose my Kate without any dowry before all the world beside, and I am prepared to abide by my choice. But we shall have to wait; we shall have to possess our souls in patience. They all tell us that; and I gainsay them not. I am young. I have friends in high places. I will win a name for myself, and a fortune too, ere my head be gray. Alas for the old days of chivalry, when men might ride forth to fame and glory, and win both that and wealth in a few short years! Those bright days are gone for ever. Still methinks I will conquer fate yet!”

Culverhouse looked as though fitted indeed for some career of chivalrous daring. He and Cuthbert would gladly have ridden forth together upon some knightly quest; but the days for such things had gone by, as both recognized with a sigh. Still there was brightness in Cuthbert’s eyes as he said:

“Mistress Kate will spend her Christmas at the Cross Way House, and I trow that others of the Trevlyns will do the like. If thou wilt be one of the party there upon that day, I

doubt not that there will be a welcome for thee; and perchance thou wilt find then that thy nuptials need not be so long postponed. A golden key may be found which will unlock many doors."

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Culverhouse looked quickly and eagerly at his companion, but could ask no more even had he wished, as they were at that moment joined by two friends of his, young men about the Court, who at once began to talk of the approaching opening of Parliament and the grand show that would accompany the act.

The King's love for fine dress, fine pageants, and fine shows, of which he was the sun and centre (in his own opinion at least), was well known by this time. These young sprigs of the nobility amused themselves by making game freely of his Majesty behind his back, ridiculing his vanity, mimicking his ungainly action, especially upon horseback (though he considered himself a most finished and accomplished rider), and describing to Culverhouse the fine new robes he had ordered for the occasion, and which were to surpass in grandeur anything he had ever worn before.

"Folks talked of the vanity of our good Queen Bess, and called her mighty extravagant; but beshrew me if she were half as vain or extravagant as our noble King Jamie! It is a marvel he cannot see how ten-fold uglier he makes his ugly person by trapping himself out in all such frippery and gorgeous apparel."

So the young men chatted on in lightsome fashion, and Cuthbert, who listened to every word, could not gather that the smallest uneasiness had penetrated the minds of those who moved in these high places. Culverhouse talked with equal gaiety and security. Certainly he had no suspicion of coming ill. The mutterings of discontent the seething of the troubled waters, the undefined apprehensions of many of the classes of the people, were apparently unknown and unheeded here. All was sunshine and brightness in the region of palaces. But if these youths had entertained any secret misgivings, they would have discussed them freely together.

Culverhouse kept Cuthbert to dinner, and he was kindly received by the Earl's family. Lady Andover even remembered to ask after Cherry, and won Cuthbert's heart by so doing. She questioned him in private about the marriage in the church porch, of which he had been witness, and plainly all he told her only went to strengthen her conviction that the matter had gone too far to admit of any drawing back without some breach of faith that was akin to sacrilege.

After the meal, which seemed stately and long to Cuthbert, Culverhouse asked him would he like to see the Houses of Parliament, where the King would shortly meet his Lords and Commons. Cuthbert eagerly assented, and the two youths spent some time in wandering about the stately buildings, to which Culverhouse could obtain easy admittance; the Viscount explaining to his companion where the King sat and where his immediate counsellors, to all of which Cuthbert listened with marked attention.

There were several attendants and ushers within the building, and Culverhouse told him that orders had been given to keep strict watch over the building both by night and day.

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“The King is not like our good Queen—Heaven rest her soul!” said the Viscount, laughing. “He does not trust his people. He is always in fear of some mischance either through accident or design. Well may the great Shakespeare have said: ’Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown!’ Albeit the King would do better to have a little more courage.”

This was the first word Cuthbert had heard of any uneasiness in high quarters, and he asked with some eagerness:

“Meanest thou that the King fears some evil to himself at this time?”

“No; I have heard naught of that. The country seems unwontedly quiet. It is the fear which never leaves him—the fear that makes him wear a doublet so thickly quilted that it would suffice to turn the sharpest blade, even as a suit of chain mail. He is always dreading assassination. That is why he wills such close watch to be kept, lest haply any evil-disposed person might find hiding within the walls and spring upon him unawares. Methinks it is an unkingly fear, but there it be, and he carries it ever with him. The Queen had none such—nor had she need; and as thou knowest, when once an assassin did approach her when she was alone in her garden, the glance of her eye kept him cowed and at bay till her gentlemen could hasten to her side. She was a Queen in very truth! I would we had more of her like!”

Culverhouse spoke out aloud, careless of being overheard, for he was but speaking the thoughts of the whole nation. Cuthbert echoed his wish with all sincerity; and still looking round and about him with keen interest, went through a certain mental calculation which caused him at last to ask:

“And what buildings lie around or beneath this?”

“I know not exactly how that may be. There is a house close beside this where methinks I have heard that Master Thomas Percy dwells, the steward to my Lord of Northumberland. I know not what lies beneath; it may be some sort of cellar.

“Dost thou know, fellow, whether there be cellars beneath this place?”

Culverhouse spoke to a man-at-arms who appeared to be on duty there, and who had for some moments been regarding Cuthbert with close scrutiny, and had now drawn slowly near them. Cuthbert was vaguely aware that the man’s face was in some way familiar to him, but he had no recollection where he had seen him before.

“Master Thomas Percy has rented the cellar beneath, where his coals be stored,” answered the man carelessly; and Cuthbert, who had asked the question rather haphazard and without exactly knowing why, moved away to examine a piece of fine carving close at hand.

Whilst he was doing this he knew that the man-at-arms asked Culverhouse a question, to which the latter gave ready reply, and he heard the name of Trevlyn pass his lips. At the moment he heeded this little, but the remembrance came back to him later.

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As he passed out he noted that the man still continued to gaze after him, as though wishful to read his face by heart. He was standing beside a companion warder then, pointing out, as it seemed, the visitor to the other fellow. Was it only fancy, or did Cuthbert really hear the name of Father Urban pass in a whisper between them? Puzzled, and even a shade uneasy, he followed Culverhouse to the outer door, A flash of memory seemed then to recall to him the faces of these two men. Had he not seen them keeping watch at the wharf for Father Urban that day so long ago? He was almost certain it had been so. But what of that? How could they possibly connect him with the fugitive priest?

It would soon be dusk now, so the comrades said adieu to each other and went their several ways. Cuthbert had come as far as the Strand by boat, and had only to drop down and find it there; but somehow he felt more disposed to linger about these solemn old buildings, and try to piece together the things he had seen and heard.

Hardly knowing what he was doing, he wandered round the great pile till he came to the narrow entry he had once traversed, leading up from the river to the door of the house where he had seen Catesby and his companions at their mysterious toil. The house looked dark as night now. Not a single gleam penetrated the gloom. Already the last of the twilight had faded into night, but no ray of any kind shone from any of the casements.

Cuthbert stood looking thoughtfully up at the house, hardly knowing why he did so, his fancy running riot in his excited brain and conjuring up all manner of fantastic visions, when suddenly and silently the door opened. A gleam of light from behind showed in relief the figure of a tall man muffled in a cloak, a soft felt hat being drawn over the brow and effectually concealing the features; but one glance sufficed to convince Cuthbert that this cloaked and muffled individual was none other than the same tall dark man who had produced the holy water blessed by the Pope and had had it sprinkled around the spot where those mysterious men were at work in Percy's house. Filled with a burning curiosity that rendered him impervious to the thought of personal risk, Cuthbert first shrank into a dark recess, and then with hushed and noiseless footfall followed the tall figure in its walk.

The cloaked man walked quietly, but without any appearance of fear. He skirted round the great block of buildings of which the Houses of Parliament were composed, until he reached a door in the rear of that building, within a deep arch sunk a little way below the level of the ground, and this door he opened, but closed it after him, and locked it on the inside.

Unable to follow further, Cuthbert put his ear to the keyhole, and heard distinctly the sound of footsteps descending stone stairs till the sound changed to the unbarring of a lower door, and then all was silence.

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Cuthbert looked keenly around him, and soon made out that these steps must certainly lead down to the cellar beneath the Parliament Houses of which he had recently heard. That other cellar he had visited so many months before was close at hand—close to these great buildings; and this tall dark man seemed to have some mysterious connection with both.

What could it all mean? what did it mean? Cuthbert felt as though he were on the eve of some strange discovery, but what that discovery could be he could not guess.

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of approaching footfalls along the roadway, and he hastily stood upright and walked onwards to meet the advancing pedestrian. The man carried a light which he flashed in Cuthbert's face, and the youth saw that it was one of the men-at-arms on guard over these buildings.

"What are you doing here?" asked the man civilly, though in slightly peremptory fashion.

"I did not know that this road was anything but public," answered Cuthbert, with careless boldness. "I have walked in London streets before now, no man interfering with me."

"Have a care how and where you walk at night," returned the man, passing by without further comment. "There be many perils abroad in the streets—more than perchance you wot of."

Cuthbert thanked him for the hint, and went on his way. He would have liked well enough to linger till the tall man emerged again, but he saw that to do so would only excite suspicion.

Although it was quite dark by this time, it was not really late; for it was the last day of October save one, and masses of heavy cloud obscured the sky. Now and again a ray of moonlight glinted through these ragged masses, but for the rest it was profoundly dark in the narrow streets, and only a little lighter on the open river.

The tide was running in fast, with a strong cold easterly wind. Cuthbert saw that it would be hard work to row against it.

"Better wait for the ebb; it will not be long in coming now," he said to himself as he noted the height of the tide; and stepping into his boat, he pulled idly out into midstream, as being a safer place of waiting than the dark wharf, to find himself drifting up with the strong current, which he did not care to try to stem.

"Beware of the dark-flowing river!" spoke a voice within him; "beware of the black cellar!"

He started, for it almost seemed as though some one had spoken the words in his ear, and a little thrill of fear ran through him. But all was silent save for the wash of the

current as it bore him rapidly onwards, and he knew that the voice was one in his own head.

Upwards and upwards he drifted; was it by his own will, or not? He did not himself know, he could not have said. He only knew that a spell seemed upon him, that an intense desire had seized him to look once again upon that lonely house beside the river bank. He had no wish to try to obtain entrance there. He felt that he was treading the dark mazes of some unhallowed plot. But this very suspicion only increased his burning curiosity; and surely there could no harm come of one look at that dark and lonely place.

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No volition of his own was needed to carry him onwards; wind and tide did all that. He had merely to keep his place and steer his little bark up the wide river. He saw against the sky the great pile of Westminster. He had drifted almost across the river by that time. He was seated in the bow of the boat, just dipping an oar from time to time as it slipped along beneath the trees. And now the moon shone out for a few minutes clear and bright. It did not shine upon his own craft, gliding so stealthily beneath the bare trees that fringed the wall of the very house he had come to see; but it did gleam upon another wherry out in midstream, rowed by a strong man wrapped in a cloak, and directed straight for the same spot. Cuthbert started, and caught hold of a bough of a weeping willow, bringing his boat to a standstill in a place where the shadow was blackest. He had no wish to be found in this strange position. He would remain hidden until this other boat had landed at the steps. He would be hidden well where he was. He had better be perfectly silent, and so remain.

A sound of voices above his head warned him that he was not the only watcher, and for a moment he feared that, silent as had been his movements, his presence had been discovered. But some one spoke in anxious accents, and in that voice he recognized the clear and mellow tones of Robert Catesby. He was speaking in a low voice to some companion.

“If he comes not within a short while, I shall hold that all is lost. I fear me we did wrong to send him. That letter—that letter—that luckless letter! who can have been the writer?”

“Tresham, I fear me without doubt, albeit he denied it with such steadfast boldness. Would to heaven that fickle hound had never been admitted to our counsels! That was thy doing, Catesby.”

“Ay, and terribly do I repent me of it, Winter. I upbraid myself as bitterly as any can upbraid me for the folly. But hark—listen! I hear the plash of oars. See, there is a boat! It is he—it is Fawkes! I know him by his height and his strong action. Heaven be praised! All cannot yet be lost! Move upwards yet a few paces, and we will speak to him here alone before we take him within doors to the others.

“Guido Fawkes! Good Guy, is that verily thou?”

“Verily and in truth, my masters. Has the time seemed long?”

“Terribly long. How foundest thou all?”

“All well—all as I left it weeks ago. There has been no soul within. Gunpowder, faggots, iron bars, and stones—all are as before; and above, the coal and faggots carefully concealing all. Why this anxiety and fear, Catesby? it was not wont to be so with thee.”

“No; but I have something of terrible import to reveal to thee, good Guy. And first I must ask thy pardon for thus exposing thee to peril as this day I did. I sent thee on this mission of inspection; but I ought first to have told thee that we are in fear and trembling lest we have been betrayed!”

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“Betrayed!” echoed Fawkes with a fierce oath, “and by whom?”

“That we know not. But some days since, my Lord Mounteagle received a mysterious warning bidding him absent himself from this meeting of Parliament, for that a blow should then be struck, no man seeing who dealt it. Wherefore we fear—”

“Mounteagle!” cried Fawkes, interrupting fiercely; “then the traitor is yon false hound Tresham!”

“So we all thought till we charged him with it, and had he blenched or shrunk our daggers should have been buried in his heart!” answered Winter in low, fierce accents; “but he swore he knew naught of it, and that with so bold a front and so open an air that for very doubt of his guilt we could not smite him. There may be other traitors in the camp. There was that lad thou, or thy fool of a servant, Catesby, once brought amongst us. I liked it not then. He should not have been let go without solemn oath taken on pain of death. Trevlyn, methinks, was the name. I hear he has been seen in London again of late. Why does he haunt us? what does he suspect?”

“Tush! thou art dreaming. Trevlyn! why, that is a good name, and the lad knows nothing, and is, moreover, stanch.

“Guido, thou hast not said that thou dost pardon us for sending thee on so perilous an errand this day.”

“Thou needst not repent, Catesby. I should have adventured myself the same had I known all. I have sworn myself to this task, and I go not back to mine own country till all be accomplished.”

Chapter 23: Peril For Trevlyn.

Cuthbert stood at the door of the narrow house in Budge Row, seeking speech of the wise woman.

It was a blustering night—the first night in November. The wind howled and shrieked round the corners of the streets; the rain pattered down and splashed the garments of the few pedestrians who had braved the storm. It was but seven of the clock, yet Budge Row was dark and quiet as though midnight had settled down upon the city. Scarce any gleams of light filtered through the cracks in the shutters, and only the sound of a distant watchman’s cry broke the silence of the night.

Cuthbert had once before sought this house, but had knocked in vain for admittance. Either the wise woman was from home, or else she had no intention of receiving visitors. Since then his mind had been engrossed by other matters, and he had not thought again of Joanna’s charge concerning Esther. But recent mysterious

occurrences had made him desirous not only of telling her his own tale, but of seeking information from her; and here he stood in the wind and rain making request for admittance.

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Softly and silently the door swung open at last, and he saw before him the dark passage he had traversed a year before with Cherry, the dim light from above just guiding his steps as he moved. The same juggleries were repeated as on that occasion. The outer door swung back and bolted itself behind him. The invisible light wavered and flickered and showed him his way. The black cat appeared ready to dispute his entrance into the room till he had dropped his coin into the box; and when he entered the dim place where the wise woman ensconced herself, he saw her as before, seated behind the lamp which shed its light upon him, but left her face in deep shadow. All was precisely as it had been upon a former occasion—all but his reception by the wise woman herself.

That, however, was altogether different; for the moment she saw who her visitor was, she rose suddenly from her chair and exclaimed in excited tones:

“Cuthbert Trevlyn, why hast thou not come hither sooner?”

“I did, but could not find thee.”

She made an impatient exclamation.

“And thou wert content not to find me, and came not again and yet again! Foolish boy! Did not Joanna warn thee to seek me out and tell me all? I know well that she did. She is loyal and true. And so, boy, the lost treasure is found, and is safe beneath the roof of that house which shelters the honoured heads of the Wyverns?”

“Yes, it is all there.”

The old woman flung up her arms with a gesture of triumph.

“I knew it: I knew it I knew that the prophecy would fulfil itself, for all Miriam’s spite and Long Robin’s greed. Boy, thou hast done well, thou hast done very well. But thou hast been more bold than secret. Thou art suspected. Miriam has been here. She is raging like a lioness robbed of her whelps. She loved yon fierce man who called himself Long Robin, yet was neither husband of hers, still less her son, with a love more wild and fierce than thou wilt ever understand. She vows that she will be revenged. She vows that the Trevlyns shall yet smart. She suspects not thee alone, but all who bear the name. Boy, boy, why didst thou not seek me earlier?”

Cuthbert made no response. He was looking in amaze at this old woman, who had now come forth from her nook behind the table, and was speaking to him without any assumption of prophetic power, but as one anxious human creature to another. He saw in her a strange likeness to old Miriam, and to the dark gipsy queen; but he marvelled at the excitement she evinced, and the eager intensity of her gaze. It was so different from her aspect when last he had seen her, so much more natural and full of human concern and anxiety.

“I have looked for thee day by day. I said in my heart, surely thou wouldst come quickly. And now, in lieu of seeking safety and counsel, thou hast been running blindly into those very perils of which I warned thee long ago. As if it were not enough to have Tyrrel and all his crew, with old Miriam at their back, resolved to hunt thee down and wrest the treasure from thee!”

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Cuthbert started and looked intently at her.

“Miriam! Tyrrel! what can they know?”

“Miriam can piece together facts as well as I,” answered Esther in rapid tones; “and thou oughtest by this to know what power that gives to those who possess the gift. In brief, I will tell thee what I myself have learned from her and others. She missed Long Robin, waited for his return till despair took the place of expectation. She knew that one of two things had happened—either that he had made off with the treasure, or that he had been done to death in the forest by some secret foe. Burning with fear and fury, she caused search to be made. The grave was found where the body lay. Rage filled the hearts of all the tribe, for the strange old man was venerated and feared, albeit he was not greatly beloved; and as thou knowest, amongst our people an injury done to one is avenged by all. Thou hadst been seen in the forest, seen moving to and fro in mysterious fashion. Many had wondered what thy business was, but none had interfered; for thou wast known to be under the protection of Joanna, and the word of the queen is sacred. But now that may serve no longer to protect thee. Miriam has declared aloud that Robin was the keeper of the long-lost treasure, that he was hoarding it up in some secret spot, ready to divide it amongst the whole tribe when the moment should have come. In fervid words she described the golden hoard—the hoard which I know well that evil man meant to make all his own when the time came that he might escape from the jealous watch kept upon him by Miriam. He was but waiting for her death, which may not be far distant, since she is subject to strange seizures of the heart which defy all our skill in curing. Then would he have fled, and taken all the treasure with him. He would have shared the spoil with none, as Miriam well knows. But she is using her power and her half knowledge of the secret for her own ends, and one of those ends is—”

The old woman paused, looking straight at Cuthbert, who regarded her fixedly, and now asked in a low voice:

“Is what?”

“The destruction of the house of Trevlyn, root and branch.”

A gleam of angry defiance shone in his eyes.

“Still that mad hatred? But why should we fear her? Let her do her worst!”

Esther raised a warning hand.

“Peace, boy!” she said; “be not so full of recklessness and scorn. Miriam is an adversary not to be despised. Miriam is sworn to the task of vengeance upon thy

house. She will not let this fresh deed of thine pass without striving might and main to fulfil that vengeance which thou hast now made void."

"Made void?"

"Ay, by the finding of the treasure. She is assured that this is what thou hast done. She has persuaded Tyrrel and his band of it, and all are resolved to find it for themselves. She is acting with the craftiness of her nature. She has persuaded them that all the Trevlyns are in the golden secret. Wherefore vengeance is not directed against thee alone, but against all who bear thy name—Sir Richard and his son, who are in this city now."

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Cuthbert drew his brows together in a frown.

“They know naught of it,” he said hastily.

“That may be; but they are Trevlyns, and that is enough for Miriam. It is not the gold she covets; it is vengeance upon all who bear that name. She stirs the avarice and cupidity of others, that they may do the work she wishes done. And she works in other dark ways, too. She has tools which few suspect, and she uses them for her own ends without scruple. And thou, foolish boy, blind and self willed as thou art, unheeding my warnings, hast played into her hands; and now others as well as thyself may be brought into sore peril through thine own foolhardy recklessness.”

The old woman’s eyes were gleaming brightly. They were fixed upon Cuthbert with keen intensity. He felt himself change colour beneath their glance, and he answered with some uneasiness:

“What hast thou to chide me with? Wherein have I been guilty of recklessness that may be hurtful to others?”

“Did I not charge thee to beware the dark-flowing river; to avoid the black cellar; to have no dealings with strange men; to have the courage to say nay to what was asked of thee? Hast. thou avoided these perils? No! thou hast been led on by thy reckless hardihood and insensate curiosity. Hast thou said no to what has been asked of thee! No! thou hast ever done the things required of thee, making excuse to forget warnings and disobey those who have counselled thee for thy good. And what has come of it? Verily, that the name of Trevlyn has been whispered amongst the names of traitors suspected of foul crimes, and that thine own kindred now stand in dire peril from thine own defiant hardihood.”

Cuthbert started and made a step forward.

“Woman, what meanest thou?” he asked with breathless eagerness. “I understand not the meaning of thy words.”

Esther continued to gaze at him with her bright keen eyes.

“Understandest thou not that there be on foot at this very moment a vile plot for the destruction at one blow of the King, the nobles, and the whole house of his Peers—a plot to blow them all into the air at the moment of their assembly upon the fifth day of this month?”

Cuthbert recoiled in horror. A sudden illumination came upon him. He put together chance words dropped, expressions used, things he had seen as well as what he had heard, and his face grew pale with conflicting emotions and his extreme bewilderment.

“What?” he gasped; “is that what it means? Is that the hideous deed to be done? Great Heavens protect us from such men, if it has come to that!

“How knowest thou this thing?” he added, turning almost fiercely upon the old woman, who was still regarding him steadily. “If it be as thou sayest, sure such a fearful secret would be held sacred from all.”

Esther smiled her strange smile.

“Secrets known to many have a wondrous fashion of leaking out. And, moreover, the wise woman has means thou knowest naught of for learning the things concealed from the world. Cuthbert Trevlyn, look back, search thy memory, and thou wilt surely know that I have spoken naught but the truth. If thou art not one of them, thou knowest their dark secrets; thou canst not deny it!”

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Again he recoiled from her.

“I know their secrets! I one of them! Woman, dost thou believe this vile thing of me?

“No, I believe it not. I know that thou hast but let thyself be led into dire peril through that foolish, generous weakness of youth and thy Trevlyn blood, against which I have warned thee—and warned thee in vain. But dost thou think thou canst despise the warnings of the wise woman and escape deadly peril? Cuthbert Trevlyn, listen to me and heed me well. This thing is known—is known in high places. The King and his counsellors have had intelligence thereof. The deed of darkness will be frustrated, and heads will fall beneath the axe of the executioner. Already whispers are going abroad—already the guilty ones are watched and spied upon; and with the guilty there are those suspected who know naught of this vile deed. Shall I say more, or can thine own quick wits supply the rest?”

Cuthbert had turned a little pale. His eyes were fixed upon this woman’s face.

“Tell me all,” he said hoarsely. “What dost thou mean by these dark sayings?”

“I mean,” she answered, in clear low tones, “that there is peril for Trevlyn in this thing. Thine own rashness, Miriam’s spite and quickness of wit to avail herself of every trifling matter that passes, the presence in London of Sir Richard and his son at this time, the old tradition surrounding the name of Trevlyn—all are helping on the work; all are pointing in one direction. Rash boy, thou hast been seen with Father Urban in the streets—a Jesuit, a seminary priest, a man suspected of many plots and many daring acts of courage and cunning. Thou art suspected to have been concerned in his escape one dark and foggy night, when thou wert on the river in thy wherry; and he must have been taken on board some such craft. Thou hast been seen with others who are suspected of being mixed up in this business. Thou hast appeared within the city walls when they appeared; when they were absent thou wast absent likewise. Thou wouldst not heed warnings when yet there was time; thou must now take double heed to thy steps—”

“Thou spokest of Sir Richard and his son but now,” cried Cuthbert, interrupting hastily. “For myself, I must take the consequences of my rashness. The fault is mine, and if harm comes to me I can bear it; but if others have been imperilled through me, I should never forgive myself. Tell me plainly if this has been so; keep me not in suspense! How can one word be breathed against the loyalty of a man faithful and true as Sir Richard, and a stanch Protestant to boot?”

The old woman shook her head meaningly.

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“A man’s character and reputation and life may too easily be whispered away in these evil times. But listen to me, Cuthbert Trevlyn, and all may yet be well. Thou hast been noted, spied upon, observed. There be those who have seen thee in strange places and strange company, and it behoves thee to look well to thyself. But for thy kinsmen, methinks that no whisper regarding them has as yet reached high quarters. As thou sayest, Sir Richard’s loyalty is known, and men will not easily believe such ill of him. Yet he were best to be gone. Miriam is at work. Miriam has tools that even I wot not of, and she hates the head of Trevlyn’s house with a bitter and undying hatred. Let but this thing be known—as known it will be to all the world in a few more days—and she will leave no stone unturned to overwhelm him in the ruin that must then fall upon so many. Vengeance such as that would be dear to her heart. She would weave her web right skilfully to entrap his unsuspecting steps. Wherefore let him begone—let all who bear the name of Trevlyn begone, and that right speedily. Flight will not be thought flight now; for this thing is as yet a profound secret, and thou must not breathe a word that I have spoken to thee abroad, else thou mayest do harm of which thou little reckest. Let him go speedily; and go thou likewise, and do not tarry. If thou wouldst undo the harm thy rashness has well-nigh brought to thy kinsfolk, carry them this warning, and make them listen.”

“That will I do right speedily,” answered Cuthbert, whose heart was beating high with excitement and agitation. “Did harm befall them through deed of mine, I should never forgive myself.”

“Go then,” answered Esther; “go, and be thou cautious and wary. Remember thou hast many foes, and that the hour of peril darkens over this land. Strange things will be heard and seen ere many days have passed. Take heed that thou be far away from hence ere the day of reckoning comes. Take heed that Miriam’s vow of vengeance be not accomplished, and that the house of Trevlyn be drawn into the vortex!”

Cuthbert descended the stairs with uncertain steps, his mind in a whirl of conflicting feelings. He believed that Esther was sincere in her desire for the welfare of the house of Trevlyn. He trusted her, and he saw that she had in some way or another become possessed of information concerning himself of a very particular and intimate kind. This being so, it was easy to believe that she had discovered other matters of hidden import; and he was quite disposed to give her credit for dealings in magic and charms which should show her the things that were to be.

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The horror of the knowledge of this plot was upon him as he went forth into the streets and felt the keen air and the cold rain dashing in his face. He could not doubt the truth of Esther's words. All he had seen and heard tallied too well with it to leave in his mind any room for doubt. A plot of some sort he had always suspected—he would have been foolish indeed to have come to any other conclusion; but a plot of such malignity and such diabolical scope would never have presented itself to his mind. He found it hard to believe that such a terrible thing could be menaced against the King and the nobles of the land, many amongst whom must surely be of the same faith as those conspirators who were plotting in the dark.

And then the peril that menaced the Trevlyns—what of that? Cuthbert remembered the looks bent upon him a few days back by the men-at-arms in the Parliament House. He remembered the light of the sentry flashing in his face as he turned away from the door in at which the tall man they called Guido Fawkes had vanished but a few moments before. He knew that he had been observed more than once with some attention as he had stepped on board his wherry, or had brought it up to the mooring place. Could it be that he was really watched and suspected? It seemed like it, indeed. And what was more serious still, his kinsmen were like to fall under suspicion through his rash disregard of warnings.

For himself Cuthbert cared comparatively little—perhaps rather too little—for he possessed a strong dash of his father's stubbornness of disposition; and in him the Trevlyn courage was intermingled with a good deal of absolute rashness and hardihood; but the thought that Sir Richard and his family should suffer for his sake was intolerable. That must at all cost be prevented. Surely he could warn them and avert the danger.

As the youth walked rapidly westward through the miry streets, he was revolving the situation rapidly in his mind, and at last he reached a conclusion which he muttered aloud as he went.

"That will be the best: I will to mine uncle and Philip and tell them that. It will make them hasten away at once; but I will not go with them. If I am suspected I must not be seen with them, nor seem to have dealings with them. If they leave town and I remain, none will suspect that I have warned them and sent them forth. To fly with them would at once raise such thoughts. Here must I remain, and let myself be seen abroad, so will they the better escape Miriam's evil intent. Sir Richard has friends at Court. Lord Andover and others will speak for him if need be. I doubt me much, he being quietly gone, whether any will dare to strive to bring his name into disgrace. There be those to find who are the guilty ones. Sure they may let the innocent go free. As for me, I will not flee. I would fain see the end of this matter. And perchance I might even warn Master Robert Catesby of the peril that hangs over his head. Strange how so gentle and courteous a gentleman can sell himself to a work of such devilish wickedness!"

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Divided betwixt horror of the deed and pity for the conspirators who had been practically discovered and frustrated in their evil work, and who had doubtless persuaded themselves and been persuaded by their ghostly advisers that it was an act of virtue and justice and right, Cuthbert walked on, wondering more and more at the strange vagaries of human conscience, and at the extraordinary self delusion possible to the sons of the Romish faction.

It was long since he had decided definitely and of resolute conviction to cast in his lot with those who held the Reformed faith; but had he ever had any secret doubts and leanings towards the faith in which he had been reared, the revelations of that night would have proved enough for him. He knew—none better—that this diabolic deed was planned and executed with the full consent, approbation, and blessing of the Romanist priests, and might even be known to the Pope himself. Sorrowful and indignant as Cuthbert had often been for the persecuted Romanists, and keenly as his sympathies would have been stirred had they risen in man-like fashion to claim liberty of conscience and fight boldly for the cause in which their hearts were bound up, he could regard a plot like this with nothing but loathing and horror. He wondered that men could be found willing to sell themselves to such iniquity. Yet he knew, from what he had himself seen, that these were no mere hirelings bought over with money to do this thing, but that they were gentlemen, most of them of noble birth and large means, all of them actuated by motives of devotion and religious enthusiasm; and that they did not prize their own lives or regard them as in any way precious, but would gladly offer them up so that this thing might be accomplished.

Well, it was a mystery, and one that he could not fathom. He could only feel thankful that no compulsion lay upon him to make known what he had seen and heard. His word had been pledged to Catesby and Father Urban, and how to have broken it he knew not. But there was no call for him even to think of this. It was not he who had discovered this strange plot. The knowledge of it was already with the King and his ministers. The conspirators themselves were half aware of this; Cuthbert well remembered the words of fear concerning some letter spoken in the lonely garden at Lambeth but a couple of days back.

How dared they, knowing so much, pursue their dark scheme? The youth shuddered as he marvelled at them. Did they believe themselves yet secure? What a fearful thing security such as that might become! Cuthbert longed to warn them, yet feared to intermeddle further in such a matter. And at least his first business lay in the warning he must instantly convey to Sir Richard, and that without revealing more of the truth than was absolutely necessary. Cuthbert was worldly wise enough to be well aware that the greatest protection his kinsmen could have against suspicion was absolute ignorance of the matter of which they stood suspected.

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Sir Richard was absent when Cuthbert asked for him, but his son was at home, and the visitor was ushered into a room where Philip and Culverhouse were sitting together conversing by the glow of a bright fire of sea coal.

He was made very welcome by his cousin, and quickly plunged into the matter in hand.

“Philip,” he said, “I have come to ask whether the business that has brought you to town is yet accomplished.”

“Yes, verily,” answered Philip, surprised. “We came to talk of Kate’s rash marriage with Culverhouse there, and if it was such as might safely be ignored. My Lord and Lady of Andover, however, had adjudged that their son is too far pledged to draw back, and that for the sake of the lady’s honour and happiness they must be held to be solemnly betrothed. Their punishment will be the long waiting ere they may truly wed; but Culverhouse means to tell all his tale in the ears of the Prince of Wales, and he holds that the kindly youth will doubtless give him some post about his royal person that may be a stepping stone to further wealth and advancement.”

“My Lord Culverhouse need scarce do that,” said Cuthbert, speaking in short, abrupt sentences. “Let me tell my news in a few words. The lost treasure of Trevlyn is found. It is hidden in the Cross Way House, where Mistress Kate and my sister Petronella are at this moment sheltering. It was thought the safest spot, for that the gipsies and the robbers of the road alike think kindly of the ladies of the Wyvern family, and hold their abode sacred—”

Cuthbert was at this moment arrested by a storm of questions and eager exclamations, which he had some small trouble in answering or setting aside. When he had so far satisfied his eager listeners as to be able to take up the thread of what he was saying, he went on in the same quick, abrupt fashion as before.

“I thought the treasure safe when I hid it there; but I have had a warning this night from one who knows well the temper of the gipsy folk. I hear that suspicion has been aroused in the tribe—that there is a resolve abroad to win it back. There is a man called Tyrrel, a notable highway robber, who has vowed to regain it for himself and his men. If this be so, I fear me that even the sanctuary of the Wyvern House will not suffice. In that house there are but women and a few old men—servants, little able to withstand a concerted attack. I have heard this news but tonight, and I have come straight on to tell thee, Philip. If your business in London be done, why shouldst not thou and thy father return forthwith home, and abide awhile at the Cross Way House, to see what fares there, and to protect the household should Tyrrel and his men attack? Methinks that they may stand in need of the presence of kinsmen at such a time as that. I hear that ill is meant by these fierce men to all who bear the name of Trevlyn. Two of the women within those doors bear that name; wherefore—”

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But Cuthbert had no need to complete his sentence; both young men had started at once to their feet.

“Kate in peril!” cried Culverhouse, between his shut teeth; “then verily her husband must find his way to her side.”

“Petronella at the Cross Way House, exposed to alarm and attack!” cried Philip; “then must I be there to shelter and protect her.”

“We will forth this very night!” cried Culverhouse. “I will to the house and get ready my servants to accompany me.”

“I will make all preparation here!” echoed Philip, “and only await my father’s return.

“Cuthbert, thinkest thou that they are in peril this very night? Speak; tell us all!”

“I trow not,” answered Cuthbert with some decision, knowing that his object was well accomplished and that the Trevlyns would make all speed to leave London, yet scarcely himself wishing them to hurry off in the night like fugitives in fear for themselves. “I am certain sure that no immediate peril hangs over them, or I should have been more urgently warned. I would not have you hasten thus. I trow it would more alarm the ladies to be aroused by you in the middle of the night than to see you come riding thither later in the day on the morrow. Surely it would be better to wait for day. The night is black and tempestuous; it will be hard to find the road. Tomorrow with the first of the sunlight you may well ride forth.”

Culverhouse and Philip both saw the soundness and reasonableness of this counsel, and knew that their respective fathers would both concur in this opinion, though their own impatience chafed at the delay.

“And thou—what wilt thou do thyself, Cuthbert?” asked Philip; “come with us to Cross Way House?”

Cuthbert hesitated a few moments, debating within himself what were best. He had been warned on the one hand to flee the forest, on the other to flee the city. If his mysterious gipsy friends were right, for him there was peril in both places. But it certainly seemed to him that his own presence and company would add to the perils of his kinsmen; and his decision was speedily taken.

“I hope to join you there anon,” he said; “but I have something set my heart upon seeing this grand pageant when his Majesty shall open his Parliament on the fifth. Methinks I will stay for that, and then perchance I will forth to the Cross Way House.”

He looked keenly at both his companions as he spoke, but neither face wore the least look of any secret intelligence. He was certain that no whisper of the plot had reached their ears.

“Ay, do so, and come and tell us all,” said Culverhouse gaily. “I had thought to be there myself, but I must to my Kate’s side.

“Philip, thy father will be something loath to leave London ere that day. Thinkest thou that thou canst persuade him?”

“I trow I can,” answered Philip; and then they both turned on Cuthbert, asking him for a more detailed account of his search after and his discovery of the lost treasure, hanging with eager interest on his words.

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It was late ere he left their lodgings, and the family at the bridge house had retired to rest. He found his way to his room; but little sleep visited his eyes that night, and the fitful dreams which came to him betwixt waking and sleeping seemed charged with ominous warnings.

Sir Richard Trevlyn heard his son's story in great surprise, but he hesitated not a moment as to the course of action they must pursue.

"I would it had been brought to Trevlyn Chase. We have a household of men there, and could well defy these rogues of the road. But Cross Way House has no such defences, and it is tenanted mainly by helpless women, and we must lose no time in going to their assistance. I have heard long since of this man—Tyrrel. He is a notable outlaw, and there is a price upon his head. The forest will be well freed of him if we can overthrow him. He has owed his safety again and again to his reckless riding and the alliance and good fellowship he has with the forest gipsies. It is time the whole brood were smoked out from their hiding places. They want destroying, root and branch!"

Sir Richard found it easier to remember that the treasure had been stolen and hidden by the gipsy people than that it had been restored partly through the assistance of the woman Joanna, the queen. However, there was little time for further talk. The night was already advanced, and on the morrow they were to make as early a start as was practicable.

Sir Richard had not many servants of his own, but Culverhouse could bring a good dozen men with him. Unluckily the storm raged all through the earlier hours of the following day, and it was not till noon that a start could be made. However, the seventeen miles' ride could be easily made before dark, although the roads were deep in mud, and travelling in the open country was both tedious and bad.

The last of the scattered hamlets had been passed. The sun glowed red before them in an angry, lowering sky. Sir Richard and his son and Lord Culverhouse paused on the brow of the ridge to look both before and behind. They had in their impatience outridden their servants, who, less well mounted, found some difficulty in spurring along the deep mire of the ill-made roads. They could but just see them on the horizon of the last ridge, coming onwards at an even jog trot, which seemed the swiftest pace they aspired to.

Before lay the long waste of forest—trees and heather intermixed in long stretches alternating one with the other. A good seven miles lay between them and their destination, and the sun was already nearing the horizon, and would soon dip behind it.

"We must push on something faster," said Culverhouse impatiently, "if we are to reach Cross Way House before dark."

“We have already far outridden our men,” said Sir Richard, frowning slightly as he turned his head to look over his shoulder; “and this is the worst part of the road before us.”

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“But we are well mounted and well armed,” urged Culverhouse, “and if we wait for the men we shall lose the rest of the daylight. Surely if there be any footpads about, the fact that we are followed by so goodly a train will serve to scare them away. And we have no valuables upon our persons. They will get cold steel and hot lead for their pains, an they venture to molest us, instead of silver or gold.”

“Very true,” said Philip, who was as eager as his cousin and endued with full share of Trevlyn courage and impetuosity; “we can never wait till those sluggards have come up. The fault is not theirs: they are not so well mounted as ourselves. We shall never keep our horses to their pace, try we never so hard.”

“Forward then, and let us ride as fast as our steeds can carry us!” said Sir Richard with a smile; “for if we wait not for our men, the daylight is our best friend. We are all familiar with the road, and our horses likewise. Forward! and all eyes keep a sharp lookout to left and right. At least we will not be set upon unawares.”

Putting spurs to their horses very gladly, the younger men placed themselves one on each side of Sir Richard, and the good horses settled themselves to a steady hand gallop, which was the best and surest pace for getting over those rough muddy roads.

Three miles had been safely traversed. Absolute solitude and silence seemed to reign throughout the woodland tracks. But the darkest of the forest still lay ahead of them, and the red ball of the sun had just dipped behind the ridge in front.

“It will be dark beneath the trees,” said Sir Richard; “have a care, lads, how you ride.

“Philip, thine eyes are better than mine. Dost thou see aught there to the right of the road, just beneath that great oak?”

Philip had seen already, and his answer was quickly spoken.

“They be horsemen,” he said—“horsemen drawn up and, as it were, awaiting us. I fear me we shall not pass without molestation. But my counsel is not to pause, rather to gallop still on steadily, as though we saw them not. But let us be ready; and if they dare to molest us, let us with one accord discharge our pieces in their faces. That will disconcert them for a moment, and we may perchance outride them. We are but three miles and a half from Cross Way House. I trow we can make shift to reach its friendly shelter; and once there we shall be safe.”

“It is useless to pause now,” answered Sir Richard, who was always cool and self possessed in moments of real peril. “Our men are a mile behind, and to hesitate would be to lose all. A bold front is our greatest safeguard. We are all well skilled in the use of arms. Be watchful and vigilant, and make you sure that every shot and every stroke will

tell. We have need of all our strength, if we are attacked. But they may let us pass unmolested; they may guess that our followers are behind."

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Culverhouse said nothing, but he set his teeth hard and his eyes flashed ominously. He had never tasted real warfare before, and it seemed to fire the blood in his veins and send it tingling through his body. Each rider so shifted his carbine that it could be readily used at a moment's notice.

And now they had reached the forest aisle. Their good horses, still galloping freely and easily, bore them rapidly onwards. They had almost reached that silent, motionless band awaiting them with sinister quietude. In another moment they would have passed them, when, on a sudden, a voice rang out clear and sharp through the still air:

"Halt! stand! Stand, or we fire!"

"Ride on and fire!" said Sir Richard in calm tones; and the next moment the echoes were awakened by three sharp reports of firearms and by a yell—three yells—of human rage and pain. A roar of execration and menace arose from twenty throats, and twenty blades gleamed brightly in the gathering dusk. But already the riders had passed the little band, sweeping by before they were well aware of it. And as they did so, they heard a voice exclaim, sharpened by rage and pain:

"It is they—it is our foes! I knew it—I knew it! Those are the Trevlyn brood that we were warned would pass—the false sire and his son and nephew. After them, my men! Let them not escape your vengeance! Take them, or slay them, but let them not escape! They have the treasure. We will have them. The vengeance of the gipsy tribe shall be consummated! They shall not make it void. They shall give life for life—blood for blood!"

"They shall! they shall! They shall not escape us. We will be avenged, and the red gold shall be our reward!"

Sir Richard set his teeth as he heard these words, and dug his spurs into the sides of his horse, causing the noble animal, who seemed to share his master's knowledge of the deadly peril they were in, to spring forward with redoubled speed.

"We must save ourselves by flight; they are six to one!" he said in low tones to his companions, who kept pace for pace at his side. "It will be a race for life; and if we are beaten, all we can do is to sell our lives as dearly as may be. It is not robbery alone, it is vengeance, the old grudge against the Trevlyns. But if we can but make Cross Way House ere we are outridden, we may save ourselves yet."

Chapter 24: Kate's Courage.

Lady Humbert had left the Cross Way House for a three days' visit to a sick relative who had sent an urgent message to her. Mistress Dowsabel remained in charge of the

house and its small establishment, lessened considerably by the removal of four of the men servants who had attended their mistress on her journey.

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Mistress Dowsabel would gladly have accompanied her sister, for she was always nervous and ill at ease in her absence, but she was withheld by two considerations. In the first place, she was suffering from what was then termed a rheum, which we should call a bad cold in the head, so that the idea of a wet cold journey of some hours' duration was exceedingly unwelcome; in the second, it was not thought seemly by either sister that the young girls, their guests, should be left in the house without some guardian and protector; and Mistress Dowsabel therefore decided to put her fears on one side and remain in charge.

"And beside, what is there to fear?" Lady Humbert had said, in her decisive and cheery fashion. "We are quiet and peaceable folks, and have naught to dread either at home or abroad. I shall strive to be but three nights absent; and our merry Kate will uphold thy spirits, sister, till my return. Thou wilt be better by the fireside than journeying in the saddle this tempestuous weather."

This fact was self evident, and Mistress Dowsabel had no desire to leave the fireside.

"I must e'en do the best I can without thee, sister," she said. "I doubt not my fears be foolish. I will strive that the girls be not affected thereby."

"I trow it would be no easy matter to teach them to Kate," said Lady Humbert with a smile. "She has all the spirit of Wyvern and Trevlyn combined. She will be a stanch protector for thee, Dowsabel, if thou art troubled by strange noises in the wainscot, or by the barking of the dogs without."

"Thou thinkest me a sad coward, sister; and so perchance I am," said meek Mistress Dowsabel. "But if ever thou art absent from the house, I am beset by a thousand fears that assail me not at any other time. My heart is heavy as lead within me now."

But Lady Humbert could not delay her journey on that account. She said something equivalent to "Fiddle dee dee!" and hastened forward her preparations with her customary energy. Kate flitted about and chattered merrily to her, having won her way by that time to a very soft spot in the heart of her ancient kinswoman.

"I am glad to leave thee with thy aunt Dowsabel, child," said Lady Humbert before she left. "Ellen will read to her and see to her possets and her little fire-side comforts; but thou wilt assist her to overlook the household and servants, and cheer up her spirits and her courage if either should flag. She is strangely timid when I am not by. Thou must do what thou canst to keep away her fears."

"Fears!" echoed Kate, laughing; "why, wherefore should we fear?"

"There is small cause, but Dowsabel is by nature timorous, and she will lean on thee, child though thou art, when I am gone. There be certain charges I would lay upon thee.

The men will be gone, all but old Thomas within doors and Joshua without; wherefore I will ask thee to go round the house thyself at dusk each eve, and see that all bolts and bars be securely drawn. That is Andrew's work, but he will be with me. Dyson and thou hadst better go together—or thou and Cherry. Thou wilt not be afraid of such a task?"

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“Afraid? marry no! Cherry and I will do it gladly. She is a merry-hearted lassie, and I like her well. Is there aught else, my lady aunt?”

Lady Humbert, standing beside the fire and drawing on her riding gloves, looked into Kate’s bright face with a thoughtful smile.

“If I could trust thy discretion as I trust thy courage and sense, my giddy-pated maiden, there is one more charge I would lay upon thee.”

The light of laughter in Kate’s eyes changed suddenly to something deeper and graver. She came one step nearer and laid her hand on Lady Humbert’s arm.

“Try me,” she said simply. “Methinks I am not so giddy as they deem me. I have thought, I have suffered, I have been forced to possess my soul in patience. Try and see if I may not be trusted in this thing.”

Lady Humbert gazed a moment into the clear eyes, and then said:

“I will try thee, child. It is no such heavy charge I would lay upon thee, yet it is one that thy aunt Dowsabel would fear to undertake. She would fain close the doors of the Cross Way House against all strangers and wayfarers who come to them in the absence of the mistress; but that is not my wish. Dost thou know, child, the name the Cross Way House has ever held with those who fare through the forest tracks?”

“I have heard it spoken of as a place where none in need is ever turned away,” answered Kate.

“Ay, and so it was in those good old days when Wyverns held open house here, and were beloved from far and near. Alas! those good old days are passed away; for our fortunes are fallen, and we have no longer the power to entertain in such bounteous fashion. And yet I have striven, as thou hast doubtless seen, that the poor, the aged, the sick, and the needy are never turned from these doors without bite or sup to cheer their hearts and send them rejoicing on their way. Strange persons come to the house from time to time; but all are admitted to such good cheer as is ours to offer, and never has my hospitality been abused. Fugitives from the robbers of the road have been admitted here; yet never has this lone house been attacked. Wounded robbers have sought shelter here, bleeding nigh to death, and their wounds have been dressed by these hands, and their lives saved through our ministrations. To the cry of poverty or distress the doors have ever opened, be the distressed one worthy or no. Never have we had cause to regret what we have done for evil men or good. Never has our hospitality been repaid by treachery or deceit.”

“And now?” asked Kate as Lady Humbert paused.

“Now my timid sister would have the doors closed for the days that I am absent and the men with me. She says she fears for the treasure. She says there is more peril now than of old. She may be right; but I see not why the danger be greater, since none know the secret save those who are pledged to keep it, and it goes against me that the traditions of the house should be broken. Can I trust thee, Kate, to take my place in this? Wilt thou strive to still thy aunt’s fears and keep watch over all who come and go, that our doors may still open to the poor, whilst no needless terrors be inflicted on the timid women who will be forced to keep guard alone?”

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“I will gladly strive to do all I may,” answered Kate, who had been Lady Humbert’s companion now long enough to know much of her methods.

“It may well be that none will come,” said Lady Humbert cheerfully, with a smile and a nod of approval. “These be ill days for travellers, and in the winter season few pass this way. But such as do seek shelter from the storm or from hunger or peril must not be turned away disappointed. Look to it, Kate. I trust that matter to thee. I shall ask thee for the account of thy stewardship on my return.”

And then the mistress of the house gathered her train together and set forth, riding her steady old horse as fearlessly as though she had been fifty years younger, and nodding a brisk farewell all round as she turned out of the gate upon the highway so close at hand.

Mistress Dowsabel wept feebly for a short while, and seemed disposed to start and tremble at every sound. But Petronella got a book and settled herself to read to her, whilst she forgot her fears in the intricacies of her well-beloved tapestry work. As for Kate, she called to Cherry, and began to set about those household duties which the mistress of the house had given into her charge, so that the timid invalid might be spared all trouble and anxiety.

Cherry was a very happy girl in those days. Her position in that household was slightly anomalous, and at first it had been a little difficult to find the right niche for her. As the niece of Dyson, who had summoned her thither to act in the capacity of lady’s maid, her place would by rights have been the servants’ hall and kitchen; but then, as Kate had seen at once, it would scarce be right for Cuthbert Trevlyn’s future wife to take so lowly a station as that of a serving wench.

Cuthbert was no longer the impecunious son of Nicholas Trevlyn, dependent upon his own wit and energy for the place he might hold in the world. He was the finder of that vast hoard of lost treasure, which had proved so far more valuable than the most sanguine hopes had pictured. By every rule of right and justice a large share of this treasure should come to him. He would be a man of wealth and station; and it had been openly announced by these sisters of the house of Wyvern that they intended to make him their heir. They had taken a great liking to him. They had no near kindred of their own. He was the grandson of one of the Wyverns, and a degree nearer them than the other Trevlyns, so they were quite resolved upon this step.

So when Kate, with the courage and frankness inherent in her nature, had told the old ladies of Cuthbert’s betrothal, Petronella adding all she knew of the constancy of her brother’s attachment to Martin Holt’s daughter, Lady Humbert recognized in a moment that it would not do to treat the girl as a mere dependent. She must be admitted to some other position, and trained for that station in life to which her marriage would entitle her.

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Lady Humbert had all the class exclusiveness of her race; but she was a large-hearted woman to boot, and had an uncommon share of common sense. She would have been glad had Cuthbert's choice fallen elsewhere; but as it had not done so, and as Cherry was as faithful to him as he to her, there was only one thing to be done, and that was to make the best of the matter, and strive to see the best side only. The girl must be admitted to the position of companion to Petronella and Kate. She must be taught the refinements of life in another station, and gradually fitted for the life that lay before her.

It had been a great relief to find the girl so pretty, so gentle in her ways, so eager to please, so naturally dainty and particular. Cherry had quick apprehension and ready adaptability of nature. She took to the new ways like a duck to the water. She had a sweet voice and a refined fashion of speaking. In a very short while she looked as much at home in the presence of the ladies as Petronella herself. Kate found indeed that the city-bred maiden was more advanced in many things than the recluse of the Gate House. She set herself busily to the task of drilling both her companions in the arts of dancing, deportment, the use of the globes, and of playing upon the harpsichord; and found in both apt and eager pupils. Both girls had much natural grace and a great desire to improve themselves. Petronella was by nature dreamy and studious, whilst Cherry was all life, brightness, and vivacity. She and Kate gradually drew together, and would spend hours rambling in the extensive gardens and shrubberies behind the house, or riding out, with Andrew in attendance, through some of the forest tracks.

Petronella, on the other hand, preferred remaining at home, reading to the elderly ladies, and being by them instructed in many matters of political and religious import. Her mind was rapidly enlarging. She was unconsciously fitting herself daily more and more to be Philip's wife; whilst their very differences seemed to draw the three girls more closely together, and they felt by this time like sisters as well as companions.

Lady Humbert's absence was a matter of some excitement to Kate and Cherry, upon whom many small duties now devolved.

The house certainly felt lonely with so many of its ordinary inhabitants absent. The great empty rooms were kept strictly locked. The gates in front of the house were likewise locked by day as well as night, and only the small door at the back was to be opened until the return of the mistress. So the timid Dowsabel had decreed; and she had directed that the keys of the outer doors should be brought to her; and by day they were laid in her sight upon the chimney ledge, whilst at night they were placed beneath her pillow. Kate made a wry face, but did not otherwise protest. Time was passing quietly by, and there seemed little probability that their tranquillity would be disturbed.

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“I would fain wish for some small adventure in Lady Humbert’s absence, just to show that she has not put her faith in us in vain!” said Kate, as the girls sought their couch on the second night of the mistress’s absence. “There has not been so much as a beggar to the gate. These storms of wind and rain seem to keep all within doors.”

“I fear me I am but a coward,” answered Petronella, “for I am glad when night follows day and there be naught to alarm us. Perchance sitting with our aunt Dowsabel so much, I learn somewhat of her fears from her.”

“A truce to fear!” cried Kate, as she unbound her hair and tossed the heavy mane out of her eyes and over her shoulders. “Would that we lived in days when women might do and dare somewhat for those they loved, or for their country! I should love to have to hold this house against a rabble of hooting foes!”

“So should not I,” answered Petronella. “I love not strife and warfare; I am for quietude and peace,” and she smiled into Kate’s flushed face, whilst Cherry looked from one to the other, scarce knowing with which she sided.

She had something of Kate’s daring, and dearly admired it in her; but she shared in part Petronella’s shrinking from strife and danger, a shrinking that to Kate was inexplicable.

The night came and went in quietness and peace. The day passed without any event. Kate paced impatiently up and down the big hall as the sun went down in red and gold, sullen and lowering as it neared the horizon, but shining to the last. She had not been beyond the limits of the garden since Lady Humbert had gone. Now it seemed as if a restless fit had come upon her, and grasping Cherry by the arm, she cried:

“Let us go into the long gallery overhead and dance—dance—dance! My feet are fairly aching for some exercise. Come thou and dance with me.”

Kate’s word was almost always law to Cherry, though she thought it a dreary place to select just at this hour of approaching darkness. Still, there would be a little light glimmering in through that long row of windows, and with Kate who would be afraid?

The key was in the door. The polished boards of the long ballroom lay gleaming with ghostly shimmer in the fading light. The pictures on the walls seemed to stare at the two intruders with cold displeasure. Cherry shivered slightly as the chill struck her. It seemed to her as if these stately knights and dames themselves must surely come down from their frames at such an hour as this; and silently disport themselves in this long gallery. She was glad to feel Kate’s arm about her as she commenced circling round and round in her light and airy fashion. As the warm blood began tingling in their veins the pace grew faster and faster, and Cherry’s chilliness and fear alike left her. Up and down, round and round, flew the light girlish feet. The exercise was delightful to both after the inaction of two long days. Up and down, round and round, as though they

would never tire; and as they danced the twilight changed to night, and only glimmering moonbeams fell within the row of windows, lighted the long gallery, and fell upon the flickering figures of the two girls.

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But their eyes had grown used to the darkness, and they heeded it not. Cherry's thoughts had flown off to Cuthbert, Kate's to Culverhouse. The rapid exercise stimulated thought, and both hearts beat high with the glowing hope of youth. When at last they paused, laughing and breathless, at the upper end of the long room, their eyes were shining brightly, there was a vivid colour in their checks. They only wished to gather breath and then on again.

"It is hot—it is stifling!" cried Kate, as she threw back her tumbled hair. "I must have air—air! I will open this window; we can look out such a way from it. O Cherry, think—this big window looks straight out towards London! Ah, why are not our eyes strong enough to see our loved ones there!"

Cherry laughed and blushed in the darkness, and Kate's strong hand undid the bolt and latch and flung the great casement wide. The cool night air rushed in, and both girls, heated with exercise, were glad to rest their elbows on the stone mullion and lean out into the breezy night.

"It is delicious!" cried Kate; "it is the elixir of life!"

Then the girls were silent for a few moments, till they both started at the same sound.

"That was a gun!" cried Kate suddenly, leaning further out of the window. "Listen, Cherry! There again—another shot! That can only mean one thing!"

"What thing?" asked Cherry, growing suddenly pale with excitement and fear.

"Highwaymen attacking travellers!" answered her companion, standing straight up, but with her head still inclined in an attitude of keen attention. "Listen, Cherry, listen! Is it the beating of my heart, or is that sound the galloping of horses' hoofs upon the road? Hark! Yes, they grow louder they come this way! Down, Cherry! We must rush to the gates and have them open and take them in!

"Cherry, listen! Be calm, be quiet! Run thou to old Thomas and to Dyson and the rest; tell them what we have heard. I must for the keys. I must have them whether our aunt wills it or no. There be no place of refuge save this for miles around. Here must they find shelter from their foes. It is Lady Humbert's will; I must fulfil it."

All the while Kate spoke she was running swiftly along the boarded floor, with Cherry keeping pace at her side; and as she dashed down the staircase she paused for a moment and took from the place where they hung two matchlocks, which she knew were always kept loaded, and these she laid quietly down in the hall. Then she opened the parlour door, and walked boldly forward to the spot where the keys lay. Possessing herself of these, she said quietly:

“Be not affrighted, Aunt Dowsabel, but there be folks in trouble on the road. They are pursued by robbers, I fear. I am about to unlock the gates, that we may draw them into safe shelter here.”

Petronella sprang to her feet, and Mistress Dowsabel uttered a sharp scream of terror.

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“Kate, I forbid it—I forbid it!” she gasped. “The gates shall not be unlocked! Dost hear, child? They shall not be unlocked! We shall have the whole horde upon us, we poor unprotected women! Kate, come back, come back! The keys are mine; I am mistress here! It shall not be done! Girl, I will not be thus defied!”

But Kate was already half through the hall, where the terrified servants were mustering. She had seized up the matchlocks, and now thrust one of them into old Thomas’s shaking hands.

“Take it!” she said, “and when I am gone lock and bolt the door behind me an your lady desires it. But I will not disobey my Lady Humbert, and she would have done as I do now. I go to the gate and I hold it open. I draw within its shelter the pursued, and I strive to close it against the pursuers. All within these walls will be safe.

“Thy place is here, Thomas, beside thy mistress. She will die with terror if thou leave her. I am strong enough to unbar the gates alone, and I have this weapon, which I know how to use.

“Hark! there be cries along the road. The pursuit draws nigh.”

Kate flung open the great door and sprang out into the dusky darkness beyond, and Petronella and Cherry, casting one glance at each other, caught up a gleaming weapon from the wall, where many hung, and dashed out after her.

“Shut and lock the door behind us, an you fear for yourselves!” cried Kate, as she led the way down the short flight of steps.

“Girls!” she cried, turning her flushed and resolute face upon her companions, “we three will stand together for weal or woe this night. It may be that we shall save life. We can but lose our own, come what may. Are you ready to face the peril? for these gates must be unbarred.”

“We are ready,” answered both, as they stood beside her holding her weapon, whilst her strong young hands turned the ponderous key in the lock and slipped back the heavy bolts.

All this while the thundering thud of galloping horse hoofs was approaching nearer and nearer, mingling with the fierce vindictive shouts of the pursuers, that sent thrills of terror through the hearts of two of the girls, but made Kate set her teeth together, and braced her nerves and muscles till they felt as if turned to steel.

“Girls,” she said, “listen! I open this gate—so, and stand here with my weapon. As the pursued make for this house, as they most surely will, I shout to them as they near it to fling themselves from their horses and rush in. If they understand, they will do so; but there may be delay. If the pursuers are close at hand, I shall fire at the foremost, and

methinks I shall not miss. My hands will be thus occupied. It must be your task to swing to and shut the gate behind the pursued. If any assailant strive to follow, strike him down without mercy. Methinks a woman's arm can deal a hard blow! I trow mine could. But, above all, be it your task to guard the gate. Is it understood?"

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“It is!” answered both girls in a breath.

They looked back at the house, so close behind them that it was hard to feel afraid. The door stood ajar, and faces peered out into the darkness; but Mistress Dowsabel’s shrill voice was still heard within, and she was plainly hindering any of the servants from going forth to the assistance of the brave girls without, terrified almost out of her wits at what might occur.

The high wall hid the road from the three who stood beside the gate, but the gasping breath of the horses could now be heard, whilst the fierce cries of pursuit had changed to an ominous silence, as though not even a breath was to be wasted—every nerve being strained to the effort of the chase.

It was terrible to be able to see nothing. Petronella suddenly made a rush towards the wall, and finding foothold here and there in the chinks of the brick work, contrived to swing upwards her light frame till she could look over the top.

“There be three pursued,” she cried to those below; “and methinks the hindermost is wounded, he sways so terribly in the saddle. The pursuers are close behind; it seems well nigh as if they must come up with them.

“Oh, well done, good horses; oh, well done!

“Kate, they be close at hand; they are making for the gate as a dove to its nest!”

Then Kate suddenly threw both doors wide and stood out in the dim moonlight.

“Fling yourselves from your horses, gentlemen, and come in!” she cried, in clear, penetrating tones. “There is shelter behind these walls. And the first man who dares to follow I shoot dead!”

Then as the foremost horseman obeyed her, flinging himself from the saddle, and staggering rather than walking within the gates, at either one of which stood one of the two girlish guardians, ready at a moment’s notice to fling them together again, a quick sharp cry broke from Kate’s lips, together with the one word:

“Father!”

The second horseman was now within the gates; the third was close behind. But there was a yell as of triumph, and suddenly Kate’s eyes flashed fire. There was the sharp report of a gun. The girl flung the smoking weapon in the face of a second assailant, and dragged within the gate the prostrate form of the third traveller. Cherry and Petronella banged to the iron portals in the very faces of the foremost assailants, who had recoiled for a moment before Kate’s blows, and drew the heavy bolts; whilst the

shower of oaths and curses which arose from the rest of the band, who rode up at that moment, showed how fully they recognized their defeat.

Even the horses had escaped them; for the sagacious animals had recognized their locality, and had made for the yard door at the back, where Joshua had admitted them without delay, glad enough to do anything to assist the hardly-beset travellers in their hour of need.

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The travellers had sunk down just within the gates, so breathless and exhausted that for the first few seconds they did not even know how and by whom their rescue had been effected. But the banging to of the gates, and the sullen murmurs of the highwaymen as they had drawn off, recognizing their defeat, showed those within that for the moment the peril was past. The doors were then thrown open; lights streamed forth into the darkness. Sir Richard Trevlyn rose to his feet, passing his hand across his brow, to find his son passionately embracing the dark-eyed Petronella, who clung to him, fairly sobbing in her excitement and wonder; whilst Kate knelt beside the prostrate figure of Culverhouse, who lay with closed eyes almost like one dead.

“Kate, my girl, is it to thee we owe our deliverance?”

“Father, is he dead—is he dead?”

The cry was so full of anguish that it went to the father’s heart; and disregarding the shrill welcome and asseverations of Mistress Dowsabel, who had just recognized, to her immense relief, that they had admitted their own kinsmen to their doors, he bent over the Viscount, and lifted him in his arms.

“Dead! not a bit of it. Dead men do not ride as he did. But he was wounded in the arm, and has been losing blood fast, and doubtless fainted the moment the strain was over. See, we will lay him here on this settle beside the fire. Give him some wine, and bind up that arm, my girl. Thou wilt choose to wait upon him thyself, I trow. He will soon be able to thank thee for this timely rescue. I must hear more of thy tale when I have spoken with thine aunt.”

All was confusion now in the house, but confusion of a pleasant and bustling kind. Joshua brought news that the highwaymen had retreated in disappointment and dudgeon, but, true to their principles, without any attempt at taking vengeance upon the Cross Way House. Sir Richard was striving to soothe the agitation of the timid Dowsabel, and hearing of the absence of the mistress of the house; whilst servants hurried to and fro, setting the table for supper, and vying with each other to provide comforts for the weary travellers, who had been through so much peril and hard riding.

Petronella sat beside Philip in a deep embrasure, and had eyes and ears for him alone. Kate and Cherry, under the direction of Dyson, bound up Lord Culverhouse’s arm, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the colour come back into his face, and his closed eyes slowly open.

When they did this they dwelt for some moments upon Kate’s face in a dreamy fashion, as though their owner thought himself still in some sort of a dream; but when she raised his head and put a cup to his lips, he seemed to awake with a start, and after thirstily draining the contents of the vessel, he caught her hand, exclaiming:

“Kate—my Kate!—is it truly thou?”

She gave a little cry of joy at hearing him speak in tones so like his own. He pressed the hand he held, whilst she knelt beside him and whispered softly in his ear:

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“It is I, indeed, thy little wife. O Culverhouse—and I thought that thou hadst but come hither to die!”

There was a catch in her voice that told how great had been the strain of the past minutes—greater than he could know just then. She found it hard to keep back the tears as she knelt beside him, listening whilst he whispered to her of all that had been said about that sudden marriage of theirs, and how that none would dare to call him free of his plighted word.

“And so thou art in very truth my betrothed wife, sweet Kate,” he said, “and none may part us now. It was as I said when I bid thee come and plight thy troth. It was a pledge too solemn to be broken. My father and mother say so, and so does thy father. We may not be able to wed just yet; but if what I hear be true, sure our day of waiting need not be so very long.”

The colour had come back into her face now; her eyes were sparkling in their old fashion. She looked indeed the same “saucy Kate” that he had known and loved ever since his early boyhood.

There were steps behind them, and Sir Richard emerged from the room where he had been holding counsel with Mistress Dowsabel. He looked at the two beside the fireplace, and at that other pair in the window, both too much absorbed in each other to heed him; and with a smile upon his face he strode forward and laid his hand upon Kate’s shoulder.

“And so, my headstrong daughter, it is to that strong will of thine, and the reckless courage I have sometimes chidden, that we owe our lives and our safety today?” he said.

Culverhouse looked up eagerly.

“What sayest thou, sir?” he asked, whilst Kate’s face crimsoned over from brow to chin.

“Say, my lad? why, I say that but for this hardy wench of mine, who, instead of retreating behind the strong walls of the house, flung open with her own hands the iron gates to let us in, we should by this time have been in sorry plight enow, had we not all been dead men. It was she who opened those gates when all else feared to do so—she who (aided by her two companions, whom she inspired by her own courage) saved us from our foes. It was she who shot down the foremost enemies, who would else have had thy life, Culverhouse, and with her own hands dragged thee, all unconscious as thou wert, within these gates.

“Wherefore, as to thee, boy, I owe my life (for that thou didst receive in thine arm the charge that else would have dashed out my brains), and that to her we both owe this

timely rescue, methinks that no wife nor daughter could do more, and that we must let bygones be bygones and wed you so soon as may be. I will give my fatherly blessing to you twain, for you are worthy of each other, and have proved it this night. And so soon as you can win the sanction of your good parents to your nuptials, Culverhouse, I will give my saucy Kate to you without a doubt or a fear."

Chapter 25: "On The Dark Flowing River."

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“That is our man! Seize him, bind him, and bring him before the chief!”

Cuthbert heard these words spoken in a clear low tone not far away; but the fog wreaths were hanging upon the river, and he could not see the speakers. Instinctively he bent harder to his oar. The wherry shot at redoubled speed through the dull, gleaming water; but there were sounds astern of other plashing oars, the sound of voices low yet eager, and Cuthbert felt sure he heard the name of Trevlyn spoken in accents of subdued fierceness. He could hear by the sound of the oars in the rowlocks that there were many rowers in the pursuing boat. That they were in pursuit of him he could not doubt, and he set his teeth hard as he plied his oars, for he felt that the issue of this chase might mean life or death to him.

Esther’s warning was ringing in his ears: “Beware the dark-flowing river—the lone house—the black cellar!”

How had he regarded that warning? He had not heeded it at all. He had let his curiosity and love of adventure conquer both prudence and caution; and now he was well aware that he was in some immediate and imminent peril.

He had been warned to fly from London, but he had not obeyed that warning. This had been partly out of generosity to his kinsmen, for it seemed to him that by his presence amongst them he might be increasing the peril in which they stood, and he had been told that that was in great part due to his own rashness and hardihood.

He had remained in London. This day was the very eve of that fifth of November on which the King’s Parliament was to assemble in state. All the city was silent and tranquil. The vague sense of expectation and excitement that Cuthbert had observed amongst some of his acquaintances a few days back seemed now to have died down. Was it the hush that immediately precedes the breaking of the storm cloud; or had the fearful tale whispered to him by the wise woman been but the product of her weird fancy, and all his fears and terrors groundless?

This was the question which had been agitating Cuthbert during the past two days; and upon this dim, foggy afternoon he had taken his wherry and resolved to find out for himself the whole truth of the matter.

Cuthbert had not forgotten Robert Catesby, or the priest to whom he always felt he owed his life. If any plot were in hand at this juncture, both these men were most certainly concerned in it. And at the lone house at Lambeth he could surely get speech of Catesby, or learn where he was to be found; and it seemed to Cuthbert that he could not sleep another night until he had set at rest the doubts and fears crowding his mind.

Did he go with a view of warning Catesby that the plot was discovered—that the dark secret was out? He himself scarcely knew. He was not at all sure that he believed

himself in the hideous magnitude of the contemplated deed as Esther had described it. Remembering as he did all he had heard and seen, he could not doubt that some secret plot was afoot, but he thought it highly probable that the scope and purpose of it had been misunderstood; and there was certainly this feeling in his mind, that a timely word of warning to those concerned might serve to avert a terrible doom from any who might lie already under suspicion.

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He had not been able to gain speech with Father Urban; for although he was convinced the priest was in hiding within the house of the Coles, both father and son resolutely denied this, and it seemed of late as though they distrusted Cuthbert himself, and desired no more of his company.

Martin Holt and honest Jacob Dyson had warned him to be cautious in his dealings with any of the Romish persuasion, and Cuthbert had been content to take this advice. But this last afternoon before the great day so long anticipated might surely be put to some good purpose, and the thought that those men in that Lambeth house might be unwittingly remaining to be caught in a trap impelled Cuthbert to strive to have speech with Master Robert Catesby and put him on his guard, if he could not persuade him to abandon whatever rash scheme he had in his head.

Sympathy with the persecuted went some small way in blinding Cuthbert's eyes to the terrible nature of the purposed crime. Moreover, he thought it like enough that Esther had heard a grossly exaggerated account of what was determined. Still, what she had heard others might have heard, and nothing was too bad to find credit with those who planned and desired the ruin of all who held views different from their own.

These and similar thoughts had been occupying Cuthbert's mind as he bent to his oars and propelled his light wherry upstream towards the lonely house. The tide was running out, and rowing was hard work; but he was making progress steadily, and had no thought of any personal peril until the sound of voices through the fog broke upon his ear, and he realized that he himself was an object of pursuit.

Then the wise woman's warnings flashed across him with vivid distinctness. Had she not bidden him beware of just those perils which he seemed resolved to court? Why had he forgotten or disregarded her words? Had they not proved words of wisdom again and again? And now here was he on the dark-flowing river alone, unarmed save for the dagger in his belt, and far from all chance of help.

Just behind was a boat in hot pursuit, and there were many rowers in that boat, as the sounds told him. If he could hear their oars, they could hear his. And though the twilight was creeping on, the fog seemed to be lifting. Only the vapour wreaths hid him from the gaze of his foes. If these were to be dispersed his last chance was gone.

The river was absolutely lonely and deserted at this time of year and at this spot. Lower down, schooners and barges were moored. Near to the bridge he might have had some hope of being heard had he shouted aloud for aid; here there was no such hope. He was away on the Lambeth side: there were no houses and no boats of any kind. His only chance lay in reaching the shore, springing to land, and trusting to his fleetness to carry him into hiding. The lonely house could not be far away. Perchance within its walls he might find a hiding place, or gain admittance within its doors. At least that was the only chance he had; and inspired by this thought he drove his light wherry swiftly

through the water, and felt the keel grate against the bank almost before he was prepared for it.

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The pursuers were still coming on, but did not appear to be distressing themselves. Probably they felt so secure of their prey that they could afford to be moderately cautious in the midst of these fog wreaths that made river travelling somewhat perilous. Cuthbert shipped his oars and sprang lightly ashore, leaving the wherry to its fate. Then he raced like a hunted hare along the margin of the river, and before five minutes had passed he had scrambled up and leaped the wall of this lonely river-side house, and was crouching breathless and exhausted in a thick covert upon the farther side, straining his ears for sounds of pursuit.

These were not long in coming. He heard regular steps approaching the wall, and a voice said:

“Here are the tracks. He got over here. Follow, and find him now. He is in a trap!”

“Am I indeed in a trap?” thought Cuthbert, setting his teeth hard; “that remains to be proved!”

And gliding out from the covert with that noiseless movement he had learned during his residence in the forest, he raced like a veritable shadow in the direction of the house.

He had reached the building rising black and grim against the darkening sky; he had almost laid his hand upon the knocker, intending to make known his presence and his peril, and demand admittance and speech with Master Robert Catesby, when forth from the shadows of the porch stepped a tall dark figure, and he felt a shiver of dismay run through him as a loaded pistol was levelled at his head.

“It is the spy again—the spy I have sworn to sweep from our path. False Trevlyn, thine hour has come!”

A puff of smoke—a loud report. Cuthbert had flung up his hand to shield his face, for the barrel was aimed straight at his temple. He was conscious of a sudden stinging pain in his wrist. A momentary giddiness seized him, and he stumbled and fell. A sardonic laugh seemed to ring in his ears. He thought he heard the banging of a door and the drawing of heavy bolts. Probably the man who had fired was so certain of his aim that he did not even pause to see how the shot had told.

“Your tongue will not wag again before the morrow!”

Those words seemed to be ringing in Cuthbert’s ears, and then for a moment all was blackness and darkness, with a sense of distress and suffocation and stabs of sudden pain.

When he awoke from what he first thought had been a nightmare dream, he was puzzled indeed to know where he was, and for a while believed that he was dreaming still, and that he should soon awake to find himself in his little attic chamber in the

bridge house. But as his senses gradually cleared themselves he became aware that he was in no such safe or desirable spot. He was lying on some cloaks in the bow of a large boat, which was being rowed steadily and silently up stream by four stalwart men. The daylight was gone, but so too was the fog, and the moon was shining

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down and giving a sufficient light. In the stern of the boat sat two other men, whose faces Cuthbert could dimly see, though their hats were drawn down over their brows. These faces did not seem entirely unfamiliar, yet he could not remember where it was he had seen them before. His senses were cloudy and confused. He felt giddy and exhausted. He had no disposition to try to move; but he soon found that even had he been so disposed he could have accomplished little. His feet were bound together by a cord, and his right hand was bound up and utterly powerless. He remembered the shot levelled at him in the garden of the river-side house, and felt certain that his wrist was broken.

And who were these men who were carrying him away captive, and what was their motive? He imagined that they must surely be those fierce pursuers who had striven to capture him upon the river, and who had followed him into the garden where he had hoped to hide himself from their malice. Doubtless they had found him as he lay in a momentary faint, and had borne him back to their boat; though what was their motive in thus capturing him, and whither they were now transporting him, he could not imagine. His mind was still confused and weak. Esther's words of warning seemed to mingle with the gurgle of the water against the bows of the boat. His temples throbbed, there was burning pain in his wounded arm; but the night wind fanned his brow, and brought with it a certain sense of refreshment.

Hitherto there had been unbroken silence in the boat, and the rowers had steadily plied their oars without uttering a word; but now that they were out in mid river, without the smallest fear of pursuit, far away from sight or sound from the shore, they paused as by common consent, and one of them suddenly said:

"Now, comrades, we must settle which it is to be. Are we to take him to Miriam or to Tyrrel?"

Those words told Cuthbert who were his captors. He was in the hands of the gipsies or highwaymen—probably the prisoner of a mixed band who had joined together to effect his capture. As the discussion went on it became more evident that there were two parties and two factions, both anxious to possess his person, and he listened with bated breath and a beating heart to every word that passed.

"I say to Miriam," spoke up one swarthy fellow, with a backward look towards the prisoner in the bow. "Miriam is wild to have him. She is certain sure he has killed Long Robin. She would give her two eyes to have vengeance on some Trevlyn. Why not let her have the boy, to do with as she will?"

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“Because all she cares for is to burn him alive, as her old mother was burnt by some Trevlyn long ago; and what good would that do to the rest of us? Long Robin was no such friend to us. If Miriam’s story be true, he was a treacherous fox, and deserved the fate he got. If he it was who stole and hid the treasure, and kept the secret all these years, hoping to enjoy the fruits of it alone, why, he was a knave and a villain, say I; and that old hag is little better. What do we care for her vow of vengeance? what is it to us? Tyrrel, now, wants the prisoner for a purpose. This lad knows where the treasure is, and he must give up the secret to us. Once we know where he found it, and if moved where he has stowed it, we shall speedily be rich for the rest of our days. You all know that the forest is getting something too hot for us. Tyrrel has decreed that we must go elsewhere, where we are less known. It would be a thousand pities to go without this treasure, since it really lies beneath our hand. A curse upon Long Robin, say I, for keeping it hid all these years! It was a scurvy trick! and Miriam was privy to it. I will raise no hand to help her. She may die with her vow unfulfilled for all I care. Had she but acted fairly by us, then would we have given yon lad up to her tender mercies; but not now—not now!”

A murmur of assent ran through the whole party. The only one to demur was the first speaker.

“The old woman got her death blow when Robin’s corpse was found. She will not last many weeks more, they say. I should well like to bring her a bit of happiness at the end; and her one cry is for vengeance upon the Trevlyn brood. She would well like to have yon prisoner brought bound to her, Why not lead him first to Tyrrel and then to Miriam?”

“When Tyrrel has him, he will decree what is done with him, not we,” said another voice. “He has no love for Miriam and her insensate hate. Miriam and Long Robin have both played us false; and Tyrrel loves the dark-eyed Joanna, and she will not stoop to any deed of cruelty or tyranny. He will have a care how he treats the boy over whom her mantle has once been thrown. But the secret of the gold he must and will have. We will not let him go without that.”

“To Tyrrel then!” cried several voices with one accord. “I trow he will have scant patience with any son of the house of Trevlyn, since he was so bested by those other Trevlyns but two short evenings back. He will be glad enow to have this lad brought before him, for he verily feared that the whole brood had found shelter within the gates of the Cross Way House.”

Cuthbert listened eagerly to these last words, which told him that his kinsmen at least had escaped peril and had found a safe shelter where the treasure lay. Knowing that this was so, and that the treasure was under their safe keeping, even did these men throw aside the tradition of years and make a raid upon the home of the Wyverns, his mind became somewhat calmed, although his own fate was terribly uncertain, and he might have to pay the penalty of his rashness with his life.

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The rowers bent to their oars once again when this knotty point had been settled. They rowed on steadily for a short time, and then out of the darkness came a sharp clear hail.

“Who goes there?”

“Friends. We have caught the quarry; we are bringing him to Tyrrel.”

“Good. He has been waiting with impatience this two hours for news. His wound doth not make him the more patient.”

“We bring him at least the best medicine.

“Easy, lads! Ship your oars. Catch hold of her prow, Toby. So here we are safe and sound, and there is the prisoner!”

Cuthbert had raised his head, and supporting himself on his left elbow was gazing about him from side to side. He was still in the middle of the river; but the boat was now alongside a big barge moored in midstream, and from this barge several lights were gleaming, whilst voices were answering and asking questions, and the name of Tyrrel passed continually from mouth to mouth.

Then the rowers in the bow came and lifted him bodily in their arms, taking care not to be needlessly rough with the broken arm that gave him considerable pain; and so soon as he was placed upon the barge, the rope that bound his feet was cut, somebody remarking that it was needless now to hobble him, since he was safely on board and beneath the eye of the whole crew.

“And where is Tyrrel?” asked several voices.

“Below in the cabin, and waiting impatiently for news. Go, and take the boy with you; the sight of him will be the best medicine for him.”

Cuthbert was led along, dazed and bewildered, but calm from a sense of his own helplessness, and perhaps from bodily weakness, too. This weakness surprised him, for he did not know how much blood he had lost, and he could not account for the way in which the lights swam before his eyes and his steps reeled, as he was taken down a dark ladder-like staircase and into a low long room with a swinging lamp suspended from the ceiling. It felt close and airless after the coldness of the night, and everything swam in a mist before his eyes; but he heard a voice not altogether unfamiliar say in authoritative accents: “Let him sit down, and give him a stoup of wine;” and presently his vision cleared, and he found himself sitting at one side of a rude table opposite the highway chieftain Tyrrel, whose face he well remembered. They were surrounded by a ring of stalwart men, some of whose faces were vaguely familiar to him from having been seen at the old mill a year ago from now.

He noted that Tyrrel's face was pale, and that his head was bandaged. It was plain that he had received recent injuries, and apparently these did not smooth his temper. His face was dark and stern, and the eyes that looked straight at Cuthbert gleamed ominously beneath their heavy brows.

"Well, boy," he said at length, seeing Cuthbert's gaze fasten upon him with inquiry and recognition, "so we meet again."

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Cuthbert answered nothing. He did not intend to speak a needless word. He had some inkling now of the motive for his capture, but he was not going to show his hand.

“Cuthbert Trevlyn,” said Tyrrel, in brief, terse sentences, “I have not brought thee here to bandy words with thee; I will to the point at once. I will tell thee why thou art here. Thou art in deadly peril from without. There is a vile Popish plot but recently discovered. The perpetrators and conspirators will all be seized upon the morrow. Thou art held to be one of these. Thou wilt be seized amongst others. Innocent or guilty, it matters not. Thou wilt die the traitor’s death—the hideous doom of those accused of high treason. Thou wilt be lucky if thou art not racked first to make thee confess what men hold (whether truly or falsely) that thou knowest. I have interposed to save thee from that fate. I have had thee pursued and brought hither to me. I can and I will save thee and hide thee till all pursuit is over. But thou must purchase my protection at a price.”

Cuthbert listened as one in a dream. He knew that Tyrrel might be speaking truth. He knew that he had received warnings before telling him he was suspected and watched. He recalled many past moments when he had felt that he had placed himself in a false position and might have laid himself open to misconstruction. But he had never thought himself in actual peril from the arm of the law. Was Tyrrel speaking the truth now, or was he only striving to intimidate him for his own ends?

Fixing his dark eyes full upon the face of the man opposite, he asked:

“And what is that price?”

“The secret of the Trevlyn treasure,” was the calm reply—“the secret thou didst learn from Long Robin ere thou didst lay him in his bloody grave, and which now thou holdest alone. Where is the treasure, boy? Speak, and all will be well. For bethink thee, if thou holdest thy peace I give thee up on the morrow to the myrmidons of the law, and the golden secret will perish with thee, none profiting thereby. Tell it but to me, and by that honour which I have ever held sacred, thou shalt be released and placed in a secure hiding place till all hue and cry be past. Speak, then, for thy silence can aid none—least of all thyself. Tell the whole story and guide us to the treasure, and all will be well.”

Cuthbert sat silent and motionless, turning the matter rapidly over in his mind. What should he do? Would it be a lasting disgrace to yield to thoughts of personal peril, and reveal all he knew? That revelation would not place the treasure in Tyrrel’s hands. He might fear to assail the Cross Way House; and now that house might be so well guarded that it could defy attack.

Should he risk it? Should he tell all? For a moment he was half disposed to do so; but another thought followed, and the words were checked ere they had reached his lips.

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What if further business had taken away Sir Richard and his son from the lonely house? What if, in the tumult and alarm that the news of such a plot would spread through the kingdom, the household within those walls should be left unprotected by these kinsmen, who might have occasion to make their way to their own home to see how it fared with those left there?

He knew the fearless character of Lady Humbert. She would never keep Sir Richard from his wife at a time of anxiety and possible peril. They might already have left the Cross Way House for Trevlyn Chase (for Lady Humbert knew that the secret of the treasure lay with none but themselves, and would have no fears for that). And if in the dead of night the whole force of the gipsy folk and the highwaymen—or even these latter alone, if they could not get the gipsies to join with them—were to sweep down and attack that solitary house, what chance would its inmates have against them? None, absolutely none! The golden hoard would speedily be made away with; the treasure would be lost to Trevlyn for ever, and all the golden hopes and dreams that had been centred upon it would be dispersed to the winds.

Should he have it always on his mind that he had sold the secret from craven fear? Should he ever know peace of mind or self respect again?

Never! he would die first. And surely since he had no dealings in this plot, and was innocent of all thought of treason, no hurt could come to him even were he given up. Surely he could prove his innocence, though with his head so confused as it now was he scarce knew how he should be able to parry and answer the questions addressed to him. Perchance some knowledge of his peril would reach the ears of Lord Culverhouse, and he would come to his aid. At least he would not be coerced and threatened into betraying his secret. Tyrrel might do his worst; he would defy him.

He looked straight at the robber chief, who sat awaiting his reply with a cold smile of triumph on his face, and answered briefly:

“I shall tell you nothing.”

A gleam of anger shone in the man’s eyes.

“Have a care how thou answerest me. Remember that thy secret will perish with thee when thou goest to the traitor’s death.”

“It will not,” answered Cuthbert coolly. “There be others of my kindred that know it. The treasure will be saved for Trevlyn, do what thou wilt with me.”

“I shall do as I have said,” answered Tyrrel, speaking very clearly and distinctly. “My plans are all well laid. If within two hours thou hast not altered thy mind, thou wilt be rowed ashore by my men, bound hand and foot. Thou wilt then be given in custody to

some good friends of ours on shore, who lie not under suspicion as we do. By them thou wilt be guarded till morning breaks, and then all London will be ringing with the news of this foul plot, and men will be ready to tear limb from limb all those who are so much as suspected

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to have had dealings with the false traitors who have planned all. Then wilt thou, Cuthbert Trevlyn, whose name has already been whispered abroad as one having cognizance of this matter, be handed over to the tender mercies of the law. It will be told of thee how thou wast caught in the very garden of the house where these vile conspirators resort, and that thou didst fight like a fury to save thyself from capture. Thy dealings with Father Urban will be remembered against thee, and many another thing beside. A traitor's death will be thine end; and thou wilt wish in vain when those dark hours come upon thee thou hadst saved thyself when yet there was time. I give thee two hours to bethink thee of these things. If thou wilt speak plainly, tell us all thou knowest, and help to place the treasure in our hands, we will save thee from the fate that awaits thee on shore. If not, we will give thee over to it; and then no power on earth can save thee."

But Cuthbert's mind had already been made up, and he did not waver. He knew himself innocent of all complicity in the plot, and he clung to the hope that his innocence might be proved. In no case would he purchase his freedom by a loss of self respect, by a cowardly yielding up of that very treasure it had been the dream of his life to restore to the house of Trevlyn. Argument and menace were alike thrown away upon him; and two hours later, bound hand and foot, as Tyrrel had said, he was thrown roughly into the bottom of the wherry, and rowed downstream in dead silence, he knew not whither.

Chapter 26: Jacob's Devotion.

"If thou wouldst save thy friend from a terrible fate, come hither to me without delay."

Jacob stood gazing at this scrap of parchment as one in a dream, his slow wits only taking in by degrees the meaning of the mysterious words.

"Thy friend," he repeated slowly, "thy friend! What friend? I have many. Terrible fate! Saints preserve us, what means that? Can it be Cuthbert who is in peril—that rash Cuthbert, for ever diving into matters he had far, far better let alone, and burning his fingers for naught? Can it be of him it speaks? Belike it may. There have been ugly whispers abroad of late. Mine uncle told me only this day that some constables came to his door asking some trivial questions anent his household, and speaking of Cuthbert by name. It would be like his folly at such a moment to run his head into a noose.

"But he shall not be hurt if I can help it. Who is this wise woman who sends the message? Methinks I have heard Rachel speak of her ere now. Well, I can but go visit her and hear what she would have to say. I know the house in Budge Row; I took Rachel to the door once. For myself, I love not such hocus pocus; but if it be a matter of Cuthbert's safety, I will e'en go and listen to her tale. If she wants to filch money from

me for foul purposes, she will find she has come to the wrong man. I will pay for nothing till I have got my money's worth."

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It was already dark. Jacob had been partaking of one of Martin Holt's hospitable suppers. Cuthbert had been absent, and Mistress Susan had remarked with some acrimony that the young man was growing a deal too fine in his ways for them. He came and went just at pleasure; and she did not think it well to encourage him in his idleness and irregularities. Martin opined that he had been amusing himself by watching the preparations for the grand doings on the morrow. The King was in London, and would open his Parliament the next day. Little was being talked of but that event all over London that night.

And now, on reaching his home, Jacob found this brief missive awaiting him, and started forth again, wondering not a little whither it would lead him. The streets were almost empty. Budge Row was dark and silent as the grave. Yet as he looked up at the tall narrow house, a window from above was softly opened, and a low voice over his head spoke in soft, urgent accents:

"Hist! make no sound. Wait but a moment. I will open to you."

Jacob waited, and almost immediately the door was cautiously opened, and a head looked round, a pair of dark eyes peering up into his face.

"It is well, Jacob Dyson, thou hast come," said the same voice, in the lowest of low whispers. "But I may not speak with thee here. Thou must come with me elsewhere. Tyrrel's men are in this house, carousing in their cups. But they have ears like the wild things of the forest. I may not bring thee within the door. They think that I be gone to my chamber to sleep. They will seek me no more tonight. And before the morrow dawns our task must be accomplished."

"And what is that task?" asked Jacob breathlessly.

"To free Cuthbert Trevlyn from the bonds that hold him; to save him from the power of those who will, when the morning dawns; deliver him up to the emissaries of the law as one who has taken part in the vilest plot that has ever been conceived by heart of man!"

Jacob started, and faced his companion, who was hurrying him along the dark streets at a rapid pace.

"Plot, woman! what dost thou mean?" he cried, alarmed and distrustful, and yet impelled to let her lead him whither she would, dominated by the power of her strong will. "I must know more of this matter ere I go further. I have heard fell whispers ere now, but I know not what their truth be. I am a peaceable, law-abiding citizen. I mix myself not up in such doubtful matters. Speak plainly, and tell me what thou knowest, and what evil or harm threatens Cuthbert Trevlyn, or I vow I will go no further with thee. I will not be made a tool of; I will not walk in the dark."

He stopped short, and she did the same, still holding his arm in a close clutch. They had reached one of the many city churches; the big building loomed up before them dark and tall. The wise woman drew her companion within the shelter of the deep porch. Here they could speak at will; none could overhear them now.

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“I will tell thee all in as few words as may be. Thou knowest me as the wise woman of Budge Row; but once I was the queen of the woodland, the queen of the gipsy tribes there, and I still hold some power over the children of the forest. They still bring me news of all that passes there. Cuthbert Trevlyn has found the lost treasure, and in finding it has killed one of the tribe. Hatred and greed have been alike stirred up. Many are bound together against him. If he cannot be snatched this night from the clutches into which he has let himself fall—oh, why would he not heed my warnings?—nothing can avail to save him.

“Listen, Jacob Dyson. Tyrrel, the notable highwayman, upon whose head a price has long been set, has this night taken Cuthbert Trevlyn prisoner, hoping to win from him the secret of the hidden treasure which now lies in his keeping. Cuthbert has refused to tell him aught; and now he purposes to strive to turn this to good account for himself by delivering him up to the officers of the law upon the morrow, as being concerned in a fearful plot that tomorrow will make the ears of all England tingle.

“Dost thou stare at that? hast thou indeed heard aught of it? There have been whispers abroad; but the matter hath been kept wondrous close. Cuthbert Trevlyn has by his hardihood, his curiosity, and his fidelity to friends, who are no true friends to him, placed himself in jeopardy. He ought to be in hiding now; for if upon the morrow the name of Trevlyn gets noised abroad, there will be scant mercy shown him by the judges of this land.”

“Cuthbert a prisoner! Cuthbert delivered up to judgment!” cried Jacob, aghast. “What meanest thou, woman? What hath he done?”

“He bath done no evil; but he hath shown himself imprudent and reckless. He has been seen in company he ought to have fled; he has visited places against which he was warned. Tyrrel knows this. Tyrrel knows how to turn to his advantage everything of like nature. Tyrrel will give him up at the moment when hue and cry is being made for all concerned in this matter. He will give him up, and men will bear witness where and how he was seized, where and how he has been seen before this. Men’s minds will be all aflame with rage and fear. The wildest tale will obtain credence, and there be nothing so wild in what they may truly say of Cuthbert Trevlyn. The Tower gates will close upon him, and they will only open to him when he is led forth to die. Have I not lived long enough to know that? If he he not saved tonight, nothing can avail to save him afterwards.”

Jacob felt a strange thrill run through him at these words,

“And why dost thou tell me this, of all men, woman? What can I do to save him?”

He saw that she had raised her face as if to strive to scan the expression on his; but the darkness foiled her, neither could he see aught but the gleam of her dark eyes.

“I come to thee because time presses, and I know not where else to turn. Thou hast been his friend before; wilt thou play a friend’s part now, even if it be fraught with peril?”

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Jacob paused a few seconds before replying, and then said simply, “What can I do?”

“I will tell thee,” answered Esther, speaking rapidly. “Cuthbert Trevlyn lies bound in a house not far away. Tomorrow, so soon as the news of the plot is noised abroad, and all is in commotion to discover the conspirators, he will be delivered up to those who are searching for these; and if thou knewest as much as I, thou wouldst know that nothing then can save him. But there be yet twelve hours before this can happen, and if he can be rescued within those twelve hours, and lodged with me in my house at Budge Row, I will undertake to hide him so well till all hue and cry be past and over that none shall find him; and before the glad Yuletide season has come to rejoice men’s hearts, he shall be free to go where he will and show his face with the best of them.”

This and much more did the eager gipsy pour into Jacob’s astonished ears as he stood in the shadow of the deep porch. Every detail of the capture was made known to him, the whole plot laid bare, as she had heard it from the lips of the men who had borne Cuthbert ashore, and had then been so cunningly plied with heating liquor by the astute old woman that they had babbled freely of those very things that Tyrrel would fain have had held secret as the grave, at least for twenty-four hours longer.

Jacob listened, and as he listened his mind was strangely stirred. Here was his rival in deadly peril of his life; and if Cuthbert were once to be removed from his path, had not Cherry almost promised, in time, to be his wife? And had he not done all he knew to warn Cuthbert from just those friendships and associations which had ended by placing him in this terrible peril? Could anything more be looked for from him? What did this strange woman think that he could accomplish?

Cuthbert was truly his friend and comrade. He had proved it once by risking his life to aid and abet him. But now what could he do? And surely in these perilous times, when all men knew they must walk warily, it behoved him to take heed to his steps.

“And what can I do?” he asked, as the woman paused.

“Art thou willing to strive to save him at some peril to thyself?”

Jacob paused for a full minute. A host of tumultuous feelings rushed and surged through his brain. A thousand conflicting impulses swayed him as he revolved the situation with all the rapidity of quickened thought.

It was but a minute, yet it seemed like an hour to him before he placed his hand upon that of the eager woman and answered steadily:

“I am willing.”

She clutched his hand and held it fast.

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“My heart did not deceive me. I knew that thou wert a true man. Jacob Dyson, listen to my words, and take good heed to them, and I will strive so to work that no harm shall befall thee, albeit I may not deny that thou mayest stand in some jeopardy. Take and put on this long cloak that I carry beneath my arm; wrap it well about thee, and turn up its collar that it hide well thy face. Pull thy hat down over thy eyes—so. And now take this ring and put it upon thy finger. I have told thee where Cuthbert Trevlyn is lodged this night. Go to the house and ask speech of Master Dibbler. When thou seest him, show him that ring, and tell him that Esther, the wise woman, has sent thee with it, and that she desires him to let thee have a brief interview alone with his prisoner, who has something to say to thee for me of the utmost value to all. Show not thy face, show only the ring, and unless I be greatly deceived, he will take thee to the prisoner forthwith, and lock thee up together alone. The rest thou canst almost divine. Thou must lose no time, but cut the cords that bind him, wrap him in this cloak—ye are much of a height—-and so muffled he may well pass out in the darkness unheeded. Thou must stay behind in the prison bound as he was bound. In the morning thou wilt be given over to the officers of the law; for I misdoubt me much that Dibbler will ever find out the trick that has been played upon him. He never saw Cuthbert Trevlyn before, and I trow he has scarce observed what manner of man he is. He will deliver thee up for one Cuthbert Trevlyn, taken in the act of fleeing to the house where the conspirators are known to lodge.

“But I trow that thy father’s solid weight and Esther’s acuteness can soon serve to set thee at liberty. It will be an easy task to show to all the world that thou art Jacob Dyson, a peaceable citizen, and that thou hast been wrongly apprehended in the place of another. Thou wilt be able to prove that at the hour men say they found thee in that dark garden thou wast in thy father’s or thine uncle’s house. Thy captors will be confused, enraged, bewildered, and will have to explain how they come to be striving to pass off Jacob Dyson as an evil doer. I trow well we can turn the tables upon them.

“Art thou willing to run some small peril for the sake of serving one who has called thee friend?”

And Jacob, with scarce a moment’s pause, replied once again, “I am willing.”

Next day, the morning of the fifth of November, 1605, dawned clear and still and bright. London was early astir; for was not the King to open his Parliament that day? and were not hundreds of loyal subjects going to line the streets to see the procession pass? If the King were not popular, the Prince of Wales, Prince Henry, was; and a sight was a sight to the simple folk of those days, even as it is still.

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But before long a curious change passed over the face of the London streets. A breath—a whisper—a fleeting rumour. Men's faces grew suddenly pale and grave. Women uttered sharp exclamations of astonishment and fear. People pressed together into knots, asking quick questions and awaiting the answers in breathless expectancy; and presently the whispers became changed into open cries and shouts. A smothered roar as of execration and menace ran through the streets, being caught up and passed from mouth to mouth till it was surging along like a great billow on the wide Atlantic sea.

"A Popish plot!"

"Down with the Papists!"

"Blow up the whole of the Parliament Houses—King, Lords, and Commons!"

"Heard ye ever the like before?"

"Taken in the very act—with the barrels of gunpowder laid ready, and the slow match in his hand!"

"A curse upon all such vile traitors!"

"A curse upon the Papists!"

"England will never know peace till she has destroyed them root and branch!"

"Down with the whole brood of them—the vile scum of a vile race!"

These and many like cries were passing through the crowd in great, gusty shouts. Martin Holt, standing at the door of his shop, was just taking in the sense of what was passing, and anxiously ruminating upon the fact that Cuthbert had not been home all the night, when Abraham Dyson came hurrying up, his face pale with apprehension.

"Good Master Holt, hast thou heard the news?"

"That the Papists have tried to blow up the Parliament Houses? Can such a thing be true?"

"As true as daylight; there is no manner of doubt as to that. But I have another trouble than that, which has been happily averted. They tell me my boy has been arrested as one of the conspirators. I am about to hasten down and inquire into it.

"Martin, where is Cuthbert?"

"I have not seen him since yesterday noon. What of him? Has he—the foolish, hot-headed boy—gone and run himself into like trouble?"

“I know not—I know naught of him; only methought they might be together, being such friends and comrades.”

“They were not together yesterday. Jacob supped here with us, and knew naught of Cuthbert then.”

“Supped with you last night! that is good hearing, for men say he was seen at Lambeth then, where the conspirators have some house or hiding place. Come thou with me, good Martin, I prithee. I must take solid men to witness for my lad, and bring him safely home again. I warrant me he has had no dealings in yon foul plot! He hates the very name of Popery and scheming.”

Martin Holt lost not a moment in following his friend, who was joined by several sober and wealthy merchants and citizens, all deeply indignant at the insult received by their friend in this false accusation of Jacob.

Abraham Dyson had been warned by a letter of the peril in which his son stood—a mysteriously-worded letter, but one that was evidently written by a friend. It advised that Dyson and his friends should proceed at once to Westminster and Whitehall, where the excitement would be at its height, and there they would find Jacob in custody, and would doubtless be able speedily to obtain his release, since he had been arrested under a misapprehension.

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Whoever had written these words had plainly known the truth; for when the city men had almost fought their way through a howling and wildly excited mob, they found Jacob, bound and guarded, being just led before some of the King's counsellors under the name of Cuthbert Trevlyn.

"That man is not Cuthbert Trevlyn," shouted old Abraham, forgetting all but the fact that he saw his son in dire and deadly peril. "This is a quiet and peaceable Protestant citizen. Here am I with friends ready to testify the same. This is nothing but another vile Papist plot, conceived to strive to do to death good, peaceable citizens of contrary faith, while they escape the doom their traitorous villainy deserves!"

This astute form of vindication roused another clamour from the crowd. There was not the smallest difficulty in proving Jacob's identity, in establishing his innocence and obtaining his release. Those in authority saw at once that it was one of those innumerable cases of mistaken identity, and did not even care to waste time over a close inquiry into circumstances; whilst the bystanders were raving in indignant sympathy, perfectly convinced that it was all the work of the conspirators themselves, to try to throw their own guilt upon the innocent, and by no means sure that their own turn might not come next.

When Jacob was free, he turned to the King's counsellors and said:

"If it please you gentlemen to fall upon and make away with a notable band of outlaws and robbers, who have long made the terror of the southern roads, they be all beneath your very hand today—gathered together in an old barge not far above Lambeth, where they be waiting the issue of this day's work, knowing far more about it than peaceable and well-minded men should do. Tyrrel is the name of the leader, and he and the best part of his band will hold high revel there this night. They will fall an easy prey in your hands if it please you to send and take them."

The crowd shouted in delight. There was no love lost between the citizens of London and those freebooters who made all travel so perilous, and the name of Tyrrel was widely known and widely feared. The counsellors conferred together awhile and asked many questions of Jacob, and then they released him with courteous words of regret, intimating that if good came of this hunt after the outlaws he should not lose his reward.

His father lost no time in getting him safely home, and questioning him closely as to how he came to find himself in such a predicament; but all he answered was that he and Cuthbert had been about a good deal together, and that they had been mistaken for one another. As for Cuthbert, he was safe enough, but would remain in hiding for some few weeks. He was innocent of all complicity in the plot; but his carelessness had caused him to be suspected of some knowledge of it, and suspicion at a moment of popular frenzy was almost as fatal as actual guilt. When the real culprits had been discovered and had paid the penalty of their crime, smaller persons would be safe once more.

Silence and obscurity were the safest shields for the present, and to no living soul did he reveal the secret of Cuthbert's hiding place.

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London was soon ringing with the news of the death or capture of the plotters of the Gunpowder Treason, as it quickly began to be called; and those interested in the matter heard with satisfaction that Tyrrel and his band had been surprised, and all upon the barge had been either apprehended or slain. Tyrrel had died sword in hand, as became a man of his calling, and the few who had escaped to their old haunts had warned their comrades there, who had fled the south country forthwith, and were scattered no man knew whither.

Only to one person did Jacob presently tell the whole story of that strange night when he set out to rescue Cuthbert from dire peril, and that person was his cousin Keziah. The tale aroused her deepest interest, and from that moment Jacob became to her a hero as well as an idol. The honest youth had never been idolized before—never in his wildest moments had he hoped to rise to the level of a hero; and there was something so wonderful in finding himself so regarded that it began to have a softening and even an elevating effect upon him, and to draw forth an answering admiration and love.

The end of it was that before the Yuletide season had come, he went blushing to Martin Holt to ask for the hand of his second daughter Keziah in marriage instead of that of Cherry, whose heart had from the first been given elsewhere; and it was arranged that the marriage should take place almost at once, for Jacob pleaded he had waited long enough for his wife, and Keziah's only wish was to please her future lord and master.

Chapter 27: Yuletide At The Cross Way House.

Lady Humbert had got her own way—she generally did when her mind was set upon a thing—and a large and merry party was assembled beneath the hospitable roof of the Cross Way House to spend the festive Yuletide there together.

Sir Richard was not sorry just at this juncture to extend his visit to these kinswomen, whose known loyalty and adhesion to the Protestant cause had made the name of Wyvern respected and held in high repute even at the King's Court. It had been with equal satisfaction that he had married his eldest daughter Cecilia to Sir Robert Fortescue, and had allowed Lord Culverhouse openly to proclaim his betrothal with Kate.

For strange things had been happening in the world of London since the discovery of that abortive Gunpowder Treason; and, in the first panic, the name of Trevlyn had freely been whispered abroad. Sir Richard's friends had trembled for him, and had counselled him to keep perfectly quiet and let the evil whisper die a natural death if it would.

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For two long weeks the family at the Chase lived upon tenterhooks. Every day they feared to hear the approach of some messenger with tidings of woe. There was terror in many hearts when a loud explosion in the middle of the night roused them all from their beds; but it was quickly seen that this explosion did not immediately concern them, and that it must have proceeded from the old Gate House, which was already wrapped in flames. The servants hurried down to assist, but were too late. It was only many hours later that the charred remains of what had once been two human beings were found amongst the smoking ruins. A whisper went abroad that a certain well-known seminary priest, by name Father Urban, had fled from London, and had taken refuge with Nicholas Trevlyn. It was surmised that the two must have been preparing themselves for a siege, and that their ammunition had unexpectedly ignited and caused the catastrophe.

To say that any one deplored the fate of the gloomy old man, who was supposed to be little better than a maniac, would be going altogether too far. Petronella shed a few tears, but they were tears rather of relief than of sorrow; while Sir Richard felt that he could breathe more freely when his contumacious kinsman had ceased to live at his door.

The whisper which had alarmed his friends died a natural death so soon as the real facts connected with the plot came to be known, and the number and names of the true conspirators discovered. Indeed, further inquiry appeared to elicit the fact that Cuthbert Trevlyn had been striving to unravel and expose the plot, and that he had been shot down by one of the genuine plotters as a spy and a foe. As he had not since been seen or heard of, considerable anxiety was felt in some quarters for his safety. Sir Richard was causing inquiries to be made in London. Cherry was beginning to go about looking pale and hollow eyed. Lady Humbert, who always cheerily avowed that everything would come right in time, was secretly not a little anxious, until a few days before the Yuletide season, when she was called out into her own back regions to interview a strange woman who was asking for her, and found herself face to face with Joanna, the gipsy queen.

For a moment she scarcely knew the woman again, for she had put off her distinctive dress, and was habited like a simple countrywoman. Her face, too, had lost its brilliant colouring, and her eyes were softer than of yore. She told the astonished Lady Humbert that her mother Miriam was lately dead, that the tribe over whom she ruled had been dispersed and scattered she knew not whither, and that she had no wish to gather about her the remnants of the gipsy folk, who had long been more disposed to consort with robbers and outlaws than to submit to her sway. She was weary of the old life, and desired something more tranquil. She asked if she could serve Lady Humbert in the capacity of dairy woman or laundress, and was promptly answered in the affirmative.

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She then went on to whisper that first she must to London, and that she would bring back Cuthbert Trevlyn with her, and be with them again on the Christmas Eve. More than this she would not say; but Lady Humbert trusted her implicitly, and after that she went about the house with a bright face and brisk step, laughed at Cherry's wistful looks, and declared that she would wait no longer for the absentee, but on Christmas Eve would have up out of the strongroom all the treasure hidden there, and would hand it over to its lawful owners, the Trevlyns—Sir Richard, as head of the house, being the fittest person now to have charge of it.

There was a little murmur of remonstrance, Cuthbert's name being mentioned. Was it fair to do anything till he returned? But some persons began to fear he never would be seen again. All were deeply interested in the treasure; and Lady Humbert clinched the matter by declaring that her mind was made up, and that she would do as she had said.

What a wonderful sight it was as piece after piece of rich old plate, some gold, some silver, all richly chased and embossed, was brought by the servants and placed by Lady Humbert's direction upon the long tables in the old banqueting hall, now unused for half a century! Breathless and wondering, the Trevlyns stood by watching, Sir Richard exclaiming in delighted recognition of various family heirlooms he had often heard described, and which transcended even the fancies he had formed about them. And, besides the wonderful plate, there were jewels and gold in abundance, small coffers filled with golden coins and precious stones, sufficient for a king's ransom.

Kate stood clinging to Culverhouse's arm, her eyes as bright as stars. It was to her the realization of a wonderful dream; and as she gazed and gazed upon the sparkling hoard, which she knew would smooth her own path in life and that of the lover of her choice, she glanced up at him with kindling glances to say:

"Nay, but what a splendid treasure! I never dreamed of aught like this! But oh, it seems to spoil it all not to have Cuthbert! It was he who found it, when nearly all the rest of the world derided the hope of such a thing. Oh, why is he not here to be with us today?"

"Why not, indeed?"

A door at the far end of the room was thrown suddenly open. Lady Humbert, who had withdrawn herself for a few moments, came forward smiling and beaming, and behind her—who?

Petronella, who was standing at Philip's side, not far away, uttered a quick, sharp cry of rapture, and flung herself into Cuthbert's arms.

"Cuthbert!" cried Kate, with a forward bound; and the next minute Cuthbert was surrounded by a crowd of eager questioners, and so belaboured with greetings, inquiries, and congratulations that he himself could not get in a word, but stood looking

smilingly from one to another till his eyes met the eager, wistful glance of a pair of limpid blue ones, and with a quick cry of “Cherry!” he shook off the detaining clasp of all other hands, and went straight across to the spot where she stood blushing, quivering, and hardly able to believe the evidences of her senses.

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All made way for him smilingly, for the secret of his love was an open one now, and Cherry had endeared herself to all the family by her gentleness and pretty, clinging ways.

“Sweetheart,” he said, “I come to claim thee at last, and to claim thee with thy good father’s ready consent and promised blessing. Cherry, it is to Jacob’s devotion and generosity that we owe this happiness, for he it was who saved my life, and might well have risked his own to do so. But he thought not of that; he only thought how he might serve me, and redeem a promise he had made to thee. And now he has his reward. He was wedded to thy sister a short week back, being unwilling to wait longer. And he bids me give thee a brother’s love and greeting, hoping that thou wilt find a place for a brother in thine heart, and wilt give to him a sister’s love.”

“Oh, that indeed I will! Good Jacob! kind Jacob!” cried Cherry, who, bewildered by this rush of happiness, scarce knew what she said or did; but it was enough that she had Cuthbert back again safe and sound.

To her the voices questioning and exclaiming and eagerly displaying to her lover the treasure he had never been able to examine and had never seen massed together, sounded like the murmur of troubled waters. She stood with Cuthbert’s hand in hers, gazing at him as one in a dream, and it was only when Lady Humbert took her hand and imprinted a kiss upon her cheek that she seemed suddenly to awake from her trance.

“There, little one! I trow thou dost not half know what is in store for thee! We shall lose our merry Kate, who must be transformed into the Viscountess Culverhouse, instead of going home chastened and repentant for her mad folly, as was once hoped, after her imprisonment here. And as for our quiet Petronella, she too is to find a home of her own with Master Philip, whose share of this golden treasure will give him all he needs. But as for thee, little one, Cross Way House will still be thy home; for Cuthbert will be content to abide here with us so long as we live, and reign here with thee after we are gone.

“So thou wilt still be beneath the stern rule of an aunt, little one. How wilt thou like that? But thou wilt have a husband to protect thee, so that thou needest not fear too greatly.

“Say, pretty child, art thou content with Cross Way House for a home; or dost thou wish to seek for another?”

Cherry’s answer was to put her arms timidly but lovingly about Lady Humbert’s neck, as she answered, with a little sob of pure happiness:

“With Cuthbert I should be happy anywhere, and I love Cross Way House dearly. If you will have me, I will gladly stay and strive to be a daughter to you and Mistress

Dowsabel. It is all like some wonderful, beautiful dream. I never thought the lost treasure of Trevlyn could bring such happiness with it!”

The end.