

The Man-Stealers

By M. P. Shiel

CHAPTER I

THE CONFEDERATES

After Waterloo, Buonaparte hurried back to Paris, and the next morning was virtually asked to abdicate by a deputation of the Chamber. This he did; and retired to Malmaison: but the Provisional Government, embarrassed by his proximity, sent General Becker to “accompany” him away to Rochefort and here the trapped little Titan, after a brief vain hope of running the blockade of English ships to America, trusted himself to his enemies, and embarked with his suite of forty on the *Bellerophon*, having first written to the Prince Regent these words:

“I come, like Themistocles, to cast myself upon the hospitality of the British people”—though, of course, Themistocles had never done that: but it was the day of large phrase, and reference to the classics.

Napoleon’s hope, apparently, was some English country-seat, where he might lord and luxuriate a space, till the next lion-spring to France, and upheaval of the world.

What really happened we know: he was not allowed to land: but on the responsibility of the British Ministry was transferred, near Plymouth, to the *Northumberland*, and, with only three adherents, packed off to St. Helena.

Certainly, this was as high-handed a piece of business as possible; it was coarse, it was treacherous, it was savage—and it was wonderfully wise.

At all events, Bony raved largely: “I hereby solemnly protest in the face of Heaven and mankind,” wrote he, “against the violence that is done me. I voluntarily came on board the *Bellerophon*:—I am not the prisoner, I am the guest, of England. I came at the invitation of the Captain himself (this was true!) to place myself under the protection of England, with full trust in the sacred rights of hospitality. If the Government only wished to lay a snare for me, it has forfeited its honour, and disgraced its flag. An enemy who made war for twenty years against the English people has come spontaneously, in the hour of misfortune, to seek an asylum under their laws; what greater proof could he give of his esteem and confidence? And how has England replied? She pretended to hold out a hospitable hand: but when this enemy gave himself up, he was immolated! I appeal to History!”—and so on.

All this had not the least effect upon the British people, into whose soul the iron of Bony had well entered.

But what he said was quite true: and upon *the French people* it had an effect!

The *Northumberland* was not half-way to St. Helena when Buonaparte, throughout the length and breadth of France, acquired a glamour which was partly that of Romulus, the god, and partly that of Stephen, the martyr.

The Hero, murdered, becomes a Saint; then admiration rises into Awe, and veneration kindles into Religion.

Men said: “How has he been sacrificed—for us!” With this realisation of the sacrificial, the mind has reached out into the transcendent, and is in a state of Piety. There was instituted, indeed, no public worship and apotheosis of Buonaparte, as in the case Buddha, Mahomet, etc.:

but *only* because he was the god of a modern, western nation: and there was *private* worship and apotheosis enough.

By the time he reached St. Helena, at least *seven* Secret Societies had sprung into existence in Paris, at which the members, on entrance and exit, knelt uncovered before a statue of the hero.

The aim of all these associations was either the practical one of getting Napoleon out of St. Helena, or the vaguer one of revenge: and in both cases the mind turned naturally to one man: the Duke of Wellington.

The practical ones said in effect: "Hostage for hostage! let us seize their leader as they have seized ours: then, perhaps, we can exchange." The vague ones said: "Man for man! let us seize their darling as they have seized ours: then, perhaps, we shall be comforted."

For it was true that the Duke at that moment was as profoundly venerated (though less wildly adored) in England, as Napoleon in France.

Associated with those Secret Societies, or members of them, were, it is said, five members of the Provisional Government, six hundred and seventy-four ladies of the *monde* and Court, with old hands like Savary, Bertrand, Las Cases, Lallemand, the Duc de Rovigo, Gourmand, and Jacquiers of the Clarendon in London—Marshals, men with the Grand Cross, naval men, generals, old bed-chamber grooms, men-about-town, aristocrats, *ouvriers*, old Guards, the *demi-monde*, every type of France.

It was the age of rough-and-ready "*violence to the person*": in England, Sayer, the Bow Street officer, and the St. James' Watch House, knew well the 'prentice-kidnapping chimney-sweep; at Bartholomew Fair, wives were formally sold for seven-shilling pieces, with a wind-up of Blue Ruin and the cotillon; the Resurrection Men struck openly for higher pay, and "burked" (suffocated) to procure corpses; women abducted young boys and married them; the Prince Regent was playfully stoned in his phaeton, and had his eyes blacked by Lord Yarmouth; Buonaparte was kidnapped by the British Ministry. This conception, therefore, of the French Societies came naturally, was in the spirit of the air. And from the first they set about its execution with fanatic zeal.

In the end nothing of national importance came of it—unless we call "national" the destruction of Raddon Lighthouse. But because the whole incident so illustrates the seven-times tempered spirit of the puke in that most awfully ticklish ordeal through which he had to pass, we give the details in fresh form.

One of these sworn enemies of the Duke was a young man of twenty-five, named Camille de Verdier, son of the Marquis de la Terville-Rochefoucauld, an *émigré*. The son, a fellow of iron grit, took to Republican views, and after seven years of exile in England, broke with his father, returned to France, and attaching himself to Court, was territorially reinstated. He dropped the *de* of his name, took part in the march to Moscow, was captured at Vittoria, brought to England, refused to be free on *parole*, escaped from the Medway hulk, was in the Staff at Waterloo, and accompanied Napoleon to Malmaison and Rochefort.

He was of strong character, but given to spasmodic passions. During his London life he had flamed for a fellow-exile, one Mdlle. d'Arblay, of Mansfield Street, a young lady of great beauty, once referred to in the *Morning Chronicle* as "that fair female of Family and Fashion whose genteel figure and elegant Paris deportment so adorn the magic Circle in which she shines." This fair female had a head which thought, and a cold and ruthless heart, which yet could adore: her adoration being first Verdier, and secondly Napoleon, and that Republican France which had chased her parents: indeed, from her lips Verdier had caught a fiercer enthusiasm for the new Religion. She loved him: and on the death of her last parent, followed

him to France. But when she yielded to his passion, the restless fellow almost ceased to pretend adoration; and they rather drifted apart.

On the 3rd February, 1816, he visited her at her house in the Rue du Faubourg St. Honoré. She came to him in the heavy salon Henri IV., stooping through a protracted curtsey; she being then a large, beautiful woman of twenty-seven years; Roman-profiled, with a flat forehead, lined from hair to nose with delicate frown; skin dead white; and blackest lax hair; and a plenteous figure of long-legged grace in her bosom-waisted robe.

She was all in black.

Verdier, who had not seen her for two months, kissed her perfunctorily, even while he said:

“Why the deuce are you in mourning, pretty Lise?”

They often talked together in English. “Why are *you*?” she replied.

He glanced at a *brassard* of crape on his left arm—a singular addition to a dandy attire of cut-away demi-surtout, tight pantaloons of stockinette, and splendid shoe-buckles; he being a rather small fellow, knit and agile, firm-lipped, with a wealth of wheaten hair, seraphically pretty, but with a sardonic stare of blue eye, and a habit of breathing a Jew’s-harp whistle through white teeth-edges in a silent moment; and walking, his coat-tails swung freely from side to side.

In some minutes he had learned that Lise was a member of a Society called “*Société du Sacrifice*,” whose members bound themselves to wear mourning till “a certain illustrious Personage” had paid the forfeit of England’s treachery.

He was surprised: for the same reason *he* wore mourning: and deeply as he knew the Parisian under-currents, he was not aware of any other *Société* than his own.

And he had this thought: if there are more than one, there may be more than two!

For two months he worked hard, from La Villette to St. Cloud, with a grand idea, and a persistent industry: by the end of that time he was a member of seven Societies: there might be more, but he could glean no hint of them in casino, bureau, salon, cabaret, club, or Montmartre den. Now, however, he was satisfied. His dream was to amalgamate all those unearthed into a single force which would not fail.

The necessary formalities and precautions were, of course, innumerable, but the task not otherwise difficult; and at midnight of the 17th May, 1816, the first Chapter of the amalgamated bodies, present 1,217, at last took place in the *caves* of a lonely château at Garenne-Bezons, then country, now a Paris suburb. The members bore printed Notice Papers; a Board consisting of Presidents of the old *Sociétés* presided; the Society was named; a Roll read; Resolutions, Statutes, Agenda passed; and Officers elected. In the tangled old walled garden, before the portal, had been placed a stone statue of Napoleon, and in the dark cellar also, at the back of a rough-board *estrade* serving as platform, stood a gaunt crucifixion in wood of the Emperor on a black cross. The walls were draped in black. It illustrates the inherent crassness of the times, that members, in swearing, sipped from a chalice containing mixed blood and wine—a fit Napoleonic Sacrament, certainly; and after each subsequent meeting—they usually lasted till foreday—a veritable Black Sabbath of license appears to have transacted itself throughout the château (it was called Château Beconles-Giroflets, and still partly stands in the grounds behind an *auberge*). The President elected was M. Tombarelle, under the title of “Master” (he had been “Master” of two of the small *Sociétés*, and was a powerful Member of the Chamber); the Master Associate was the historic Lallemand; the Duc de Monflanquin was named Treasurer; Verdier’s reward for his organising energies was the post of “Administrator”; the Secretary’s name is somehow lost, but M. Albert Dupin, a gigantic naval man, who had been sub-lieutenant at Trafalgar, was made Sub-secretary and “Recruteur” (Recruiter?); Lise d’Arblay, with two others, were elected *Sœurs*

Supérieures (the whole thing having a semi-religious character); while at the third Chapter, a man called Danda, a half-Spaniard, with a good deal of madness in his composition, was named Ship's-Captain.

By the end of June the Society was exceedingly wealthy; it had acquired the bleak Château Durand, seven miles from the Norman Coast near Montreuil, for *its* St. Helena; also, by secret purchase from the Government, it owned a splendid frigate-built two-decker of 1,080 tons, carrying 50 guns of 2 to 5,000 lbs. on spar and main deck, with a 500 lbs. weight of broad-side, and a twelve-knot speed. All the while, a Committee of Management was selling to members "Relics" of Napoleon—a piece of soap, a shoe, a brush, fetching prices like 25 to 40,000 francs—and funds accumulated beyond the possibility of use.

On the midnight of the 5th of August occurred the most sensational of the Chapters of the Society. In the midst of a speech by the Master, Verdier rushed with flushed brow into the room, leapt to the *estrade*, brushed the speaker aside, and waved before the members an English-printed sheet.

It was the *Court Circular*, and had been sent over by Jacquiers of the Clarendon.

It contained the gossip that the Duke of Wellington meant to "escape from the no inconsiderable turmoil of the Life and Fashion of the Town during the whole month of September next, and had accepted an invitation of the Marquis and Marchioness of Elwell to pass four se'ennights in the placid and elegant Seclusion of Grandcourt."

Grandcourt, Verdier said, was only twelve or fourteen kilometres from the South Coast!

This was the awaited opportunity: and a scene of wild excitement ensued, till the assembly broke up on the Motion for an extraordinary Synod that day se'ennight, when drawings and plans would be submitted, and Resolutions adopted.

This was accordingly done; and by the end of the month, Verdier, Lise d'Arblay, big Dupin, the Marquis d'Artois, and three others, had chartered at Calais one of those sea-blue lugger-privateers used in the war, and passing through Dover, had installed themselves in London. They were the delegates of the Society: and to the brains of Verdier and Lise d'Arblay, in particular, the minuter planning of the undertaking seems to have been committed.

CHAPTER II

THE PLOT

In the *Morning Post* of the 9th September appeared these words:

"—the amiable youth of Quality and Fashion, who has lately took the town by storm—who already has been satirised by a Rowlandson, and oded by a Walcot—whom Mr. Creaton, the auctioneer, must needs bless, Wigley's extol, and Tattersall's laud—the patron both of Cordiality and the Arts, etc."

This panegyric referred to Verdier, who by this time was everywhere, and knew everyone. Long since, in London, he had acquired the knack of drink, and at the fifth of hock or port, with his sardonic smile, would see his man under the table. This alone made him something of a King. It was an age of notorieties, little social rags and alarums, easily gulled and dazzled. Verdier had set up for the Prince of Dandies (great Brummell had just gone under). He had £6 dinners at the Clarendon or Stephen's, followed by largesses of £1 bank-tokens for "perquisites" to waiters. He readopted his father's titles. He had denny, curricule, tilbury and chaise, and largely trotted his milk-white Hanoverian four-in-hand. He lounged at Owen's, the Bond Street pastry-cook, and

danced at Almack's, and played macao at Brooke's, and whist in "the charmed circle of White's." In three weeks he had fought two duels, and each time gallantly spared his man. One day he spurred, the admiration of the *beau monde*, on a gilt hobby-horse from Johnson's Repository in Long Acre to Bayswater, and back again to his rooms in Bolton Street, next door to Whattier's. Twice he did the 104 miles to Brighton and back in eight hours, breaking seven whips: and to what he did he took care to have witnesses. In the "Squeeze" at Rotton Row he went meteoric, siffling through his teeth-edges, amid the salutation of the *crème de la crème*. He was a man-about-town, to be met in the print-shops, at the Academy in Somerset Place, and where the new bibliomaniacs bid high, and at Miss Linwood's Leicester Square Exhibition of Needle-work, and at the Panoramas, and at Mrs. Salmon's the wax-works, and at the cock-pit, and the bull-baiting, and the prize-fight.

After three weeks, little transpired in the upper life of London which he did not hear; and into what friendship he chose he could enter.

His French associates, too, made a figure in the town, but not on the same scale; and Verdier appeared not to know them. As for Lise d'Arblay, she lay low in a house in Sweeting Alley near the Royal Exchange, only venturing out deep-veiled in the shade of an Oldenburg poke.

On the 4th September, at 9 a.m., the Duke of Wellington left Apsley house in his own travelling-coach and four, bound westward. London, then a large family (there were twelve millions in all Britain), knew, and came to howl: 'prentice and yoked milk-woman, the prevalent gipsy and the little coster-cart dog-drawn, Covent Garden basket-woman, wigged doctor, wigged parson, and the dandy who meant to return to bed till two, and an escort of light horse. And these, at the first sight of the curving beaver, roared and roared. He tipped a dry nod at the crowd, spoke some last words, foot on step, to a certain Lieutenant Opie, and, accompanied only by his host, Lord Elwell, was away, to be left by his escort-of-ceremony near Chiswick, but to be met at every station by the gentry and yeomanry of counties.

In the crowd, close by the berlin-door, was Verdier. They had not met, for the Duke was one of a set, of very high rank, who never frequented the Clubs, but would congregate in crony-circles at hotels, like naval Fladong's, military Stephen's, clerical Ibbetson's, and so on; and his habits were so regular, that a man in his "world" could readily avoid "knowing" him. So that, when the berlin rattled off, Verdier, with deep reverence, and out-waved hat, muttered: "To our better acquaintance, your Grace."

But he was secretly uneasy: plans remained unmaterialised: and the time was at hand.

However, that night, late, he knocked over a City beadle, lanthorn and all, with his racing curricule; and on a Sweeting Alley first-floor, solid with bourgeois mahogany, rushed, rather tipsy, into the presence of Lise d'Arblay.

"Victory, Lise," he said, covering her face in his cocked hat where she sat at an old Antwerp harpsichord: "we have the whole."

"You stifle me!" cried she, "I thought you never got fuddled."

"In the legs, Lise, in the legs: never, damn me, in the head. I have been at that vile turfy hole of Limner's, and had three of port, two of negus, and four of gin-punch—give us a kiss, girl—"

"Faugh! you deteriorate in London," said Lise: "could the Marquise de la Terville-Rochefoucauld hear her once *chaste* Camille, her most *pious* and *intact* Camille, recounting his gin-punches, what an ejaculation she'd let!"

"Be good enough to let the Marquise de la Terville-Rochefoucauld sleep sound in her grave, Lise. 'Tis all part of the game, is it not? Hark you, we've *got* this same illustrious Personage."

"Real news?"

“Why, yes. The man who will take down to him the War Office despatches I now *know*.”

“Good, good,” went Lise softly.

“With him I have been tippling, and playing Under and Over Seven half the night.”

“Well, thank the good God, then! Who is he?”

“Lieutenant James Wootton Opie, of the Guards Artillery, Companion of the Bath, though never you’d dream it, Lise, Lise, I swear; a lout of lubberly demeanour replete with rodomontade and ‘Odd Zookers!’; drinks purl and Sampson by the bumper as you water, my adored, and wears a tousled wig, and breeches-and-leg-boots, and a long face, and a big nose: so you have his portrait. I left him sitting in Limner’s coffee-room, one leg sprawled to the devil in the air, his mouth bawling, his tongue lolling—”

“How did you discover—?”

“He was the last man the illustrious Personage spoke to on departing this morning: that gave me the thought, and at the Marchioness of Hertford’s ball to-night, I pumped Lord Sidmouth and *he* told me; then I unearthed the fellow himself at the London Tavern and ‘Dash my wig! ‘cried he, when I slapped his back, ‘I thought I had killed you some years ago. By Godes, aren’t you my friend Thingumbob, what’s-his-name? eh, by Godes, damn me?’ Well, I took him in tow, and *he* himself; told me he is despatch-officer to you know who. If once we get those despatches *from* him, you have the introduction you need.”

“But would this Opie be easily knocked on the head?”

“If necessary, I suppose. Is it necessary? We might get the papers *from* him somehow, and then lock him away somewhere till all *is over*.”

“But what a useless risk for no reason!” said Lise, with surprised eyes. “Locked away men escape, write, do a thousand things, I suppose? Dead men tell no tales.”

Her needle clicked *in* embroidery during a silence.

“Ah, well, I suppose you are right,” said Verdier.

“Knock the man on the head.”

“Never that, you know. We are not assassins, pretty. We can kill him in a duel, if necessary. The first thing, of course, is to know the day and even hour of his departure. Lise, you must make him your slave. Use the face and the smile, and twist the eyes about, eh? No need lying low any more: the great Personage is gone. Come out and shine for a week, my sibyl, and make the town talk. By the way, let’s see the Grandcourt map: suppose we pass the night over it? time is going, going, Lise! You will need spend at least a se’en-night down there, before our men dare land. I want you to know every pebble from Grandcourt to the sea. The nights of the 19th and 20th will be moonless, one or other of those should be our night, without fault. Lise, Lise, those fair brows of thine have need to knit now to some purpose, and be wise as serpents and harmful as tigers, my Egypt Queen. All depends upon the lovely head—France—History—I. A French planet—how is that to your dainty liking? A Gallic Hindoostan—a Parisian Cathay. Come, there is something worth working for! And you and I can do it, if we like, I swear! Bring the drawing, then, and a tumbler of Jamaica—”

She sailed out, he tossing off a coat *à la guillotine*, low-collared to show stock and collar behind, drew gloves, loosened stays: and he sat siffling through his teeth-edges.

“Now,” said he, when she reappeared with coffee and plan, “we set to thinking, Lise, till our foreheads bladder out like Lord Derby’s. Here is Grand-court Abbey, like a Maltese Cross: this drawing of Dupin’s is certainly not exact, but it will do: here’s the lake washing the south wing; here’s the avenue of sycamores running south from the lake; here, twelve miles south, is the coast. Looking over the lake is the library. Two or three miles from the avenue lies the martello-

tower. As agreed, our men do not approach nearer the Abbey than the martello-tower, inside which they lie hid, till *you* bring the prisoner to them. Your idea of seizing him boldly in the Abbey, and killing every living thing is Napoleonic, Lise: but we must not be blind to the tremendous risk that some servant might escape to the villages, and have us overpowered before you reach the coast. There must be *no* risk. Not the least reason exists *why* the whole thing should not be certain as arithmetic beforehand: it is my will: I must have it so. Our problem, then, is to get the illustrious man from the Abbey to the martello at the right moment."

"That's easy done as lighting the gas lights," said Lise. "Provided you supply me with the Means, I have the whole schemed out in my head, and can have him like a mouse."

"Say a trapped lion, audacious female. Give me kisses for that cruel, wanton heart. Do you love me still with the old flames, jade?"

"Ah, Camille—no, no. As if you merited such adoration—"

"Don't I love it, then, the love-sick soul? By Heavens, I saw a little dandyess this morning in the Mall—! There is something in the English type, after all— But to the business—the Means, you say. What means

After a silence she said: "Is this Lieutenant Opie married?"

"Then I go down as his wife, privately married; and as his wife I take the despatches which you obtain from him; my *entrée*, for a definite reason, on a definite business, into the Abbey is the first End: and the despatches are the first Means."

"That I understand: go on."

"Has he any relatives, this Opie?"

"One, that I know of; ha, ha! and such an one, Lise!"

"Who, then?"

"Pon my word, I only found it out this afternoon: tis exquisite: look here, Lise."

He reached for his coat, and drew one of Ackermann's prints from a pocket.

It was a drawing by Woodforde of a girl in an Oldenburg poke: but beneath the poke was no human face, but the gross face of a pig. At the bottom appeared the words: "A Pig in a Poke."

Lise uttered a dainty exclamation, half hypocritical, for the drawing was not new to her. It, and others like it, was then the rage in all the print-shops: and there ran a persistent rumour, and belief; in London that an actual pig-faced lady *was* then existing in some hidden nook of the town. Two or three even knew that in the rumour was truth.

"That lady," said Verdier, "is the niece of Opie."

Lise cried out: "Good, good! That is, if you can *find* her—"

"Oh, I know where she is. Of course, the drawing is an exaggeration: she is more like a rat than a pig, poor girl, and a good little soul, I'm told. I had it in great confidence from Willis, the old King's physician, at Whattier's. He has *seen* her. She is well-made, he avers, but has no chin, and is an imbecile—"

"Excellent! Where is she?"

"At Opie's house, No. 11 Bedford Square, next door to Lord Eldon's."

"Oh, she is in Opie's keeping?"

"He is her only relative, and tenderly attached to her, Willis swears. He had her hidden in the country till the war was over, and then brought her here."

"Could you kidnap her?"

"Easy enough. But why?"

"Don't you perceive what a Providence is in this creature? I have to get the *vir illustrissimus* from the Abbey to the martello: well and good; but that distance is no short one: I could not *ask*

him to accompany me to the martello. I can ask him to accompany me into the long avenue, perhaps: his known gallantry makes that easy done. But from the avenue I could only get him further by evoking some passion of his mind: and I have long decided that that passion should be something in the nature of chivalry: how if he saw a cruelty in the doing and ran out to stop it, and the people committing it ran towards the martello? That is my general conception: the minutiae can be planned as we proceed. But to make certain, the cruelty should be a shocking one, done by people of established ill-fame: and I have had the thought of *gipsies*, bearing a living person in a coffin to bury. But what living person? The best would be a relative of Opie's: for if I told the Duke, from the first, that a relative of Opie's had been kidnapped by gipsies, that would furnish a good reason for Opie's having entrusted the dispatches to me, his wife, since Opie would have gone hunting this lost relative; and also, if that relative had a striking peculiarity of person, and the peculiar coffined form was described before-hand to the Duke by, say, one of the gipsies disgusted with his tribe, then that would furnish an irresistible motive to the Duke to follow the miscreants; since, I suppose, the Duke and Opie are more or less friends—”

“Lise, you are Reason itself! See, hussy, I kiss your hand with kneeling: ah, that pleases her, then! 'Fore God, I do love you, Lise. But my head is full of great affairs, my dear girl—you can't expect me to play the love-sick swain at such a juncture. It will do, that scheme of yours! I feel and perceive that it will. But the gipsies!— can they be trusted? and how would they behave to that poor afflicted female?”

“Oh, as to that, we cannot afford the luxury of qualms and compunctions, 'tis sure. She takes her chances. Charming, your considerateness, Camille, for all the world—and strange your mercilessness to *one*. What, you are not going? I am having some milk-punch brewed below stairs—”

“No! I am off. Quick and sure, girl! I have served under a man, Lise, who struck, when he struck, like Heaven's own Hammer: and I have his trick of Thunder, be Gad! *Au r'voir!*”

“But whither would you be flying at such an hour of the night?”

“Hounslow Heath—”

“The gipsies! But not *now*—”

“Yes— Oh, by the way, instal yourself to-morrow at the Foreign Hotel in Leicester Square, will you? At three I wait upon you there with Opie and some others to drink a dish of tea. Here— three signed cheques on Coutts'. Be sure retain the most genteel suite, with an apartment for carding: everything high-toned and elegant, no silver-plate—gold—and you in your gowns and ostrich-and-diamond headdress. And twist the eyes about, and let 'em see the white bust—*au r'voir!*”

Down he swaggered three steps at a time, and off he set, using the whip and siffling, flicking at everything, oil-lamp and belated staggerer, ward-constable, watchman, and darkling street-brawl. Soon he was careering in open country, and at about three in the morning sat on Hounslow Heath in one of those four-wheeled waggons, with tyres a foot wide, in which the poor, and the gipsy, travelled England. Around him spread a camp of fifty asses, panniers, dying fires, little carts and whiskies, mysterious sheeted masses, glints and streaks of romantic light, a baby-cry, and the free simplicity of the Bedouin. Here, at all times, were to be found three or four gipsy-camps.

Even with forty million inhabitants England is practically an uninhabited land. With twelve, there was “room for wandering.”

Before Verdier a man sat on a box, a sleeping child on each knee, a slipper and stocking on one leg, an ankle-jack and bandage on the other: a broad-faced, dark-bearded clown, whose wild

black eyes had yet seen star-visions of which Fox and Selwyn, making yonder for Howard and Gibbs, the Jews, after a hard night at Brooke's, never once dreamed.

He and Verdier concocted and confabulated two whole fore-day hours: till Verdier, rising, said:

"You are certain, then, that you could handle a boat eight or ten miles on the sea?"

"Sure and certain, guv'nor: and done it oft and oft in the Cornwall reaches," said the man.

"So it is a bargain?"

"It is, guv'nor."

"You'll be gentle, fellow, with that poor girl?"

"We will, guv'nor, we will."

"Your name, sir?"

"Corrie Lovell, guv'nor."

"Well, I take you, Lovell, for an honest fellow."

"Not much honesty about us poor folk, guv'nor: but faithful enough are we to those that cross our hand with the yellow stuff."

"Very well said: you *are* an honest fellow. And now, the price of the whole."

"Ah, that's it: the price, guv'nor—"

"Name a sum."

"Well, 'cod! taking all into consideration, I say— fifty golden guineas!"

"Tush! you have not to do with a St. Giles's pauper, fellow. Be somewhat less modest, sir."

"Well, 'cod! you talk like a King, every inch: cod! I say a hundred and—*twenty* golden guineas!"

"You are mighty modest, friend! Well, say three hundred golden guineas for the whole, exquisitely done. You see, I am liberal. Here, meantime, are ten for earnest. The rest I hand you the moment that we step from the martello-tower and seize the gentleman: you can have one of your men hiding there, with mine, to receive it. Meantime, day and night from to-morrow, you have a man in waiting at Leicester Square near the Foreign Hotel."

"Right! Only—here—a word in your ear: our tribe's been in this lair over a se'ennight, and the younger colts getting frisky to be away moorlanding. The wild blood, you know, and the straying itch, 'cod! Don't you keep 'em waiting too long—"

"You cat them into order. Three hundred golden guineas, sir. Zounds, I am sleepy. Till we meet again, Lovell—"

As he went away, he saw the scheme blossoming fair: nor could now even conceive of mishap.

It was grey morning. Half-way towards his waiting curricule, he heard a singular sound—the roar of a lion; and turning, saw the square of a travelling-menagerie pitched close by the road.

It was so near him, that, at some spur of curiosity, he went and peered between two tarpaulin-flaps, to spy the animals.

Right before him, in a lion's cage, he saw a girl stand, whip in hand, evidently training the creature to do something: a darkly-flushed girl, hardly clad, with splendid golden eyes.

Had he not been stumbling drowsy, he would certainly have been adventurous: but he only muttered:

"Beauteous creature," and went off nodding.

Two days afterwards (she so haunted him), he returned: but the menagerie was gone.

It was his lot, however, to meet both menagerie and girl again.

CHAPTER III

THE DESPATCHES

Within three days Opie was as much under the spell of Lise d'Arblay as it was the duty of a Man of Fashion to be.

For when a pretty woman shows her ring, what can a poor man do?

Twice daily he visited "the Foreign"—before "the Squeeze," and at night. At the Guards', on his entry now, his cheek-bones, new-rouged, drew from men the groan of "O Lord God!", and the down-turned lips of comic nausea. It was as though rude old Blücher should smell sal-ammoniac, or an elephant wear ball-slippers. Opie's cheek-bones were no longer part of himself—his real self of dislocated teeth, all yellow, and rough exterior. He was nothing but a born soldier. After a wound at Salamanca, he had killed seven men, and then dropped. He could use his sword, he could drink, he could swear and be loud. Under his slashed bosom was, however, a kind and simple heart, and he would shower largesses upon the poor with vociferations, damn me, and curses. The Duke of Wellington secretly liked him, which proves that Opie was a gentleman somewhere inside. Each morning, with perfect tenderness, he would kiss a cheek which never, never received other kiss—his afflicted niece, that puckered, pink rat-face. He considered' it the duty of man to love, and win the heart, of every dashing female, ecod. Lise d'Arblay woke in his brain the lust of Cumberland corsets: but in this matter he achieved nothing: he had too much drunk. However, the lady was clearly his slave: for ogle she gave back ogle: a certain levity in her giggle no old campaigner could mistake: she *intended* to be adorable. Pity only that, after out-works and escarpment carried, he had to abandon the citadel for a time. On the 9th of the month, at a *tête-à-tête* in the afternoon, he said as much to her.

"My goodness, you are not leaving the town?" said Lise near him on a settee, splendid in tissue gown bordered with silver jonquils, and jewelled stomacher, a painting on satin before her which anon she bent to touch and finish.

"Alas! 'tis Fate's Decree, madam."

"Then we part! Well, 'tis ever so—"

"For a time—" he touched her arm comfortingly—"for a time only: a se'ennight, ten days. madam, 'twill but add sauce to the goose when I have the honour to behold you again!"

"I also shall take myself off," said Lise, weary and woe-begone: "I am sickened of the town."

"Fie, fie. You wait—a se'ennight—ten days. Whither would you be going, flow?"

"To Bath—Brighton—Margate—"

"Why, damn me—begging pardon before a lady—dull as stale porter, all of them! There you will find *nothing* just now agreeable to your inclinations. Have you seen the fashionable *Brighton Herald*, poking fun at the new gilt blocks of the Regent's yacht?"

"Oh—but—there is always the elegant Masquerade at the theatre, the novels, the gardens at Dandelion, the Assembly at the Rooms, the sprightly misses and beaux on the Cliffs, Parades, and Piers; at Bath, the pump-room,— "And in town! what have you! Ecod! The Satirical Prints! The Panharmonicon at Spring Gardens, and the Papyruseum at Soho! Vauxhall! why, Vauxhall *alone*, with its illuminations, bands, fire-works, and dancing—and the Park, odd Zookers! and the Clubs! and the fine writing, and the fine feeling, damn me; and the Rank, Fashion, Dash and Style of the town!—don't you go, now: zounds, you lose all, I swear, and gain nothing, madam."

"I am firmly resolved, sir."

"Then for how long? Madam, the question concerns my most intimate feelings."

“Why, sir, you do me too much honour. I may be away a se’ennight—ten days—”

“Aha! And when do you go, now?”

“When do *you* go?”

“I go post the day after to-morrow morning at five by my private coach—”

Lise painted.

“Dear me, so soon?” said she: “the day after to-morrow morning at five? That is to say, on *Thursday* morning, the *eleventh* instant — at five? Is’t so?”

“You have it! ’Tis so.”

“Must you go, sir? Heigh-ho!”

“I must, madam, damn me—begging pardon before a lady. You see, I am taking down some Departmental Despatches to my Chief at Grandcourt in Devon—”

“Then, sir, I shall certainly not be here to witness your departure. I bid adieu to London to-morrow morning, without fault.”

“Dash my wig!” thought Opie, “the female’s love-sick as a mermaid. Why shouldn’t I attack *now*?”

He attacked: but was interrupted by the announcement at the door of Lord Archibald Ingram: and soon Opie left the field to the new-coiner.

Ingram, of the Guards, was a fresh, tall, beardless youth, with a lung affection, and a stoop, and protective silk wrappings about the throat and chest. He was the brother of Lady Elwell, the hostess of the Duke of Wellington.

He had already been present at three of Verdier’s choice dinners and all-night card-parties, and his young head and tongue were full of his new friendship with the Marquis de la Terville-Rochefoucauld, and the condescending amiable charms of Mdlle. d’Arblay—the Marquis’s aunt.

Lord Archibald’s “place” happened to be only twenty-three miles from Grandcourt; and the same hour that Verdier learned that fact, he had himself presented to the Guardsman, though without definite object.

But when he told Lise, she had said at once:

“That might be neatly turned to our account, surely. Would it not be a most desirable circumstance if the Duke were quite alone at Grandcourt, without host or hostess, on the 19th and 20th? It is well worth the trying for, at least.”

“Yes—proceed—I don’t see—” said Verdier.

“If the Guardsman fell sick unto death at—what is the place?—Market Graddon—about the 17th, only twenty-three miles from Grandcourt, surely his sister, Lady Elwell, would go to him: and her husband might escort her for a day or two, leaving the illustrious guest alone. She at least would go, sure. We should be big boobies if we do not accomplish it.”

“Lise, Lise—but how have him sick, there and then?”

“D’Artois understands physic.”

Well?”

“Set d’Artois up as a Harley Street quack— nothing is necessary save a wig, and a gold-top stick, for the cow-leech who attended my father had not even an Apothecary’s Hall certificate. The Guardsman falls ill while drinking here; we put him to bed and call in d’Artois, who peremptorily orders him to the country, and is prevailed upon to accompany him to Market Graddon. D’Artois may then be trusted to have him at death’s door by the 16th or 17th, and pack a messenger post to summon relatives at Grandcourt. ’Tis too easy to be resisted, and too safe to be neglected.”

Verdier sprang up: with a smile not untinged disgust, he said, bowing:

‘Lise, you would be a Richelieu, if you were not a Borgia. It shall be done.’

Guardsman was accordingly inveigled into the Circle at the Foreign Hotel, and played high, and won. After putting Opie to flight on the afternoon of the 9th, the boy dawdled long by the side of Lise, led by her through all the temperatures of passion, and was at last all one glow at the favour of a hardwon kiss, when a rowdy band of dandies, headed by Verdier, noisy, with wit, came up. Five, including Ingram and big Dupin, dined at the hotel, *en famille*; and about eleven, after supper, when Lise was ballad-singing to the new-fashioned Guitar, amid fumes of the new-fashioned Cigarro, some fourteen, all fuddled and gorged, including Opie and Lord Castlereagh, arrived to “spend the evening.” Then ensued Cordiality. On the central card-room table was a chased silver urn, with ladle, containing five gallons of Regent’s Punch. Thither the men repaired to play through the night whist, faro, chicken hazard, rouge et noir, nap, Opie and Verdier being croupiers, while many and many a rouleau of Portugal gold changed hands, and the soft-footed waiters came and went, screwing and drawing with suavest pop. It was the Symposium.

About one, Opie, with waved glass and shut eyes, was bawling: “Sing Old Rose, and burn the Bellows.”

At three, young Ingram, with a start of soberness, cried out: “Oh, my heart!” and dropped forward upon his table, well drugged.

He was borne in the arms of Dupin to a bedroom, and Verdier himself drove to call a doctor. He returned with his accomplice, the Marquis d’Artois.

At five the Symposium broke up. By eight Lise d’Arblay was in the Exeter Coach, and away westward, her object being a knowledge of the country round Grandcourt, to be gained during the week before the 19th, and communicated to the frigate already cruising in those waters.

At five p.m. on the day of her departure, the Marquis d’Artois stood, watch in hand, over Lord Archibald Ingram, where he lay tossing under white dimity; the doctor had been bleeding and physicking him most of the day, and he said with truth:

“Your lordship is truly sick: and I now perceive that the disorder must end fatally, unless you promptly decide to leave the foetid atmosphere of the town.”

His lordship groaned.

“Why, I have no whither to go,” said he, “if it be not to my little place in Devon—”

“Then repair thither,” said the physician, “the journey will help to dislodge the disorder. If your lordship’s seat is near Plymouth, I know a venerable and estimable practitioner in that town (though, I admit, uncertificated), to whose skilful hands I could recommend you with confidence.”

Verdier, sitting at the bed-head, whispered the sick lad:

“Try to get the fellow to accompany you himself: sound him first as to his fees, and then see. He is a Frenchman, with a certificate from the Faculty of Paris, and more expert than those lubberly country quacks.”

“Well, and what might be your fee to attend me to my little place, doctor?” asked Ingram.

“What! and leave a lucrative practice—!” exclaimed d’Artois.

But he was prevailed upon: and the same evening went post westward, with the patient.

Three hours later the Symposium reassembled at the Foreign. Opie, who had faithfully promised to spend with Verdier his last night in town, was there. There also, for the first time, were six Frenchmen in addition to Verdier, viz., Dupin, the Sub-secretary and *Recruteur* of the *Société*, an ex-officer of Cuirassiers named Albert Corot, the artist Tissot, and a grizzled *Grande Armée* Adjutant, named Richepin; also the Duc de Bassano, and Caulaincourt.

The movements of Opie had been watched that day by the gipsy, Lovell. He had been seen to attend the War Office, and come out with a sealed packet, which he had taken home.

The Symposium raged. It struck midnight.

At that moment, some fifteen or twenty gipsies were about Opie's house, No. 11 Bedford Square. A broad-wheeled covered waggon, with four horses yoked in pairs by the collar-hames, and belied, waited round the corner in Charlotte Street. In Tottenham Court Road a watchman's rattle passed. But in the square not a soul but the gipsies; and no sound: only from Lord Edon's first-floor near a drunken solo: also, from between the two white-painted pillars with massive pediments before No. 11, went a low sound of picking and prising. Lovell was there, forcing the lock.

When the door flew back, he whistled, and the band entered and struck light. In a second-floor room they found a slatternly old woman in drunken sleep across a bed, and in the same bed the object of their search. One gipsy struck the woman into deeper sleep with a spiked bludgeon—a blow of which she died after some months. The twinkling rat-eyes regarded them without fear, and the mouth of that aged-young visage wrinkled back in a smile. She rose at their bidding, they flurriedly dressed her, carried her down, closed the door, hurried her to the waggon, and drove away westward.

Meantime, the Symposium raged. Here was every device for gambling, the E.O. table, black-and-white-cocks, te-to-tum, wheel-of-fortune, dice, cards, prick-the-garter; there was champagne, port, hock, sparkling old punch. Opie, who proposed no sleep on that last night of good company and the upper circles, having the morrow for the coach-corner snooze, was at a faro table with Richepin, the Adjutant, ready for departure, in his pockets being pill-box, flask, light-blue Sèvres snuff-box—and the Despatches. Yonder, at the Mews in Little James Street, his sleepy guard, driver, and postillions were busied about the coach. The china clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past three.

Suddenly there pierced through thick layers of punch to the inmost core of Lieutenant Opie's brain, the sense of these words:

"Why, damn me, the fellow is cheating! I say it!

It was Richepin who spoke.

So momentous were the words, that to every fuddled brain reached the shock: and all play ceased.

Opie stared a full minute at the face of his accuser, his eyes all filmed with the vague rheums of fuddlement; then he smiled crookedly, while his freckled right hand slowly moved—toward the table; he grasped a pack of cards; and with strong directness sent them a flighty cloud into the face of Richepin.

Richepin bowed. The others stumbled round. "Had I not to be away in an hour," said Opie, with a majestic deliberateness of staggering tongue, "I'd carve that rascal like a baron of beef—"

"Yes, *you* go without fighting me," vociferated Richepin with strong French accent, "and I have you posted over the town for a base coward before sun-up—"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen—" went Verdier.

"What's o'clock?" muttered Opie, with cool frowning peer at the clock. "Oh, damn me, I have time—"

"Can *nothing* be done, gentlemen?" said Verdier.

"Nothing, sir," answered Opie.

"Well, take your own way. I have the good fortune to be able to supply you with an excellent pair of swords."

Below, the square was well packed with waiting phaetons and curricles. The party, after a babel of talk, trooped down. Verdier and Kier, a young beau of the East India College, were Opie's seconds, Bassano and Corot were Richepin's.

Richepin, a war-veteran, had besides acquired a Parisian fame for duelling; while Opie was no delicate imbibor of orgeat and forced-fruit at Owen's, and many a stout fellow who had proved him at boxing or quarter-staff, back-sword or wrestling-match, might have whispered the Frenchman:

"Beware!"

The vehicles set off. The morning was without characteristic, save darkness; clouds, with a vague local smear of moonlight, covering the sky. The fresh air caught Opie's half-sobered head, and set him singing "Anthony Rowly."

At tearing rate they went through the quiet streets, most making homewards, unenticed by so commonplace a thing as an affair of honour. Only the seven Frenchmen, Keir, Opie, and another Englishman, went together southwards and eastwards in five vehicles.

Down the Strand—through Blackfriars.

Opie, his head thrown back, his left leg in air, chortled deep and solemn:

"The Prince he would a-raking go,
Heigh-ho! said Rowly;
Whether the people would have him or no,
With a rowly-powly gammon and spinach:
Heigh-ho! said Anthony Rowly."

They came to St. George's Fields, about where the New Kent Road now is; and they placed the carriage-lanterns in a ring. Opie pulled himself well together. He handed his coat to his driver, and said:

"In the pocket are some papers for the Duke: if I fall insensible you take them early in the morning to the War Office."

Then the fighters stood with rolled shirt-sleeves on stubble. Opie was sober and cool, shook his sword testingly, swept a finger round the inside of his shirt-collar, spat on his palm, settled his chin, and with tentative plantings got a firm cock of the leg. The suggestion to drug him before the fight had been mooted among the French, but Verdier had refused.

The two measured swords, and fought, Richepin with great *brusquerie*, Opie with the cautious blade of a very old hand, who had learned to wait. The swords plied with brisk interaction for a space of perhaps three minutes; then they locked and jostled to edge, slipping, grinding, during ten intense and breathless seconds, till Richepin's wrist jerked aside, and with brisk *passado* Opie ran him through the heart.

"Oh, foul! foul!" cried six French throats, and at the same time Opie was surrounded by drawn blades.

For a moment he stood recoiled, infinitely startled, with averting hands: there was nothing foul about it! But with quick insight, he muttered, gasping:

"What, a conspiracy, you French curs?"

And fiercely bringing down his knuckles upon the eyes of Corot, he broke through, and was gone, the others after him. He reached his phaeton, and galloping off tossed to the ground Dupin, who had caught the reins.

Away he flew northward, to Theobald's Road, to Little James Street, where his coach was making ready; and with eager dispatch he was rattling westward through Piccadilly before 4.30.

“What could they have been after?” he sat wondering, singularly subdued now, and trembling like a frightened horse, he knew not why.

In reality this agitation was a presentiment of death. The Frenchmen had anticipated him on his road, and a little beyond Chiswick, five blackened faces—Verdier being absent—rushed from a hedge into the path of his galloping four-in-hand.

The “gentle thief”—both mounted highwayman and foot-pad—was so common, that when the coachman and two horses dropped shot, and the postillions ran yelling, Opie’s first impulse was toward his pocket: but as he popped his head out of window, he received some slugs in his brain. The morning light was just then struggling with a rank and misty fore-day gloom. The lieutenant dropped backward with the sigh: “Well, my God, I am done for—”

They at once rifled his pockets, and one went riding hard to Hounslow Heath, where they handed the despatches to the gipsy, Lovell, for delivery into the hands of Mdlle. Lise d’Arblay at Wyemouth; and the same hour the gipsy-caravan started westward, having with them the despatches, and the lieutenant’s afflicted niece.

CHAPTER IV

THE BUSY BEE

Either the 19th or 20th was the day decided upon for the French attempt, and by the 13th Mdlle. d’Arblay had reached Wyemouth, the nearest town to Grandcourt.

On the left bank of the Wye stood the “Busy Bee” inn, which, however, was never busy: a roomy old house, having a large garden-lawn, provided with swings, and material for skittles, bowls, quoits, knock-’em-downs, and gaming. At the south end the lawn overlooked the sea; and in the south-east corner was a grotto of rough stones among tamarisk trees.

To the “Busy Bee” Mdlle. d’Arblay, as previously arranged, brought her portmanteau, and took a room; she then hired a stables’ horse for a week, and for four days haunted the moor, the villages, the canal, and took note of everything which seemed of interest

On the 17th Lovell’s gipsy-band arrived tardy, and camped in a field a mile north of Grandcourt. Lovell and another at once hurried to the “Busy Bee” with despatches. Lise d’Arblay, anxiously on the look-out, ran down to the bar parlour, and took them to the grotto, where she heard the London news, and bow all had gone well, save the death of Richepin. She at once provided Lovell with money to hire a small sail-boat, giving him the notes she had made of the locality to take to the frigate, which, by arrangement, lay-to each day at three p.m. eight miles southwest of Wyemouth. Lise sent also a letter to Verdier, now on board, in which she definitely fixed the 20th as *the Day*, advising that on the 18th or 19th the seizing party should land at night to make themselves familiar with the ground in darkness, and adding that on the 20th, as soon as she had seen the Duke, she would send Lovell with a letter to tell them that all was well on her side, and would await the answer that they, too, were all ready, before proceeding to act.

On the afternoon of the 19th she ran from a back door to the grotto to meet Lovell for the last time, and give final directions. Through a little green door she passed into a hut of stones, opened another beyond, and there sitting on an ass under an arbour was the gipsy, his saddle being a wooden hurdle over straw, two bars of the hurdle serving as stirrups, so that his bent-up knees gave him the grotesqueness of a grasshopper bestriding a mouse. Over the animal’s quarters were two wicker panniers secured by straps, one stuffed with cloth, trinkets, cutlery, and small-wares; in the other lived a child, sucking gingerbread.

Corrie Lovell pulled a reverent lock of hair beneath his ragged soft felt hat; while Lise d'Arblay took a watch from her bosom, and handed it to him.

"There, sir," said she, "is a recognition of your services, which I give *now*, because you will have good use for it to-morrow. But first, is everything ready?"

"Everything, lady."

"The two gipsies well drilled in their little comedy?"

"Trust me for that. Everything, in fact."

"The coffin ready?"

"Everything, I tell you, lady, and our people only anxious to have it over."

"And the girl is docile? Does she always begin to pound the coffin—lid when she hears the three taps above her head?"

"Oh, she's a glory, lady. You just teach her anything, and she does it. She's just like a little dog or a mouse. She's weak, weak in the head, lady."

Lovell was amused.

"Well, that is all excellent," said Lise. "Now, listen. To-morrow morning I go to Grandcourt: in the early afternoon I wish to send you with a letter to the frigate, and that letter I will place in a hollow where a stone is missing inside the martello-tower: you will be there to seek it, Lovell, precisely at one p.m. Now, supposing you take six hours at the most to reach the frigate and return to Grandcourt, that makes that you bring me an answer at seven at the latest. Now tell me the hours when you go for my letter, and when you bring the answer."

"At One, lady; and at Seven."

"Precise. Now, there are still two more hours to remember. At Nine, sir, your band passes the end of the avenue with the coffined form; at Nine. And at Half after Eight the two gipsies are in the avenue. *ou* comprehend? Now, what are the four hours appointed?"

"At One I go to the martello for your letter, lady," said Lovell; "at Seven I bring you answer from the ship; at Half after Eight them two are in the avenue; at Nine the false funeral passes, lady."

"Precise! And you have a watch, sir. You cannot fail."

They then parted.

Meantime, the whole country-side was full of the consciousness that the great Duke was in it.

CHAPTER V

MR. GOLDE

That night, the 19th, was excessively dark. A certain Mr. Godfrey Golde, travelling near eleven from Newton to Seacombe, could not see his hand. Not only was there no moon nor stars, but there was no sky. The interspace seemed stuffed with a blackness like black cotton.

There was sound, however, if not sight: the continuous murmur of the near sea, chasing itself in long-drawn shallow surfs over a shelly bottom. The interwoven fugue and roundelay of their monotone' filled the abyss of darkness with a primeval noising. There seemed nothing in the universe save a roar, and an ear.

Mr Golde was alone: and it was the last probability in the world that he should meet anyone.

He was a thick-set man of twenty-eight years, with a pale, broad face, round which and the throat ran a bandage of short whisker and beard, the space between bottom lip and chin being nude of hair: a "sympathetic" face—but his grey eyes were prominent, heavy-lidded and

phlegmatic, his walk heavy. He wore a snuff-coloured coat with brass buttons, and small-clothes, and "breeches," with woollen stockings, and buckled shoes.

He was a person of rather timid temperament, and when he received a sudden slap in the face, three paces he recoiled, striking away something that tore his face with claws; till a seaward whirring of wings told of some belated and erring sea-fowl, foundered in the night.

"I wish I was well out of it," Golde muttered, "if the very birds can't see, it isn't likely—"

Suddenly this thought struck him: had not he, too, lost his way? For surely now the sea-roar was nearer than it should be. He stood still, stooped to feel if he stood on path or grass, then looked about, questioning the vanished world.

Seacombe Moor, lying between the villages of Newton and Seacombe and the town of Wyemouth, has the same general characteristics of the great West-of-England moors: treeless, almost pathless, desolate, choked with thistle, bracken, charlock, blue bugloss, the sparse grass near the shore showing interspaces of barren earth. Four miles north of the shore runs the Portland Canal, bisecting the moor.

But that Mr. Golde, a Newton miller, should lose the familiar foot-path to Seacombe, even in the densest night, was singular: he knit his brows, peering: this was not as it should be. Hobgoblins? He believed in them: for witches were still in England, and evil things of the air had been known to entice many a poor wight to baleful dooms on such weird nights—aye, in that very neighbourhood, too. If Golde had seen a ridden broomstick pitch sulphurous athwart the Erebus dark, leaving a trail and lingering sparks, his timorous awe could hardly have intensified. He cleared his throat with nervous effort.

But suddenly his heart lightened, and he resumed his plodding way: he had recognised what had led him astray.

It was *the lights!* Soon after setting out he had observed two far gleams, and though thinking it singular that he should see Seacombe lights from that point, and at such an hour, he had been mechanically steering his way towards them.

Only now he observed that their relative positions had changed, and as he looked afresh, one disappeared a minute, reappeared, and now was certainly in motion. It was not long before he decided that one was the light of a moving ship far out, and one of a stationary boat probably no farther than the line where the sea began to break into in-trooping surf. Golde said to himself: "They will be smugglers."

He had to be at Seacombe very early in the morning for rendezvous with two farmers, and, already doubtful of a bed, struck off north-eastward with a will, guessing his way.

All at once, the night-airs seemed to bring to his ears from far a sound like laughing in another world, and immediately, a mixture of human voices, jargonning vague as the messages from Heaven heard in sea-shells.

The next moment he stumbled over some obstacle, fell upon his hands, heard a groan; and his hand, groping, encountered a face—all wet. Yet the night was dry.

He bent low. "Can you speak? Who are you?"

A groan. He crouched, and raised a man's head. He felt a beard—then a guernsey—then pantaloons wet to the waist, having apparently passed through the surf.

"How have you got into this, friend?" said Golde with half-a-thought of elf-king, and malign carnivals of mischief in the dark air: "I am afraid I can do little for you, whoever you are. Can't you speak at then?"

"Yes," replied a voice, "soon—a little breath. I am dying, I have something—to say—do not leave me—"

Golde patted his head, saying:

“Very good—take your time, and do not excite yourself. There is no fear of my leaving you.

“Talk low. O God, I do feel bad. Listen—you are an Englishman. Your ear:—there is a French scheme to seize the Duke of Wellington to-morrow, and carry him off. I was in it. Yonder’s the frigate, see. I am a Savoyard, I; my name is Dejoie. I have lived in England four years—about this part, too—a groom I was. Before then I was at the storming of Badajoz, where General Walker fell at the head of his brigade; I found him wounded in the breach, and carried him to our French hospital. He thanked me—gave me his address. Soon after, I was taken at Salamaflea, and brought prisoner to Dartmoor. I wrote to Walker, and he got me free. Then I came to Wyemouth—here four years groom to a Mr. Onslow—”

“What, you are not Mr. Onslow’s Jean Dejoie—?”

“That’s it—yes—damn me, I do feel so bad—”

Golde lifted higher the heavy head. “Is that better?”

“Oh, yes—aha. Talk low. Aha—feel a bit easier that way. Well, it is a secret Society in Paris, to seize the Duke: I joined: and the thing is sure—it cannot fail—can’t explain why, now: ah, I’m going, going, going. . . . I got disgusted, I had rows with Danda, and I said I’d betray. I owe much, much to England. We landed to-night to go over the ground, and I thought to escape in the dark: but they suspected, they suspected: as I ran, God! I was shot—”

“I see, I see, poor lad. And are you the only soul who knows—?” asked Golde.

“And *you*, now. Another minute—it will be you alone. If they find out that, your life—”

Golde felt a chill.

“Well, but they can’t guess—I am revenged. You will be at Grandcourt: let it be before morning, and they are dished. Pah! now I am bleeding in the mouth: that’s damned droll—”

He uttered not one other word, but after a stark throe lay still in Golde’s arms.

“Ah dear, here is trouble come to meet folk,” thought Golde, “the poor man’s dead, I suppose.”

This momentous burden of tidings packed now upon his shoulders, his personal peril, and the dark presence of death, all dismayed him: and mixed with all, was the irksome sense of hurry and bother natural to an indolent fellow to whom comfort and slow routine were matters of importance. He was pale, flurried: and, to ascertain if the man were really dead, he fumbled among his small-clothes, found flint-and-steel box, and, without reflection, dashed them together.

A red wink cut the dark.

And instantly there answered it a shout of several voices not far off.

For the French, chary of striking flashes, hiding their presence from the very air, and, of course, without visible lanthorn, were silently seeking the body of Dejoie in the neighbourhood of his fall, which they had seen. They had, however, considerably strayed, till Golde’s flash revealed him bending over the body.

And the mere fact that, realising himself as doomed, Golde hurriedly dropped the body, and took, as they soon discovered, to his heels, was enough to assure them that he had the secret from the traitor, Dejoie.

And, first, they halted in a body to make sure that Dejoie was well dead.

Meantime, Mr Golde, who was no runner, ran that night, striking north-eastwards across the open; till at last, after some four hours of panting toil, he saw a line of faintly-twinkling lights, which could be only Seacombe. Surprised at Seacombe awake till now, he guessed some wake or *fête* in connection with the local pillow-lace making and straw-plaiting. He observed, however, that the line of lights was broken by a long gap of darkness in its centre—three lights, then the

gap, then four lights; and the reason was soon explained, when he suddenly struck against some obstruction—a waggon which had blocked his field of vision.

He felt the wheels, moved laterally to avoid it, but came upon another, and another—a line of waggons. To make short work, he lifted a hanging canvas-flap, dived under a waggon, lifted another, and came out on the other side. And now, when he looked for the Seacombe lights, they all, to his mystification, had vanished.

He went groping, but felt nothing: by an indefinable sensation, however, he knew himself no longer in the open air, and noticed, too, an unusual odour. Then he had a shock: on a level with his own he saw two eyes, lambent amber with sable centres, suspended apparently in the darkness; their luminous gaze held him fascinated, till a sudden innovating voice shocked the silence, pouring forth in waves, shaking the black air with reverberations, while still, with never a blink, the great eyes regarded Golde. The miller cleared a nervous throat. And in a moment his ears were overwhelmed: for that pealing solo was joined by another, and another, and a fourth, till the contagion of thunder, caught from throat to throat, swelled into a chorus—before, behind, around—of roars, yells, voices of maniac laughter, maniac screams, and chuckled jabbering. Mr. Golde should have crossed himself: but was no Papist. In two minutes, however, the Babel subsided into silence, as a child is hushed to sleep; only a tormented howl, like the last sobs, would grow and wail itself away.

And in a flash the darkness was abolished, and Golde found himself in the hollow square of a travelling menagerie, while in the cage of the lion, whose eyes had frightened him, he saw a girl stand, torch in hand. She had entered from behind.

She was dressed in the most frivolous gauze, all spangled, showing white slippers, and a velvet cap with green feather: this to accustom the lion to a special garb during special feats. She fascinated Golde's gaze not less than had the lion; while, her hand on the tawny flank, she said, with firm lips:

“Come, Pol.”

Apollyon yawned a red cavern with stalactites, stretched, and rose. The girl drew forth an ebony flageolet, and blew two sharp notes. The lion ramped, and took the torch between his forepaws: he began to dance, while she, leaning, blew a soft, slow horn-pipe, he holding the torch-light like a flag, throwing fantastic shadows, and marking the close of every phrase of the melody by a sharp roar, like a shout. He towered two feet above her, round his enormous head floating and flapping a cloud of mane.

Two minutes it lasted, and then, suddenly, the lion, still ramping, stood motionless, like one struck into listening. For from the outer dark and distance of the moor a sound arose and grew. It resembled successive sharp strokes of the bow on the strings of the bass viol: it was the bay of a bloodhound: and the knees of Golde shook.

His hands were red with the blood of murdered Dejoie.

The lion, dropping the torch, fell to his fore-feet, and dashed to his bars. The girl's eyes, following, lighted for the first time upon the dim figure of Golde, standing there. She thought at first that the lion's rage was due to him, and catching up the torch was about to run out behind; but now the near voice of the blood-hound arrested her, and immediately the canvas flap where Golde had entered was thrust aside, the fierce-eyed head of the dog filled the aperture, and Apollyon shook his bars, sending forth a roar of menace that went quivering through the night.

Golde was all wonder at the sight of the bloodhound: for, even in that vague light, he knew it for “Ritter,” a dog of Mr. Onslow of Newton: and its presence in the hands of the Frenchmen on such a night produced upon his nerves a sense of the mysterious powers of evil.

As a matter of fact, the dog had been given by Mr. Onslow, about to go up to London, into the charge of a dog-keeper at Seacombe. Ritter had suffered a day of imprisonment, tied to a kennel, and as night drew on had filled the place with howlings, bounding from his string like a thing possessed.

By eleven he was galloping through the darkness, trailing a string, with sideward-glaring eyes, back to Newton.

Golde had just struck flint and steel over Dejoie, when the dog's pace slackened suddenly, and stopped. He uttered a yelp; stood sniffing; and started again, but in a changed direction.

By this time Golde was off over the moor.

The dog, on the other hand, made straight for the body: for that hand, now cold, had fed him.

And when the French rushed towards the body, they found Ritter yelping, with thrown-back throat, over the dead man. A glint of flint and steel showed them their chance, and dragging away the reluctant dog, they were soon in its eager tow, it scenting the blood of its old friend on Golde's hand, with the instinct now that it was hunting down his murderer.

The lion-tamer stuck the torch in a sconce, and looked wonderingly forth between the bars at Golde and at the hound's head.

"What is it?" she cried, in a shouted whisper.

"Oh! I am hunted by the very fiends!"

Golde's hands clasped. At that moment, a third face was added to the group, near the ground, where the hound was, beneath the waggon-flap. Both the lion-tamer and Golde glanced and saw it in the leaping flare.

Those eyes glared; the upper lip was long and perfectly pallid, fitting the inward-slanting teeth; a long chin-beard; greasy-black hair very thick, curled about the ears, in which hung ear-rings. From the shoulders, which now appeared, he was small-sized. This was Danda, the captain.

What happened was instantaneous. The girl beckoned vigorously, slid back the door of bars, and stood aside for Golde to spring within.

The blood-hound was straining at the string; Danda picking himself up preparatory to letting it free. Five other faces meanwhile had appeared beneath the waggon-flaps.

Golde flew toward the asylum; and Danda, now on his legs, released the hound. The race was furious as it was short. Golde had reached the waggon-stair, when he was aware of something rushing past him—over him—like a shadow—something huge, winged with swiftness—not towards the cage, but away from it: a cloud of bristling mane; a murmur of expectant joy.

Apollyon had slipped through the opening made for Golde.

There was a roar. The blood-hound, cowering in mortal fear, was face to face with the lion. Danda had shrunk back.

Ritter did not attempt to run, but stood whimpering, fascinated. In three perfectly-curved springs the lion had reached him, brooding boastfully. Then its loud glee gave place to a gurgle of vicious anticipation. For fully half a minute he stopped before the hound, without touching him.

Then he lifted, with perfect deliberation his thick paw, holding it over, still without touching. This action had in it something of the meaning of a smile.

Perhaps it inspired the dog with some touch of intolerable horror, perhaps with a spasm of hope—at any rate, he uttered a growl. And the growl brought on his swift doom. Apollyon was upon him.

Bones popped; and the delicious slush of the lion's sideward munch was heard in the stillness; and again the exploding bones.

CHAPTER VI

MARGARET FERRIS

Apollyon did not stop to finish: but guiltily slid through an opening between waggons, and went roaming the moor.

"You see what you have *done* now," said the girl, with a resigned shrug, "this comes of being *good* to people."

Her coolness astonished Golde.

She was of beautiful shape in close-clinging dress, and looked foreign, with black hair, and richly-flushed face, and full lips, and golden eyes. Her name was Margaret Ferris.

"Ah, miss," whispered Golde, "hide a poor man! These men are acting like demons—they would be killing me—"

Margaret had thrown her back against the cage, looking at her slippered toes.

"Where is one to *hide* you?" said she, "I don't see what I can *do*. There are only two men in the menagerie now, and they are asleep down yonder, drunk."

The men rushed back, the captain foremost. Full in the torch-light stood Margaret and Golde; she leaning half-crossly, half-resignedly, he wringing hands.

Danda, his white upper lip intensely set, and two fellows near him, took aim.

"Shoot the girl!" cried the captain.

Margaret apparently understood French, for she muttered a hurried "Oh, no, thank you!" and seized Golde's hand, crying, "Come on, then."

Golde uttered a cry of pain: a shot had grazed his right arm; but two bullets aimed at the girl smashed against the bars.

She drew the back panel, and dragged Golde through.

"A *race* then!" she cried, hilariously; and hand in hand they went running.

Golde, a man with a good deal of flesh, was panting.

"Haven't you a weapon?" she asked.

"No," he said between two breaths.

"We need not *care* for them. The night is as black as an Arab mare. They can't *see* us—and their blood-hound is gone."

"My God!" the white-lipped captain was shrieking, "you have let them go!"

"'Twas the vile bars!" said Dupin, with a gesture of despair.

"You see the torch," Verdier said, coolly touching his moustache with shapely forefinger. "Why lose time in raving?"

"What torch?"

Verdier nodded toward the lion's cage.

"What about it?"

"You want light, I suppose?"

"That's no good!" shrieked Danda; "that'll show us to them, not them to us."

Verdier, with a light spring, entered the cage, and held the flame to the woodwork. The boarding blackened, crackled, flamed.

"Fire—fire the whole!" cried the captain, his brain grasping the other's idea. "Let it burn!"

Two minutes later Margaret and Golde noticed a glimmering, looked backward, and in the midst of a flare saw three shapes following hotly upon their track.

The woodwork was old, and in ten minutes the quadrangle was an undulating sea, sending out from its vivid focus a dusky glare over the moor. The night was rolled back, and every step of Golde and Margaret was now seen.

"It is a question of *running*, you see," said she, dragging Golde's hand. "I could beat them I know."

"They have weapons," he panted. "They will shoot us, however fast we run."

"They are not such very good *shots*, I think. Two of them hit the bars instead of me, as if one was not big and ugly enough to be hit."

"But—where are you going?"

"Can't you guess?"

"To Seacombe?"

"No. They'd have *you* long before you got to Seacombe, anyway. You are blowing like an elephant. Poor old Jumbo—he'll be burned to death!"

They were now a long distance off: but even here the accumulated roar of the whole hecatomb reached them. The cage-fronts being barred, the French had fired them from the back. The animals, seeking to escape the fire behind, raged against the bars in front, and soon succumbed to the heat and fumes, except two tigresses. These were caged with a tiger, and as there was not room for all in front, a *mêlée* of spitting and tearing teeth ensued, the tigresses at length rushing through the flames at the back from the fangs of the ravaging male. They ran different ways over the plain, and, with Apollyon, now made of Seacombe Moor a roaming-ground of the wild creatures of the wilderness.

"But where are we going to?" repeated Golde presently.

"Are they gaining upon us?"

"They are six—we are two. Oh, and it seems a frightful distance, too! They will catch us, miss.

Over hill and dale they went, and grass and gorse, hand in hand, with slackening trot.

"If that *fire* would only die down!" said Margaret, glancing behind. "It looks as if it were, I think. We should escape then, sure."

"They are gaining on us, I know," panted Golde. "As soon as they gain a little more, they will fire."

"I should fire now, if I were in their place. We will beat them yet."

"But that lion—suppose it meets us

"Pol wouldn't hurt me. He might make a short meal of *them*, if he came across them, once. I wonder if those two drunken brutes got burned in the fire, then?"

"I feel confident they are gaining, miss. I don't know at all where we are either. Seacombe should be over yonder."

"We are not *going* to Seacombe, I tell you."

"Well, I leave it to you. Where are we going to?"

"The canal."

"The canal, miss?"

"I'm hoping that the *fire* may die down, you see. If it does, we're sure of a barge on the banks somewhere about: then we're pretty safe, I should think."

"They will swim in after us! They will get another barge!"

"Yes—you are always *fearing* something, aren't you? I've had worse things behind me than those men, you see. They won't swim after us if they don't see us go into the barge. Look! The fire's dying down."

And over bill and dale they went, and grass and gorse, hand in hand, with slackening trot.

The sea of flame had died into a mere glow of embers, and the great gloom again lowered with sullen gradualness. Looking, the fugitives could still see the band steadily running them down; but they showed now like shadowy shapes, ready to pass away.

“There’s water!” cried Margaret

In a minute they were on the shelving, muddy bank, ran laterally, and presently saw in the dark a yet darker mass on the black water—a barge, covered with a tarpaulin, like some sheeted dead giant.

The canal hereabouts is a mere huge, deep ditch, its banks being the shelving ground itself.

They heard tramping feet, and a voice give some order.

Margaret entered the water to the breast, and stood waiting.

“They are here!” hissed Golde, shrinking. “You go on, miss!

“But aren’t you *coming*, then?” she wailed. “Will you get me *caught*?”

He tripped down the slush to her. In a moment they were swimming.

The French were on the hillock which formed the south bank, and rushed downward, not knowing their nearness to water. One, well in advance, splashed into the stream, uttering a cry. The others halted short. The menagerie fire was dead.

“It is the canal!” said one.

“They are going along the banks,” said Danda:

some of you to right—some to left I

“If they are not in the middle of the canal now, on a barge or something—or swum across,” suggested Verdier.

But he was unheeded. Three ran right, two left. Verdier alone, uncertain, walked leisurely to the right.

“Don’t blow so *hard*!” whispered Margaret.

The barge was low, laden with tin boxes closely packed. They found themselves on a deck almost flush, near the stern. Through the piled-up boxes a lane ran, ending at a trap-door, which they were able to see, because a light from some source beneath made of the opening a square of glimmer.

“That is all right,” whispered Margaret: “there are people on board. Let us go down and see.”

They crept down by four steps, and found themselves in a space six feet square, the walls being formed by tin boxes, in a brazier in the centre a few embers, nearly dead, showed cracks of redness under coatings of fluff. Here lay a man on his face, beside him an empty bottle.

Margaret stirred him with her foot. He did not move. She bent to him, her wet trickling upon his face: she said

“I thought so. He is stone drunk, like those two louts at the menagerie. There’s a ‘benefit’ at a public in Seacombe, where all our people are gone; and this man’s mates, too, I suppose. Those left behind take it out in drink, you see.”

Golde, taking his breath, leant against the wall of tins.

“I wonder if we are safe now?” he said. “Unless they sight the barge.”

“I’ve brought you into a fine mess, haven’t I?”

“You have. Jumbo’s dead, certain. He cost 750 guineas in Provence, in France.”

“You take it coolly, too. Jumbo’s the least of it, isn’t he? The whole menagerie’s gone—your living’s gone. What are you going to do? Your life—”

“Don’t *tease*,” she said, one hand at her hip, her feet crossed, she leaning; “where’s the use of *talking*? The thing’s done. I have been in escapades equal to this before now.”

“You are a brave lass—did you hear something?”

“A brave lass, and a kind one, and a taking one. If ever I get out of this—”

“If ever you do, I advise you to learn to *swim* faster.”

“Well, as for that—pah!”

Golde began sputtering something which, having fallen, drop by drop, to his ear, had collected and trickled into his mouth.

“What is it?” asked Margaret.

“Oil—from one of these boxes, I should think.”

“How long are we to keep shivering here?” she said, after a minute.

Beneath them had formed two lakes, sending out tentative rivulets. From the sleeping man came a snore.

“Those confounded men!” sighed Golde.

“Who are they?” asked Margaret.

“They are Frenchmen.”

“I know that. I heard them speak. But what are they *after* you for?”

“They have a secret. They’re bent upon something.”

“What?”

“I don’t see the good of telling you. They killed the man who told it me, and now want my life, and don’t mean to rest till they get it, too. If I tell you, then you will be doomed—hark!”

“I am going to hear it, all the same.”

“Hark! Hark!”

Golde’s breast began heaving again. Verdier was running by, calling after the others in a shouted whisper. A cur’s bark, too, was heard from the bow. He had been lying asleep, and was aroused now by the shouting of Verdier. The other five, who had separated east and west, hearing the persistent staccato of the dog, halted, listened, and started back. Midway they came upon Verdier, who, in disgust, had ceased to call.

“What’s the matter?” said Danda.

“I hope you liked your run,” answered Verdier. “That dog is on board a barge. If they have not swum to the other side, that is where the man and woman are.”

“Into the water!” went Danda, in loud whisper; “board the barge! Dupin and Corot, to the other side.”

Margaret was now leaning over the starboard port—last hearkening. At the first sounds she had rushed upon deck. She heard Danda’s order to board, and flew to the companion-way.

“Come,” she whispered with hurried breath, “we must get to the other side before them.”

By some sense the cur now became aware of strangers on board, and ran aft, filling the darkness with noise. Golde laboured after her along the lane of boxes.

“We couldn’t move some of these boxes, and hide among them?” he panted.

“Oh, but that is nonsense. We haven’t a *year*—”

They reached the bulwarks, but Margaret stopped, hearing a close splash. In fact, Dupin and Corot were near the other side to block escape. Verdier remained on the south bank, shirking the plunge. Three swam to board. All the time the cur, perched on the highest point of cargo, continued his querulous barking.

“Oh, they are before us!”—she put her mouth to Golde’s ear. “What are we to *do*?”

“If we could hide—”

“Never mind—come on. We will risk it. They can’t see in the dark—”

But now a roar was heard on the north bank, and eight hearts stopped an instant still. Margaret, however, quickly recovered herself

“Don’t be frightened,” she whispered, “it’s only Pol. Come along.”

“No, miss, no, I’d rather not,” said Golde.

Now the voice of Danda was heard.

“On board the barge! Every man!”

The lion had been wandering over the moor, returned to his burned cage, roamed again, and been attracted by the yelps of the cur. But the hearts which quailed at the first outbreak of his voice, quickly understood his impotence on the further shore. The five began to swim towards the barge.

“I hope you are satisfied,” said Margaret, calmly. “It is only a matter of moments now. I feel that they are coming.”

“I should go alone in your place, as you don’t mind the lion,” answered Golde, all agues; “don’t stop for me!”

She said nothing.

There was silence. The lion had ceased to roar the dog had slunk quiet.

“Hark—a splash!” The whisper came from Golde’s chest

“But what are we to *do*? We can’t stand like children, and be caught! We must *do* something.”

“What can we? The game seems up, miss!”

“I know! Have you a knife?”

She rushed down the companion-way, and from the belt of the sleeper drew a knife, and up again she flew.

“Quick, now,” she hissed, “help me with one of these boxes: they are full of *oil!* you tasted it, didn’t you—?”

She began to tug out a projecting box: Golde, clasping the other end, whispered:

“What are we up to now?”

“Come on—they’ve got the wrong ones to *deal* with—”

Struggling, they stepped and shuffled along the lane, laid the firkin on the bulwark; she stabbed the soft tin, ripped downward, prising open the rent. The fluid welled gurgling down upon the canal, where it ran far with nimble feet.

“Another!”

The men began to sputter, wondering in what strange stream they found themselves. In wild activity the two seized upon another firkin, bore it, stabbed, ripped. Golde now grasped her meaning, and toiled like a maniac. Another—in mad haste. Flop went gurgling the sobbing and buxom oil. Another! And plenteous grew the surface with superfluous grease.

“*Now,*” panted Margaret.

She flew down. There in the little brazier lay the cinders. She lifted the whole, ran up again, and cast cinders and brazier far.

Instantly the canal cried “Ho!”—an exclamation of shocked surprise—and burst—far and wide—into flame. From bank to bank, to east, to west, the nimble oil had run, and now lit the night with one vast lamp.

At the shock Margaret and Golde were thrown back; but recovered themselves, and stood looking.

Apollyon turned tail at the explosion, ran up the bank, and there halted, glaring back in half-defiant wonder. On the other bank stood Verdier—siffling.

The five had been swimming with one arm, the left holding aloft a pistol, and through the exclamation of the canal was heard, with telling clearness, the detonating pistols, as one after another banged at random in the fire, four harmlessly: but the fifth shot Corot, who sank.

“*Down!*,” cried Margaret. In the clear lamplight, Verdier, on the bank, was taking steady aim; but the bullet passed over their heads.

By now a gaudy spectacle presented itself on the water. The yellow flare-up, having lasted only an instant, subsided into an ethereal low conflagration of languidly curling and coiling gases, presenting a vast ball-room and carnival of fairy: zephyrs of fire, auroral sprites, rainbows, moving dreamily in infinite minuet, purple and rose, emerald and azure: and in the midst of phantom flames and volatile tints, four black heads, whose eyes must have been eaten away by the lazy lick of fiery tongues, but that by diving to the cool, and swimming, then rising for a hot breath, and diving, they reached the bank with burned and blistered faces.

Verdier hardly glanced at them, as, one by one, they came dripping up in dejected defeat, hands over faces, his eyes being fixed on the head of Margaret peeping, in the coloured lights, over the taffrail. He could see distinctly the broad arch of pencilled eyebrow, richly-flushed face, and alert eyes.

“She is a mighty clever girl, surely,” he said under his breath: “my beauty I saw on Hounslow Heath. I am not going to have her killed by these fellows. I take her back with me—”

Suddenly everyone uttered an exclamation; the fugitives sprang up.

For the flames, licking round the tar-seamed sides, had set the barge alight; and a fire, encompassing her shape, flared from the water’s edge, looking a perfect ship of flame risen out of the lake of flame. Only, the ship burned a murky red, the lake melted into ever-varying visions of aquamarine and vivid green, vermilion and gold.

On the north bank Apollyon, who had run, and then stood glaring proud surprise, caught sight of Margaret as she sprang when the barge began to crackle. He uttered a cry like joy, ran, and commenced to trot backward and forward a little way, near the flame, whimpering, ducking his hairy head, looking always at her, longing to be near her again.

It was now a question of minutes before the fire should eat through the wood, and reach the barge-load of liquid conflagration.

Margaret’s wide eyes flashed round: she rather pale, and scared. Golde was white as dough. They ran along the lane, she first.

“We must swim through the fire, that’s all,” she said hurriedly, looking back. “We can. *They* did it.”

“Yes—get on—for God’s sake, miss!” panted Golde.

“My face will be ruined, though. My hair—”

An exclamation from Golde: “Oh, but there’s that poor man down there—”

They had nearly reached the port bulwarks.

“We can’t *stop!*” cried she. “He is drunk—we shall be blown up—”

“Wait—wait. We can hardly leave the poor man to die in that way.”

Golde rushed, the breath wheezing through his short throat. He plunged down: there in smoky glare lay the sleeper.

Golde shook, lifted him. The head dropped back. The man was more dead than alive.

“So much for you!” panted Golde, and rushed up once more.

“Quick!” cried Margaret, as he hove in sight. “Here’s *luck!*”

The flames were now visible above the bulwarks; the air grew dingy with reek.

Golde believed that he had parted with “luck.” But she pointed: there, floating for’ard, lay a boat, her rope burned away, almost as high as the laden barge, around the boat also being a boat of flame.

To run over the cargo, and leap the fire-rim was not difficult. Margaret went first, having handed to Golde the knife of the drunken man, alighting clear in the centre. Then Golde's weight dropped clumsily, making the boat crank steeply. She righted herself with one scorched side almost quenched.

They rowed towards the north bank, every stroke sending the flaming water wheeling in a fairy dance of hues.

"Only look at Poll" cried Margaret gaily: "he's mad with joy!"

The lion was trotting by the water's edge, backward and forward a little way, whimpering like a dog, seeing her come. The nearer she came, the quicker, the shorter the runs, the thinner his whimpering cry.

Golde said nothing. He glanced at the lion, uncertain which was better, to be blown to the sky, or eaten by the wild beasts of the desert.

The French stood waiting the event. They had seen the leap of the fugitives, but thought it a leap into the water, the barge hiding the boat.

"It is useless to wait," said Verdier; "they will gain the other side as you gained this. What you should do is to run along until you come to where the flame ceases, and there swim, and intercept them. You have plenty of light, at any rate. Stop—oh, they are in a boat! That girl—!"

He had drawn back, and seen the boat about to arrive.

"Quick!" he cried, "they will escape you yet."

"Fiends!" went Danda, his white upper lip set, chin-beard singed to stubble—"this way!"

"That lion—" muttered Dupin.

All started eastward along the hillock which formed the bank.

Apollyon, seeing Margaret near, dipped a thick paw into the water, and drew it back quicker than he put it in.

"Poor Pol!" she said, looking backward all the time at him.

Now a hole appeared in the bottom, and in reeled singing the inflamed water; Golde's oar parted, burned away at the thole-pin: but immediately the bow struck. Apollyon was frantically stepping above Margaret's head.

She leapt, knelt, an arm round his neck, head buried in his mane. Springing up, she remarked coolly

"That barge hasn't gone off yet, then."

But Golde did not hear, having already run some distance up the hill.

"He is *queer*," said Margaret to herself: "is he a coward, or what? Ah, but he ran back to save that drunken man at the risk of his own life, all the same. I can't make out—Come along, you—"

She grasped a lump of mane, and started after Golde, the lion trotting meekly by her. But Golde, with that tender regard for his skin, kept his distance, ever and again glancing backward.

The French had now swum across, only Verdier remaining on the south bank.

The fugitives ran, conscious of a good start, believing that the French would wait till the canal-fire burned out. They struck at random over the moor, by ill-luck, somewhat easterly.

Golde was therefore amazed, on glancing sideways, to see four men running to intercept them. He waved, pointing them out, and pricked his run off to about north-west, she following.

The race recommenced: the French now without the power of shooting, their faces burned, one of their number dead, and the fugitives with an auxiliary worth ten men.

It was four to three: and the odds seemed in favour of the three.

But now something happened which changed the situation.

A chariot of flame was seen to rise and ride towards the sky; and immediately there burst, in heart-appalling detonation, a bang which caught and shook the earth of Seacombe Moor. The barge had gone to heaven.

Apollyon wrenched his mane free, and scuttled, his tail between his legs.

But while the ghost of that hubbub still hummed in the shocked ear, he stopped, looking back toward the source of sound, with lifted head; and doing so, saw the four French, standing paralysed by the shock.

All at once they moved; and as they moved, he roared.

“My goodness!” said Margaret to herself, “Pol is going to eat those men, as sure—”

The lion, with beautifully-curved bounds, was at them, they showing vague in light now like a lamp which has watched all night, and smoulders dim toward morning.

At his approach the four scattered, like a globe of glass which receives a blow.

The biggest was Dupin, and him the lion singled out Dupin ran his utmost. The lion’s blood was up. He sent out roar on roar.

The sight was too much for Margaret’s high-strung inquisitiveness. She ran towards the scene a little way, forgetful of everything; ran, stopped, ran, holding her chin high to look. Golde halted, wondering at her rash approach to the French.

Apollyon was in a valley, Dupin on the top of a hillock about to descend. Lion and man were near now. The race had lasted five minutes. The lion bounded up the rising ground.

When he reached the top, he stopped baffled. Dupin had disappeared.

He thrilled the air with roars, ran this way and that after new prey, scouring a limited area, attracted first by one, then by another. At last he fixed upon Danda.

Margaret, excited, ran nearer to look.

Danda flew toward the canal: but the lion was at his heels: he turned, with wild eyes, with drawn sword; and a fierce fight ensued.

An “Oh!” burst from Margaret. The man was on his back. She ran nearer to look, stopping, and running. But before Apollyon could even scratch, he fell back with languid yelp. A bullet had entered his neck: for Verdier, at the first roar, had at last plunged from the further bank, knowing that his friends’ pistols were useless.

“Oh, Poll” cried Margaret, woe-begone.

There, not twenty paces off, was she. Instantly, with intensely rapid run, Verdier was after her, and she flying. Golde, a longish distance off, also began to run slowly, looking over his shoulder.

“Stop! or I fire!” cried Verdier.

He had still one loaded pistol. But she did not stop: and he did not fire.

Yet, swiftly as the light-limbed fellow covered the ground, she was surely stealing from him, when—suddenly—she stopped. Right before her she saw standing, as if waiting to receive her, Dupin.

Dupin had just picked himself out of the gorsy hollow into which he had plunged from Apollyon. He rushed to seize her.

But Verdier’s arms were around her. He just touched her cheek with his lips, and laughed a little through panting breath, with the word:

“*Caught!*”

The others ran round. Danda, in his white-hot impetuosity, without even stopping to kill Apollyon outright, had run to join the hunt.

She faced round, hot and defiant. “What is it you *want* me for?” Danda’s scorched face wore a smile. Verdier whispered:

“No one will hurt you, you know.”

“But the man! After him!” cried Danda. Golde, a good distance off, stood looking. His face was sad.

“What’ll they do with her, I wonder?” he mused. “Foolish woman. It is her own fault—” He added: “Still, I can hardly allow her to be taken away— alone—”

Now he saw three men running toward him, and ran, too, but tentatively, in a backward-hankering trot.

“I could hardly be expected to let myself be caught,” he murmured.

Verdier had handed his remaining pistol to Danda, saying:

“You and two others shoot the man; I’ll remain by the girl.”

The pistol was heard; but Danda, shooting as he ran, fired wide, and Golde guessed that the shot represented the last of their dry powder. He changed direction, bearing round nearer to Margaret.

“A man’s first duty is to himself” he thought. And then again: “O dear me, I could hardly leave her like that.”

He fingered the knife taken from the drunken man. As he neared her, he saw her wave him away deprecatingly. He was then steering his run on a hillock-top indirectly towards her.

Had she implored his assistance with cries, Golde would have debated the risking of his skin; as it was, he made a bolt with a suddenness which startled himself straight upon girl and captors, knife in hand.

“Don’t mind! Go *back!*” cried Margaret.

But Golde, in steady career, bore down upon the group. His knife slashed Verdier’s shoulder, but his heel slipped at the arrest of his impetus, and in a moment Dupin was kneeling on his wheezing chest.

“Your sword into his throat!” cried Danda, running up.

But Verdier touched Dupin, saying, “Do not kill.”

“I should not have him killed here,” he said to Danda aside. “There is already one body on the moor, and there is the burned menagerie. Our ship, if seen from the coast, will be thought to be connected with all this, and the more so the more mischief we leave behind.”

“But—” began Danda.

“Listen to *me*. We must not leave a dead body so far inland. Our secret may be scented. We must take them on board, and throw the man into the sea.”

“And not the girl?”

“I do not see the necessity.”

“As much as the man—as much as the man.”

“Oh, the man! he would be simply a year-long danger and burden. But the girl might act as attendant to the Duke on the voyage—”

Danda, always subservient to the cunning of Verdier, turned, saying:

“Do not kill. To the ship. All forward!”

A man held Golde by each sleeve; another Margaret by the left arm, whilst Verdier walked by her right, arm around her waist. In front marched Danda with measured rhythmic step, as to sound of timbrel and flute. The canal flickered its last.

There was a stoppage—a protest from Margaret.

“I will not go,” she said, in fairly good French, “if this man does not take his *hand* from my waist.”

Verdier withdrew his hand, bowed, and smiled.

They came in a few minutes to the north bank. Some miles farther east was a canal-bridge, but in their scurry across the moor they had lost the whereabouts of everything.

They therefore swam across: and the march recommenced, the tramp of four miles over grass and gorse, with steady plod. Every now and again Verdier said something in English: but Margaret did not answer.

Suddenly there was an outcry in the night: a "Hi! Hi!" of several voices. The French stopped in alarm. Margaret understood, and sent out her voice, screaming:

"Help! Help! Help!"

"That cursed woman! Run!" hissed Danda.

Verdier covered her mouth. With the *abandon* of a naughty child, she let herself down on the ground saying:

"I will go no farther! Help! Help!"

"Hi! Hi!" came faintly, as if in answer.

It was the bargemen returned from the "benefit," hailing their mate for the barge-boat. But boat, and barge, and mate had long since reached the land of No-Return.

Margaret shrieked. But the bargemen, after leaving Seacombe, had crossed the canal-bridge: the canal therefore intervened. They were, moreover, drunk, and did not even hear.

Verdier, though hardly taller than she, took the girl strongly in his arms. She struggled, but his grip was iron.

They set off at a trot. In less than an hour the lights of boat and ship appeared. At the water's edge they three times struck flint and steel—a signal. A faint grey of morning mingled with the east.

CHAPTER VII

THE FRIGATE

Beyond the reach of shallow surf the boat lay. Again Margaret resisted Verdier's attempt to lift her, and all forded through the swarming and loudly-rumouring froth.

In twenty minutes the boat reached the frigate, which barely forged through the water under jib and fore-topsail: a long raky craft, low amidships, two-decked and three-masted, port-holed for a battery of thirty-six guns on the main-deck, four in the stern, ten in the spar-deck; sharp in the bows and beam-sheer; built for speed. Up from her nose shot the steep bowsprit, like a boar-tusk. Under full spread of plain sail and courses she had the overcrowded look of a little girl who has put on a man's jacket.

The two-sailed pinnace ran alongside, and they stepped up the black-and-white side. Some fifty men leant on the long line of bulwark, looking. Danda sprang up, calling:

"Give her the sails, Anciaux. Must be well out by day-break. In half-an-hour hands to the *Culte Napoléanique*."

Trumpeted shouts began to sound. From flying jib to spanker, from top-gallant to deck, she put on her array of whiteness, and began tripping briskly through the dark. Verdier had charge of the prisoners.

Here all were equals, all fanatics, not a quarter real sailors. Only so much discipline existed as was necessary for working the ship.

Verdier conducted Margaret down to the main deck, others bringing Golde.

"What are we going to do with them?" asked one.

“Shoot them.”

“Drown them.”

“Make them walk the plank.”

This suggestion met applause. It was the age of Avignon Massacres and Peterloos, a cruel age.

“The girl is to be saved,” said Dupin, winking; someone who knows a pretty face—”

The hint was shrugged at, Verdier here being the first among equals.

The cabin was very large, divided into apartments on both sides of the main corridor. Verdier pointed down a side-corridor:

“I should take the man down there. I caught the girl, you know, and shall look to her. All right, laugh, then. . . . Make the man walk the plank, if you like—if you have the sack. . . . I suppose it is wisest to kill him, if you decide so, poor wight. Personally—well, do as you choose!”

He bowed before Margaret, indicating the opposite passage, and she walked down it with him, the others calling “*Bonne chance!*” while Dupin said:

“You, Faguelin, run and look for a sack.”

Verdier led her to an apartment with couches and rugs, a swing-lamp creaking in the centre. Her brows were knit. To “walk the plank”—What was that? It had something to do with “a sack.” Some kind of death, blind-folded, without air. She sat on a couch, her buxom perfection of form obviously fitted to and filling the stuck wet gauze, he beside her.

“Now, I want to be your friend,” he said, in English.

“I am glad of *that*,” she answered, her manner changed almost to gentleness.

“Did the man tell you our secret?”

“Is that true?”

“I very seldom tell *lies*.”

“Have you a sweetheart?”

“What is ‘walking the plank’?”

“Have you a sweetheart?”

“Tell me first.”

“No, I sha’n’t tell you. Are you going to have *me* for a sweetheart?”

“I don’t know you. That depends.”

“You are adorable, and I adore you.”

“Why should you be cruel to that poor man?”

“Are you fond of him?”

“I hardly *know* him. He isn’t my sort, I think. But why should you kill him?”

“I will tell you. We are patriots, devoted to France: and the man has a secret which, if divulged, would hurt France.”

“You can keep him a prisoner, as you keep me.”

“We keep you because you are adorable, and we like you. But in the case of the man, we have reasons.”

“You say you like me. Well, I am not what you *take* me for. But I will think over it—if you spare his life.”

“You are fond of him, then?”

“No, I tell you! *No!*” she said angrily. I don’t *know* the man!”

“Well, but I can’t spare him. You must be reasonable. The other gentlemen would not hear of it. I am not the master of the expedition.”

“Do spare him!”

“Don’t be unkind. I can’t.”

“Then, you do not really *want*—”

“Don’t I? But I do. I am *devilishly* love-sick—those eyes, eh?—gold-coloured, with the wild look, eh . . . ?”

He was sitting sideways, bent forward, gazing at her face; she somewhat averted, with modest eyelids drooped, a faint smile concealing her absolute cunning.

A bell sounded through the ship.

“I must go,” he said, “to prayers,” and laughed.

“To what?”

“To prayers! We have a kind of worship here, you see. Our religion is a hero-worship, and—”

“I care nothing about your prayers.”

“Then, an *revoir*. I sha’n’t be ten minutes gone. But I must lock you in, you know.”

She leapt like lightning.

“You talk about being *sick* for me—!” her lips curling.

“Well, aren’t I, then?”

“You do not *show* it. You do everything to prove that you are telling lies.”

“Mustn’t I lock you in, then?”

“You can, if you like. I don’t care. But do it once—only once—and I never *talk* to you again.”

“What will you do, if I leave you at liberty?”

“What can I *do*? Except I jump into the sea! And I have had enough cold baths for one night, thank you.”

“Very well: I am your slave. Will you remember that?”

He took her hand, and kissed it; and overcame, and kissed her mouth: and she did not resist. He ran then, leaving the door ajar.

She peeped after him. From a door in the opposite side-corridor she saw men troop. The last turned the key. There, then, was Golde.

She began to walk distractedly. There was a port-hole in the apartment: she might jump through: the shore could not be far. But Golde?

She resolved, peeped out. The corridor was deserted. She stole along it swiftly.

The men meanwhile had assembled in a good-sized round room, having a raised recess opposite the door. Danda was kneeling on one of the steps which led to this, a rapt stare in his eyes.

Here was the—Apotheosis. Daily, near sunrise, the frigate-crew, with the lack of humour characteristic of Frenchmen, celebrated the Prime or Matins instituted by the Paris Society called *Culte Napoléanique*.

Around hung “relics”: a spur, a gold epaulette, a handkerchief, a green uniform with red facings; in the shrine, most precious of all—the Waterloo coat, with the stains of the bitter flight. In the centre of the room stood a wooden crucifixion; and back against the boards, a bed. It was intended that here the Duke should sleep, under the stern and anguished brows.

The rite was simple. Danda, on the steps, intoned in a rapid guttural a kind of psalm, of which little more than the ever-recurring Name could be heard. The crowd stood with bent, uncovered heads, till, the canticle ended, every sword flashed from its scabbard. Instantly they fell into a procession two deep, taking up the refrain of the dirge, their tramp keeping time with the rhythm. Three times round they marched, then the inner file debouched inward, the outer outward; each of the inner, as he passed, placed his sword at the crucifix-foot; each of the outer put the coat in the shrine to his lips. Then, with perfectly-timed evolutions, singing the refrain, the files changed places, each repeating the action of the other; till, one by one, they filed out by the door.

Meantime, "*Quick!*" whispered Margaret, as she opened the door, "we can escape—"

But where was Golde? The room was dim. Not there! Her hands met, wringing. There was a cupboard or store-room at a corner. She flew to it; looked in. Not there! Then—all at once—she knew: that was he—in the sack: a sack, reaching far below the feet, with running-string.

"It's me!" she panted, drawing the sack-mouth open: "we can *escape!*"

Golde stood before her bewildered.

"Come!" She took him by the hand.

Footsteps, voices were heard outside—the men returning. Retreat was cut off by sounds of laughter, bets as to whether Golde would reach the end of the plank before he fell.

Margaret glanced at the cupboard, pointed crazily, pushed Golde toward it.

"I—" he stammered—"you go in!"

"You *shall* be saved!—when they are gone—the opposite passage—last door—a port-hole—jump into the sea. You have their secret—I—it doesn't *matter*—"

He hardly knew anything—his wits all gone—only he had a consciousness that some heroic drama was being enacted before his eyes: suddenly he was in darkness; the cupboard-door closed upon him.

As the men trooped in, Margaret settled to stillness within the sack.

"Get it over quickly, sirs," said Verdier.

"Tie up below his feet," said Dupin.

One, not noticing the running-string now looser, drew it, tied it many times round the mouth. The sack, thus considerably shortened, yet remained longer than the body.

"Make him walk to the deck," said one.

"Lift him," said Verdier; "get it over."

"Hurry him away!" was heard the voice of Danda.

On deck, raw twilight preceding day was come. Things near were light, distance dark. The frigate walked steadily through smooth sea from the lessening coast.

About 10 ft. of a plank rested on the gangway, about 8 ft. projected over the sea. Here was the sport of the old buccaneers, flibustiers, marooners, and caravaleros, of Mansvelt, François l'Olonnois, Montbars, Morgan, Kidd, Avery. The sack was laid at the inner end of the plank, its inmate on her feet, without notion where she was, what was to happen: she knew that it was death. The French crowded round, chattering, two on the plank to steady it.

"Now—this way—walk, sir—"

Verdier guided her a few steps, and let her go. She continued to walk with cramped, staggering steps, thinking herself on the deck. There was hushed silence. Midway she stepped slant-wise on air, and fell with muffled cry.

Golde, on the main-deck below, had crept from his hiding-place, out into the corridor, and now crouched, looking through the port-hole of which she had told.

And the cry had hardly died, when his shoes and outer garments were tossed through the hole, and himself in the midst of the sea.

The sack sank far in the impetus of the fall. The ship forged forward in the twilight. Golde swam about in the region of the splash, with a wild sense of bereavement, of terror, and utter loneliness.

The weight of sack and occupant proved precisely the same as that of the water, and diving, he saw a vague wobbling five feet below the surface. He tore after it. Frantic were the struggles within the agitated bag: it rose a little, sank, rose, jerking and bulging in a hundred swift convulsions. Golde dived to the foot-end, and pushed it upward, gnawing wildly at the tense

string; till he had to ascend, all gasps. It was now, however, or never. Another dive, and again he raised her; and selecting now one whorl of twine, with patient rabid gnaw of the dog-teeth, while the death-struggle above went on, he severed it. By now he had the crazy consciousness that the struggle was over, and again he was pumped: but with his last bursting effort, he tore wide the mouth, and shot up, rending the bag from her. He saw her sink from him, bluish face, and shut eyes: but in a moment had her at his breast.

By now Verdier, returned to Margaret, had found her vanished. The noise went abroad in the ship that she was hiding, and a search began.

They were ten knots from land; the morning of the 20th June—the *Day*—grew clear; the ship, crowded with sail, yet hardly leaning, moved through brindled water south-west.

The lay of the land hereabouts is, in general, also in this direction. Bounding Seacombe Moor on the west rises a chain of cliffs, which also forms the sea-front of Wyemouth, and overlooks the striking scenery of Wyemouth Sound. St Jude's Island, now fortified, lies in front; beyond, rising green from the water's edge, is Mount Eton Park, with masses of noble wood. Here and there along the coast the land juts in rocky points, some capped with forts and batteries; whilst, beyond all, lies the magnificent breakwater, midway between the bluffs of Spedding and Raddon Points, boldly interposing between the swell of Wyemouth Sound and the long ocean waves rolling in from the Atlantic. Ten miles out from Wyemouth, stands—on its black and jagged ridge of foam-frequented rock—Raddon Lighthouse.

This series of gneiss crags is the very home of tempest. Sometimes the sea shoots white up the lighthouse column, to leap over the lantern-cupola; more often than not the lower half of the shaft is buried in a chaos of surf.

But that morning the sea's motion in the neighbourhood of the rocks was a mere sway and swing.

Margaret lived, opened her eyes on Golde's breast, looked into his face, saw yonder the grey ship steal away in mist—and understood. She glanced land-ward, saw St. Jude's Island, and knew that they could not swim half so far; though the water was warm.

She rapidly recovered. There, half-floating on the heave of the gently-breathing sea, lay the sack. She glanced at it, and again into his face, and smiled.

"You got away, then?" she said.

"I have to thank you for that, miss, as for one or two other little things," answered Golde.

"We must try for *the lighthouse*."

The rocks were three hundred yards away. The two struck out, side by side, breasting the lazy effort of the swell, while Golde's chest laboured. Suddenly the sun was up, flooding the sea, and almost immediately Margaret, glancing sideward, saw a regiment of oars stalking over the water.

"*Look—!*" she cried out.

From the tops spy-glasses had detected the two heads toiling at the bigness of the sea, and a yawl was flurriedly lowered. As she dropped astern, Danda called orders that the frigate should continue her course, but not lose sight of the lighthouse.

The long oars went out, and it seemed a question of minutes before the fugitives sank riddled with shot.

The sky was a great spread of azure; but on the south-western horizon appeared a coppery cloud: and, as it were, a whisper of darkness ran round the world.

To the straining fugitives the distance seemed not less than infinite: there came a moment when shots began to hiss about them; but they reached a rock, clambered, ran upon slimy green, and had a moment's breath, where a ridge hid them. Then round a curve, and up the side of a

sloping plateau of rock, on which stood the lighthouse. Here, once more, they were exposed, but the men, still at some distance, spent most of the shots upon the reef.

“This way,” panted Golde, and dashed up some little iron steps that led ten feet up the solid base of the lighthouse.

They came then to a trellis-work landing before a door, made like Egyptian doors, narrower at top.

They tried it by the handle. It was locked. A bullet smashed against its casing.

They began to bawl for help, beating madly. At the same time, they could not but be surprised, even in their dismay, at the sinister appearance of the sea: with perfect suddenness it began to swirl, and fret, and whiten among the rocks; the boat, near now, was pitching with quick agitations; and the shots went all over the rocks and lighthouse. That brazen cloud in the south had spread amazingly, and was now flying wide-winged. The day darkened.

From a window, seventy feet up, a face looked.

A minute later the door opened: the fugitives rushed in, and the man who had opened fell back, shot.

Golde banged the door. They were in a narrow, short passage, just high enough to admit them, made of oaken blocks, with courses of Cornish moor-stone, dove-tailed, and joggled, and cramped with iron. Two yards inwards, they came to a dark well, rising twenty-two feet, four feet in diameter. Up this ran steps, scelled into the well, and leading into the lowest of the four stories.

These stories consisted of the lower store-room, the upper store-room, the living, and the sleeping-room.

The lighthouse had the form of a long truncated cone; the period of its erection was 1760, a time when one or two stone lighthouses, like Smeaton's, had been built; but when men still shook the head, believing that nothing but wood could withstand wind and wave.

At such a time compromise was natural: and Raddon Lighthouse was, in fact, like Rudyerd's at the Eddystone, a composition of both wood and stone. The solid base was formed of squared oak balks, firmly fixed to a series of iron branches which were keyed into the rock of the reef; but to increase the weight and vertical pressure, numerous courses of stone were introduced.

Outside these solid timber-and-stone courses, strong upright timbers, scarfed together—i.e., with sides overlapping—were fixed, and continued to the roof. Outside these again, came another layer of stone from foundation to corona, constructed of circles of hewn blocks, all joggled and cramped together. The lighthouse had, therefore, the appearance of a stone structure from without, though it was lined with wood, and, in reality, contained more wood than stone in its make-up.

The place was perfectly still. They two seemed alone in it with the dead man. They mounted the well-steps, holding to a hand-rope. Half-way they heard bangings at the outer door.

The French were besieging.

Two now held the boat beyond the region of the eddies and sea-dash. The others clamoured round the door, and crowded on the outer iron stairs.

A storm was brewing. The sky grew busy and dark with clouds; the sea began to lash and sound; some leaden rain-drops fell.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SIEGE

The lighthouse door was cased with iron: iron panels, iron bolts. All the force of many Frenchmen could not avail to break it in.

“Back to the ship!” cried Danda; “batter the hole with cannon!”

But the frigate had vanished in gloom, and the yawl they could hardly still discern far from the white circle of reef, which now resounded to the thumps of the sea; spray, struck high, smartly stung the face.

Verdier said to one who was a mariner:

“What of this storm?”

“It looks bad,” the sailor said. “You see the moon there, looking out . . . ghastly!—and the tide is rising. We shall have it—but I don’t think for long. How about this door?”

“The lock: you will never get through by banging and violence: pick the lock.”

Danda, hearing the suggestion, flew to his knees, digging with his sword. The point broke off.

“Let *me* try,” said Verdier, and knelt with a thick dirk inserted, probing and prising.

“Now push—hard!” he cried, scarlet-coloured.

Danda and Dupin urged, and they, with the portal, tumbled inward.

A “Bon, bon!” was answered by a clap of thunder, a lightning-wink. They trooped inward, Danda first, with drawn sword, and began to climb the well-hole steps.

Golde and Margaret were in the bwer store-room, kneeling, peering over the edge. They could hardly see down the dark depth, but knew that the French were there, and coming. No light from the darkened day, though the outer door clapped to and fro. A wind came souging up the well.

The flooring of the lower store-room, on which knelt Golde and Margaret, was 32 ft. above the rock; the bottom of the well about ‘o ft. above it; the part below the well being the fundamental solid, outside which ran up the iron steps to the door. In the lower store-room the full shock of the billows was not felt, and there, usually, a dim light filtered through the thick red glass of two square little windows. Now it would have been quite dark, but for a lantern deposited by the dead light-keeper on the floor, by which Verdier, climbing, saw the head of Golde, and leaning aside to avoid Danda, who was before, fired in awkward pose. The bullet embedded itself in the upper store-room flooring.

The two leapt from their fascinated gaze of terror. Danda was not 6 ft. below; his left hand held his pointless sword.

“What shall we do?” she whispered.

“Up—the stairs—”

“The *slab!*”

It was a circular trap-door of iron, near the great hinges being an interval between slab and flooring large enough to admit the fingers. One on each side, they strained at the weight. As it yielded with reluctant shrieks, the wild eyes of Danda loomed above the darkness. Slowly up and up, then faster, it rose at the tugging jerks. It reached the perpendicular—there was a second’s poise and uncertainty—they had too soon let go; but a quick touch slapped it above the ducking head of Danda upon his twice-snapped blade.

They looked at each other, trembling at recovered life. Then she, arm akimbo:

“You will *know* me again when you see me!”

“It was a narrow shave, lass.”

“Somebody or other has got that *slab* on his head! I saw the eyes.”

“And a good thing, too,” remarked Golde. “But what is that—*cannon?*”

“I felt it before. I shouldn’t wonder if the men on the ship are at the place with cannon-balls.”

“But, stop! listen! that can’t be it.”

It was the shock of waves, hurling themselves upon the lighthouse, as if with malice. Above, a door slammed, windows rattled; the structure vibrated to its base.

Then a rumbling was heard above, like Titans moving furniture about for a house-flitting.

“That’s thunder,” said Golde. “There is a big storm outside, if we could only see it. I wonder what those men will do next?”

“What can they *do*? They can’t move this slab from those steps, with us standing on it. We are *safe!*”

“There is a staple, I see,” said Golde, “and a hasp. We should fasten it, I think.”

He went away to look for some small object to place in the staple, and now Margaret felt the slab jerk up a little.

“They are trying to lift it,” she called.

Golde ran back.

“Why trouble?” she said; “they are only wasting their strength—”

“You are very brave and confident,” he said, looking about again. “I shouldn’t mind if I had your pluck and go.”

“You are brave, too,” she answered, dropping her eyes; “but you have lived all your life in a *house*, I should think: you never had any call to show it. And you think too much of yourself, I daresay. I, now, have lived among lions, tigers—”

“I am a miller by trade, and my name is Golde.”

“Well, one does not require much pluck to grind the golden corn— Just listen!”

“It’s the sea, I firmly believe,” said Golde.

“I like *thunder*: just hear how it rages a little, like Pol, and then goes muttering things in its throat”

“I can’t help thinking of that poor man,” said Golde, returning with a long nail, found among square parcels piled to the ceiling, containing huge candles for the lantern.

“What poor man?” she asked.

“That light-keeper down there. He came to an untimely end, too.”

“Well, we were nearly as bad, you see. Isn’t there more than one of them?”

“It’s funny: there are usually three on a lighthouse, I believe. But the others haven’t put in an appearance.

There had, in fact, been three: but the second had gone ashore to procure a doctor for the third, who now lay dying in the top room.

Verdier, eyes flashing, with long hair whiffed, was calling:

“Who has more to spare? Pile it up!”

In his mind was this thought: “To outwit *me!* Well, we shall see—”

Two more flasks poured gunpowder upon a heap already made in the well.

“Now, some string,” said Verdier.

One handed him twine. He laid a bit on the powder-heap.

The rest hurried away over the dead light-keeper. Verdier struck a flash, and saw an end of twine well lighted: as the other end was on higher level, the hemp burned rapidly upward. He rushed, slammed the door after him, and fled down to the rocks, where all stood clinging and drenched.

The picked lock was not ruined, and still fastened firmly. A small space, hermetically closed, was thus created. Either the walls must burst, or the slab at one end of the space, and the door at the other, must fly.

And presently the lighthouse shuddered, and the men saw the door dart from its fastenings, knock away the railings of the trellis-work landing, and plunge.

They hastened up the outer stairs, rushed into the passage, stumbling over the blackened light-keeper, looked up the well. The slab was gone.

They went—Verdier foremost, sword in hand—climbing the ladder-stair.

Yonder in the ceiling was a nearly circular dent where the iron disc had bumped into the wood. But little could now be seen: the slab had fallen back upon the lantern. From below they had been able to see the slab gone, only because the room was less utterly dark than the well.

They looked around, with swords ready to kill: but the fugitives had escaped to the upper store-room.

“Let us pull up the stairs after us!” Margaret had said.

They, too, were a mere ladder, broad rungs slanting in broad uprights. Golde, kneeling, saw that they were fastened to a beam by hook-and-eye, knocked out the two hooks, and pulled. But they were also fastened to the flooring below.

“Stop, I will go down,” he panted.

He slid down. Voices and hurrying feet came up on hoarse soughs of the tempest fuming vehemently up the well. He groped on the floor. Ever and again the heavy ordnance of the sea shocked the lighthouse to its base.

To his intense relief he found the stair-foot not clamped, but fastened with hooks-and-eyes. He knocked out one hook, but the other was fixed in rust. On his back he kicked at it.

“Quick!” he heard Margaret’s loud whisper.

The hook yielded. He scrambled up, and the two were able to draw it, step by step. The alarm which had widened Margaret’s eyes while he was below alone died out. They closed the hinging, oblong, wooden trap, and while they fastened the hasp, the besiegers swarmed into the room below.

The storm was now, perhaps, at its climax, and, without and within, day was turned to night. An octagonal ship’s clock hung in the sleeping-room above, but the dying man there could not see it. Its hands pointed to eight.

The pursuers went striking flint-and-steel, searching among the candles, searching for the stairs, searching the ceiling. Golde and Margaret crouched near the trap-door listening.

“If we only had two *pistols*,” she whispered.

“It would be a good thing,” assented Golde.

“Let us go and look.”

They crept away. The room was divided by a partition, in which banged a door at every blow of the swinging sea. They butted against it in the dark. From far away reached them the wails of the dismal wind—lamentation and a voice in Ramah. This, and the rattling windows, and the banging door broke the perfect silence of the lighthouse. The men below spoke no word in intentness of search; the click of clashing steels was lost in the whoops of the wind tumbling up the flute of the well. Dupin had torn the wrapping from a parcel, seen candles, and lit one; but it was at once extinguished.

Verdier called:

“*There* is the trap-door. Ah, they are above, then; they have drawn up the steps.”

“What shall we do?” bellowed Danda from the other end, above the organ-voices of the hurricane.

“Storm the door,” sang out Verdier’s tenor.

“But how?”

“Splinter it with shot.”

“With shot!” cried Danda like an echo. “Hands this way.”

They had reserved powder from the explosion to serve in case of need. Flint-and-steel struck until all had noted the position of the trap, and detonating pistols began to punctuate the cannonade of the sea and sobs of the wind.

“You, Dupin,” cried Danda through the din; “try to reach with your sword.”

Dupin, the tallest, made a sweep on tiptoe: but the sword cut a free curve, drawing him as it came down. The ceiling was 14 ft high. Meanwhile, the door was being riddled: but the wood was thick, though old. Ball and slug sank into, without ripping, it.

“Here, Huguenin, get upon Dupin’s back,” called Verdier, “and hack the thing away.”

Danda snatched Huguenin’s sword, mounted upon Dupin, and began hewing and driving. But his fury defeated itself: Dupin was now a quivering water-carrier, and now plunged and staggered: the under-surface splintered, but no more.

Verdier had meanwhile gone running, and returned burdened with a parcel of candles wrapped in thick blue paper, and tied.

“Come, help me,” he sang out, and to and fro they ran, piling parcels beneath the trap.

Standing on the pile, they were now able to hack with ease. But only at first: for wrappings and candles began to break beneath their tramps, and soon they were slipping in a slushy bog of tallow, the separate candles stamped into a mere filth of fat, with hard base. It bore, yet did not bear: they floundering, picking themselves up, bumping together, but hacking with desperate steadfastness.

From without, the lighthouse at this time would have been seen deep-planted, like a tree, to half its height, in a steady bank of dashing foam.

Golde still carried the flint-and-steel by which he had seen the dying man on Seacombe Moor, and the two went searching the upper store-room. Here, once more, were piles of candles, with coils of rope, odds and ends of ship-tackle, biscuits, and tinned meats, and bags of vegetables; leaning in the inner room, the figure-head of some craft wrecked upon the rocks; there a fragment of spar; a pile of firewood. The place had a stale and settled stench, like the holds of rank old ships, redolent of bilge-water and fishy odours of the deep. A washing-tub contained clothes, but no water; bones, and the *debris* of fish, and empty cans, and cauldrons of pitch, and blocks, and casks, and lumps of putty, and kegs. In a cupboard at a corner of the inner room, Golde found three long knives; and, on a shelf Margaret two coils of twine, ending in copper-wire and large fish-hooks.

She put her mouth to Golde’s ear with the word:

“*Fisk-hooks!*”

And she handed him a coil of twine; he handed her a knife. They stole back with a certain glad and meaningful guiltiness to their station by the trap.

The clock in the sleeping-room above pointed to nine. The dying man listened to the tempest, to the noise below, and wondered placidly, with musing eyes.

The battery of the door grew slack, and ceased, a round splintered cavity in its under substance, but the upper surface intact.

“This is no use!” cried Danda. “A carronade of round-shot and canister would have banged the whole building to hell an hour ago—but for this cursed storm.”

Verdier smiled. He had in his mind a far more effective method than round-shot: but he feared danger to the Scheme; and, secondly, his Will was set that Margaret Ferris should acknowledge him, Camille, Marquis de la Terville-Rouchefoucauld, and be his slave.

“Some of you lay that slab there on the grease,” he cried.

“The grease!” shouted Danda, like an echo.

Some ran and bore the blasted slab, which dropped with thick flop upon the slush.

This, and the candles, were the only things in the room: yet with good generalship, Verdier had converted them into a perfectly-adapted engine.

“Now off with the shoes!” he called, that sweet tenor making chorus with the piping winds.

Above knelt Margaret, with fishing-line and knife. The contest was resolving itself into a contest between the girl and Verdier for the life of Golde.

The men toiled, dogged, in silence, with stroke on stroke. On the upper side, some splinters cracked; and through a hole a sword-point stuck.

“This door will soon be gone,” said Golde, who heard the splinter crack: “hadn’t we better try the room above?”

“We have *time*,” whispered Margaret: “we will fight them inch by inch, if it comes to that. But how do they do it? They must be on one another’s backs.”

Thick fell the blows, and rapidly did the circular hole gape wider.

“Keep your eyes close,” whispered Margaret, “and make short work of their *fingers*.”

This part of the upper store-room was not all blank darkness, like its inner chamber: for a crack in the trap-door above was filled with a light burning in the living-room, diffusing a glimmer: fingers, therefore, could be seen by the two, provided they looked close.

The hacking ceased. The middle piece of the door had dropped splintered; the remaining two pieces, fastened by hasp in front, and hinges behind, were narrow.

A clap on the floor told that fingers were there. Golde chopped tentatively: the hand vanished; a sound from the slab announced the backward drop.

“*Sapristi!*” said a voice, “they are slashing with knives.

Golde, however, not a man of blood, had cut with reluctant nervousness. She, as if she divined, sidled to him, and loudly whispered:

“You must cut *hard!* Get their *fingers* off!”

Her heart was now hardened against these men to a perfect cold cruelty.

Through the new opening, the wind came up vocal from the outer door, bearing all the noises of the storm, peals of thunder. Ever and anon the lighthouse swayed and trembled to the bombardment of the sea.

“Up!” sang the high voice of Verdier: “scale in a body—all together!”

“Together!” echoed Danda.

But in vain: they became aware, nearly all, that some diabolical thing was among them, a spiteful witch, with nails of steel—tearing at scalp, lips, cheeks. It came and went, bloodily, remorselessly, in mystery. The room was full of oaths, flights, hissing breaths, deep groans. Margaret was fishing—apostolically.

She knelt like boys who kneel with thread-and-pin for sprats, her body held backwards from reach of shot: and to every swing-out of the wire she had her catch of flesh or cloth, and in, with strong tug, she drew the prize, and out flew the pitiless hook again.

Once, as it went seeking, it met the palm of Verdier, who was wondering at the confusion, and came back ripping from thumb-root to middle finger.

He, a man intensely high-strung, could ill bear pain. He ran shrieking. But at once he understood.

“Back!” he called—“can’t you see? they are fishing at you!”

They rushed back, rent hands, nostrils, lips, and gathered round him.

“Now, listen to me, sirs,” said he, speaking only just above the tumult of the elements, “one, or both, of them has a fishing-hook flying there; one, or both, a knife. Well, if we scale in a body, one of us will have his eyes torn, one his fingers cut. But the rest will be perfectly safe, if we be quick. We have them, then. When I say *One*—then rush.”

There was a pause.

“Ready?”

“A moment,” said Huguenin, fingering a half-ear.

“Ready now?—then—One!”

There was a swift, silent dash, and five pairs of hands on each side caught the flooring. The space would hardly admit of more, and Danda, .niad with impatience, found himself jostled out with others. The ten heads rose above the planking.

But Verdier had miscalculated, or else been purposely optimistic. Margaret dropped line, took knife. Two on her side, in quick succession, dropped back, stabbed through the temple, dead. The men had no foothold for the swinging feet—little enough hand-hold. They heaved with curved back, feet struggling upon emptiness—while Golde’s knife chopped the fingers, ending in horizontal sweep like the guillotine, and Margaret’s merciless blade sought the temples.

It was done in some instants: six dropped, with wounded hand, or dying groan. Of the ten, four only were left; but now, on a sudden, four new men, Danda among them, appeared at the edge. Margaret’s knife at that moment was in prone career for the head of Verdier. He already had one knee on the brink. . . . Down came the knife: but he caught her wrist with his bleeding hand. The others, on that side, were almost landed.

An intense agony of struggle ensued between man and girl. She writhed like an eel. “*Beast! let me go!*” came in the faintest hiss, like a snake’s, from her lips. They swayed, she on both knees seeking to thrust him back; he, with one knee sideways on the edge, the other leg dangling in the void, the other hand clinging convulsively.

Thrice, with frantic vigour, she jerked him backwards, and still he held her like fate: then she tugged upward the hand that gripped the floor, jerked at him again, and now felt him going, and herself going with him.

But her outward thrusts affected the direction of fall; the opening was not wide; and her clutching hand caught Dupin’s shoulder, just appearing above the opposite side.

A man less powerful than Dupin must have been wrenched away, or a grip less fierce than Verdier’s: but Dupin clung struggling, Verdier, with grinning teeth, maintained his grasp, and the three wriggled a chaotic bundle, till Dupin’s hold began to give, when Golde, stooping near with busy knife, realised the situation, and quick as instinct had his blade in Verdier’s wrist: whereupon there was a cry of pain, and Margaret’s hand was free.

And now that agility, by which she could leap to her toe upon a racing circus-horse, came to light. Like cat-o’-mountain, she nimbly scaled the struggling body of Dupin, skipped above his head, stabbed his shoulder, and he dropped.

“*Come . . . !*”

High rang her cry: for now several had gained the flooring, she almost among them: but the fugitives were nearest the stair; and up they flew, Margaret first, then Golde, then, in a moment, the French.

“*Shoot!*” shrieked Danda.

One only had ready pistol, and fired: but he stumbled in the dark over the steps of the lower room drawn up by the fugitives, and his slug buried itself in the floor. A moment afterwards

there was dusky light, for Margaret had lifted the trap above: she gained the higher room; and Golde threw himself after her, the pursuers being still hardly half-way up.

The repinings of the storm came up, augmented now in fervent sighs and fluted voices, through the well-hole of the lighthouse.

The trap banged down. Golde fastened it. They looked long into each other's eyes.

"You are hurt, I see," he said, taking her hand.

It was covered with blood.

"I don't *feel* hurt," she answered, looking at it. It was blood from Verdier's torn palm.

"That was a narrow—"

"Well, yes, it was. But some of them have got their sleeping-draught *this* time."

"It is what they deserve, too," remarked Golde.

"Listen! They are hacking at *this* door, now. And they've got the stairs to stand on this time."

All had now come up from lower to upper storeroom, save five dead. All were wounded. But now, through a crack above, they had a glimmer. The stairs, however, were narrow, making it necessary to recline in file in awkward poses, away from the trapdoor: nevertheless, the siege recommenced.

This trap seemed less massive, and soon began to feel the assault of stroke on stroke; but, being smaller, it was more awkward to get at. The clock in the sleeping-room above pointed to ten.

"That is where the light downstairs came from," said Margaret, pointing to an open ship's-stove, whose smoke a tin tube carried away. On the fire stood a kettle, placed there by the dead light-keeper. This room was not divided by any partition. It contained a table covered with black oil-cloth, three canvas stools, a canvas easy-chair, a little shelf with the Bible, Prayer-book, Defoe, Bunyan. There were two telescopes, odd boots, a tin of biscuits, a hanging fitch, a pan of egg-shells, pipes, and stains of tobacco. All in the air was still the odour of old ships, and bitter old yeast, and the inveterate sea. A red-painted ship's-bucket, with coals, stood by the low-glowing stove, and two little pokers. The sills of the four deep, small windows were lined with peeling lead.

Margaret went looking about, while below Verdier, too, left the assault, and striking flashes, rummaged through the two apartments.

In the inner he found two fragments of spars, and running back, handed them to the two strongest Frenchmen, calling:

"Leave off swords!"

The two, half-reclining, began to pound upwards, steadying themselves with one arm. But their posture was so inconvenient, that the trap merely bounced to each bump.

Verdier stood contemplative. "Is it going?" he queried.

"Can't get at it," answered one.

"Come down, then. Remove the steps!"

"The steps!" "echoed Danda, like swift-responding Echo.

Down ran the men, struck out the bottom hooks, and lifted the stairs., trying to get the top hooks clear: but failed. Danda ran up to free them, forgetting that, if he succeeded, he would fall fourteen feet. But he could not: between the *two* side-pieces at the stair-top was a board at right angles to the steps, back of which were the hooks; and as the board nearly touched the trap-door, the band could not get at them from above; on trying, by placing the hand *under*, Danda could only touch the hooks with straining finger-tips, but not move them.

"The door is in the way!" he cried.

They were now in an *impasse*, unable to remove the stairs while the door was there; or to batter the door while the stairs were there.

Now, at the first sound of the club-blows, Margaret had started.

"They have got something besides swords now," she said. "I *thought* they wouldn't keep on. But what shall we *do*?"

"We have knives," answered Golde.

"The knives nearly got us *caught*. Have you your fish-hook still?"

"No, I left it below: which was a forgetful thing, too."

"Yes, stupid. I left mine, too, in the flurry. That door will soon be *gone*."

"These men seem more like devils than humans."

"Look! the *kettle*—"

"What of it?"

"Oh, you do ask . . . we pour the boiling water upon them!"

She ran, took the kettle, and looked in—with an exclamation of disgust.

"It is dry!"

Some flat lime-stones rattled in the bottom.

"Here's a bucket of water," said Golde.

She looked round, ran to him, and, mouth at ear, whispered:

"*Boiling lead!*"

Golde did not answer: but as she hurried to a window, muttered:

Well, all's fair in love and war, they say."

She, meanwhile, reached up, feeling, but the window was beyond her height.

"Please—lift me up," she panted.

Golde ran, ponderously embracing the waist, holding her before him, face to window.

"Wait—I am too heavy that way," she said: "some girls have got no *limbs*, but *I* have, you see. I will get on your back."

And riding him, she cut two squares of peeling lead, ripped them from the tacks, slid down then, cut them into slips, put them, in the kettle, on the fire. And the two pokers, too, she put into the fire.

Below, the voice of the tempest still came tumbling up the flute in wails and volleys of sighs; but the sounds of thunder had ceased; and the lighthouse seemed to tremble less to the massive swing of the sea: the climax had passed. In the room above the clock pointed to half-past ten.

"Take hold of the stairs!" called Verdier.

His own ripped palm and stabbed wrist were wrapped in his stock. They lifted the stair-foot.

"Now, move!—that way, towards the window."

They strained with the stair at right angles to its length. There was a creaking, a silent moment, then a pop, another, and the upper end fell in tumult.

"That's easy done," muttered Dupin, fingering the spot where blood trickled and thickened on his woollen tunic.

"*Fichtre!* what's *that*?" someone called suddenly.

Chancing to look up, he had noticed a glowing something, big as a thumb-end, hang in the ceiling, and vanish.

"Place the two stairs one over the other," called Verdier; "then stand on them, and batter up with the clubs!"

But one stair was hardly in position, when again that cry, "There it is!"

Under another spot the thumb had made its appearance, and vanished, having shed a momentary glow through the dark. All now stood agape, to look: and again they saw it come, and vanish, and yonder again, and vanish; at three spots in the ceiling, at two in the trap: a disappearing visitant, a finger of flame.

This will-o'-the-wisp was produced by the ends of two hot pokers, with which Margaret and Golde were burning holes. A "Quick!" from Verdier sent the French hurrying back to work; but while bent at the task of placing the second ladder evenly over the first, flame shot out of the middle of a man's back, lighting up the room, and a howl burst from his breast. He was followed by another, and another, the kettle of Margaret pouring a brew of inebriation, yet not of cheer. They scampered with howls, questions, curses.

Their headlong cries were audible above: when they scuttled the hot trickle ceased.

Verdier, at flying speed, had rushed into the inner room. A flint-flash revealed part of a ship's figurehead lying there—a flat wooden mass, boldly curved on one of its three edges.

He heaved it up, and ran toward the ladders, now in position. His footfalls made no sound, for all shoes, slippery with tallow, had been taken off below. A glow from the stove made faintly visible the five holes, and sticking his sword into the figure-head, he held it flat against the ceiling, under the holes.

"Now!" he sang out—"all together! Charge! with club and sword!"

The contest had resolved itself into a contest between this fellow and the girl for the life of Golde.

They rushed thundering upon the trap. But for two of the holes the shape of the figure-head did not afford covering. In three, as Margaret poured her murderous tea, the shining fluid rose, scummed with dross, throwing out little flame-jets; so at the free holes, kettle in hand, she knelt, in graceful pose, pouring—not as a matron freely pours, in the afternoon, for her guests, but as a nurse measures out, lest she overcharge the dose, and hurt her care. As bang on bang raged upon the shuddering door, so howl on howl burst from the men beneath. With every drip—a flame; with every drip—a howl of bitterness: so sore the galling *bouillon* rankled, ravening like a lion, trenching and eating, with stench and smoke, the yeanning flesh.

As the door shattered upward, Margaret cried:

"Come! let's go in time, *this* time!"

And they were not too soon. The tortured French leapt with the agility of cats over the splintered wood, rabid for vengeance. But they saw the sleeping-room trap-door close upon them above, Margaret still with kettle in hand.

"Name of a dog! how many more of these doors and stairs?" cried Dupin, twisting.

"Get at them!" shouted Danda, a brand of red scar and blister on his cheek, "wrench the stairs away!"

They swarmed round the stair-foot, looking a ragged, defeated mob, most naked, all spotted and scarred by that plague of heat. But in the wild eyes of all was resolve. In a minute, they had the stairs from its fastenings, then piled chairs, and whatever they could find, upon it; and on these, recommenced the battery, with club and sword. It was eleven o'clock.

The fugitives stood by the dying man—a long-faced, pallid man, with long red beard, and cavernous eyes. Stooping, they could make out his features. He lay watching with wide and languid eyes, beholding Heaven open.

There were two more bedsteads like his—iron truckle-beds, without head-pieces, on castors, covered with rumpled bed-clothes.

Golde said at the man's ear: "Are you ill?"

He did not answer: his wide, placid eyes looked afar at the Vision.

Golde turned to Margaret.

“Look here, lass, how long is this going to last? Here is this poor man dying, you know. It wouldn’t do for us to have him killed, would it?”

His voice had decision. He spoke pretty loudly. The thickly-battering clubs thundered upon the door.

At first Margaret did not answer: then she said:

“I don’t know what you are *talking* about.”

“This is my meaning,” said Golde: “there can’t be many more steps for us to climb: my belief is, there is only one more. We’ve got to be taken, any way. And there is this poor man, dying here—”

“What *about* him?” said Margaret, pale and panting.

“It’s me they’re after, you know, it isn’t you they want. I’m going to put a stop to this.”

She did not answer. But she laughed a little low laugh, bitter and scornful.

Golde dropped to his knees, took the long, wasted hand.

“Look here,” he said, “I want you to try and understand what I am going to say. That noise you hear there is made by some French devils who are storming the lighthouse, because they are after me. Can you understand? Try and let me know, now.”

The man nodded assent.

“The reason they are after me, is because I have found out a secret of theirs. And the secret is like this: they have a scheme on hand to get hold of the Duke of Wellington, and carry him away to France as a hostage. Can you hear me?”

The man nodded.

“Very well,” said Golde, “*you* have the secret now: and if you get a chance, you will give warning of the matter to those on shore. The Frenchmen are not likely to hurt you, if they don’t suspect that you know. So be careful, in case they find you. I do hope you will get strong and hearty again. Good-bye.”

He rose: but Margaret confronted him with clenched fists drawn threateningly back by her side.

“I am going to give myself up, miss—”

“You *sha’n’t!*”

Her face was all inflamed, eyes ablaze.

“Be reasonable, now,” he said: “you have no right to prevent me—”

“I *have!* Why have I *suffered* all this—?”

She began suddenly to cry into her hands.

“I shouldn’t cry: though it’s good of you, too,” said Golde, “and a touching thing. But as we ye got to be caught, anyway—”

“We *haven’t!* I have thought of it. On a dark day like this there ought to be a *light* on the lighthouse: but there hasn’t been anyone to *light* it, you see. The people on shore will know there is something wrong, and come off. We *needn’t* be caught, if we only gain time—”

“But no one could land on the rock—” began Golde.

There was a sharp crack in the wood-work.

She caught his arm.

“*Promise* me—see, there are the two beds! we can keep them back—for an age—”

She ran toward a bed, dragging Golde. Her intensity—her quick reasonableness—thawed his decision. He helped her trundle a bed to the trap, castors upward, then the other, so that two sides

of the beds met over the middle of the trap, the two outer resting on the floor. The sounds of battery came up muffled.

Blow on blow: but when the door was partly shattered, they came upon thicknesses of cloth, which the swords could merely pierce. They had, however, the stove-light: and Verdier, after an upward peer, leapt and seized a sheet, which came down. Soon others were leaping: the bare mattresses appeared: and they set to piercing them, straw whirling about.

“Fire the straw!” cried Danda.

“No—stop!” sang out Verdier; “batter away the whole door

Stroke on stroke. It was half-past eleven. The mattresses thinned and disappeared, leaving squares of laths, and two iron sides.

They hacked at the laths with shrill janglings, but no other result. The squares were too small for the swords to play within. Margaret tried the kettle, but the lead had solidified. One man leapt, seized an iron side, pushed the other away, and got his rash head between. But he fell back convulsed, Margaret having smitten the two about his skull.

The jangling ceased then, and the French stood round Verdier near the fire.

“Every man off with his sword-belt,” he said; “when I give the word, everyone throw his belt over one lath, and hang his weight upon it—only let it be *together*: they have knives.”

The assault was soon over: at the weight, the laths bulged downward, and split from their fastenings, so that the two had only time to cut three sword-belts, when the bedsteads clashed into one chaos of shrilly jangling and vibratory laths. The next moment they were hastening up a narrow iron ladder, and the French clambering hotly over the opening. Margaret pushed at the door above: it would not yield: it was of metal; but when Golde helped, a light-ray came in, and they were on the other side before Verdier had dashed to the ladder’s foot

They fastened the trap, and found themselves in the lantern: an octagon eight feet high, stinking of the burnt candles of half a century. The roof, made of beams and massive planking, was covered with a crust of soot, and the whole was sere with the old heat of the lantern.

Margaret looking over the blue and white sea, said:

“We are at the top.”

Then beneath, and cried suddenly:

“We are *safe!* That door—an *army* of Frenchmen couldn’t beat it away.”

Verdier, lying back on the stairs, had his head close beneath the door, tapping it with his knuckles.

“We can do nothing with *that*,” he muttered. Well, let her die then!”

And down with free swing he swaggered in haste crying in high rollicking tenor:

“Back, sirs, we can do nothing with that! Fire the lighthouse!”

A cheer arose: the long up-hill task was over: and down pell-mell they leapt from sleeping to living-room, where was the stove.

Verdier, the last to leave, dimly discerned the light-keeper, stooped, and was met by the wide eyes. He was both annoyed, and touched with compunction. As he stood uncertain, his flushed face bent low, up trickled a streamlet of smoke. He put his arms under the man’s, and running, lowered his feet, singing out:

“Hi! some of you take this man.”

Two received and dropped him in careless haste, the long-haired head bumping audibly.

Verdier dropped into a smothered room, full of coughs and tears, the grey reek stained at three points with flame-jets. The hacked beds and straw had been piled near the wooden lining, with table and canvas-chairs, and kindled.

The tempest was practically over: but the viols of the winds, finding now free vogue through the four open valves came vehemently vapouring up the long flute in fervent voices and votive sighs, routing the smoke up and down and about. It needed only the opening of the summit trap-door for the draught to go pealing like an organ through the chimney, carrying with it the steady roar of the upward-bickering flames in which all was soon to welter.

Verdier cast flinching eyes around, surprised at the spread of the fire.

“Better hurry down!” he called.

The whole interior was nothing more than a skilful piece of ship’s-carpentry; the wood-work, moreover, was seasoned, and, toward the top, mere touchwood, on account of the nightly heat. The fire was no sooner kindled than it was raging, and the roof hot before the flames were near it.

Danda was heard through smoke and confusion:

“Block up the trap-door! They will try to descend!”

“Absurd!” shouted Verdier: “look round you—”

Already the frantic fire had enveloped the room, climbing like a frightened monkey; and downwards too, with deliberate step, it walked.

Verdier, about to leap, once more noticed the light-keeper’s face, now in brilliant light, and stooped to him. But something in the way in which the weight lay upon his effort caused him to glance: and now, with a low exclamation, he deposited the body. It was dead. He dropped hurriedly: the floor was crackling.

Already in the upper store-room they could see flame at the top of its tarred sides; and as the last man dropped to the lower store-room, down upon the floor of the upper tumbled the floor of the living-room.

And now was swift destruction, and noise, and trickling lead, and crackling glass, and dropping bolts, and holocausts of tallow, and the huge crash and downfall of flaring timbers. The body of the light-keeper was seen to come tumbling, and hang like a guy half-over the doorway of the upper store-room; again it had to fall; and again, as calcined bones, down the well.

Into the mouth of a Frenchman waiting his turn to descend the well, fell broth of pewter; and yelling he ran. And now an upward rage of draught proved the roof pierced, and down on a sudden tumbled roof and iron slab, lantern, and sleeping-room floor, one mass of ruin, upon the upper store-room floor; and down immediately fell this upon the lower store-room floor, filling the well with flame. But the last of the French had passed out to the exterior.

The fallen flames quickly kindled the casing at the bottom, while the upper flames stole downward with steady step. The rapturous meeting of the two was speedily accomplished, and immediately the whole tall interior was one furnace of liquid conflagration, uproariously brawling skyward at the blast of the thundering draught.

The gale, however, was over, and the lighthouse no longer half-planted in a mound of foam. But it remained far too rough for approach, and the French were prisoners.

They did not even trouble to look if any vestige remained of Golde and Margaret, their whole anxiety being now about themselves, for their boat could not be seen.

Up through the lighthouse top a clear column, plumed with smoke, flamed high. It shed a far glow through the sombrous day, its hot breath drying the clothes of the two fugitives.

When they had felt the roof hot they had understood, and looked into each other’s faces, realising that now, at least, they were doomed, not knowing of any egress; till Margaret, running about, discovered a hook in the lantern-woodwork: outside ran a two-foot balcony, bounded by a

railing in the massive corona: and instantly she was on it, Golde after her, the heat being now intolerable to him, who had only stockings.

Round the open space they ran, looking down the outer slope; as a jet shot up within the lantern, Margaret uttered the high cry:

“Come!”

To Golde’s ineffable wonder, she legged over the railing, and vanished, seeming to hurl herself into the sea.

But running he saw her seated on a cornice-beading four feet down, hardly five inches wide, where to his flurried senses it seemed impossible that any creature could remain one second. The crackling lantern, however, was contributory to comprehension, and another glance showed that Margaret’s weight hung chiefly, not upon the cornice, but upon a rod: the lightning-conductor.

It ran through staples, admitting an arm between it and the wall. Golde, hunted from behind, stepped over the edge, trusted his weight to the rod, reached the cornice, and with his arm above Margaret’s, on the other side, clung on, sitting. But the rod, feeling unusual weight, bent its free top slightly outward. They felt it yield with a chill of intensest horror. Neither spoke. By this undecided stay they were held from the abyss of foaming rocks: and they avoided each other’s eyes. Above them roared the stammering tongue of flame.

Unmeasured hours, full of shivering Hopelessness, like an Arctic Hell, passed over them. Afterwards, they were aware of voices, men hooting up through arched hands, shouts which the vague vogue of the wind through the gutted lighthouse would not let them discern. Margaret, vaguely conscious, heard Golde shouting in answer: but he, too, was incomprehensible to those he answered.

By now the interior of the wall was ink-black, dead, without a spark. The sea was almost as calm as it ever is round Raddon, and the French had long since reached the frigate.

The men who shouted had come from the shore, as soon as they considered that the falling tide would permit a landing. Among them was the light-keeper who had gone to procure a doctor.

But the shouting ceased; and the two despairing hearts saw the boat make again for shore. Hope, which had sprung at this human neighbourhood— though formless and unconscious how help could reach them pinnacled there so dizzily—died now.

“Well, my friend—” said Margaret with pale smile.

“Ah, lass,” answered Golde.

More and more the lightning-conductor had given to their weight, the bend being obvious now. Their limbs, moreover, could not long hold on for very torpor. To be able to move but a muscle—this was their longing. But, as time passed, all longing resolved itself into a growing drowsiness. Though sleep were death, yet must they sleep: and for a long time their whole souls were centred upon a slumbrous effort to restrain the leaden weight of their eyelids, and cling on still.

But after two hours a strange wakefulness of hope revived in them. There again was—the boat. They saw it, unless it were the last sweet dream. And this time there was no shouting. The men landed quietly, and entered the lighthouse.

The two waited, wondering, till they were startled *by* a whizzing hubbub which went fussing up, up, through the lighthouse-top. There was an aspiring light in the air—a silent burst of fire—a cascade of hues: it was a rocket. Its flight ended, it curved upon itself in the height, and plunged downward, to smite upon the lighthouse side. The stick-rope struck, in its slap against the wall, upon the cheek of Golde.

It was Margaret who, with slow trepidations, made the first descent, the men paying out to her weight. Her hands could just sustain her: and she, and then Golde, arrived at the ledge where the conductor met the reef.

To the hundred questions of their rescuers, they could return no answer. The muttered word "Frenchmen" was, however, at that day, almost an explanation. Some brown-brandy was poured down their throats, and they leaned foredone with drooped head upon the gunwale.

At four in the afternoon they were landed at Weymouth.

CHAPTER IX

THE "BUSY BEE"

On the Wye-bank was an embankment, through which three steps led into the garden of the "Busy Bee."

Here the boat shipped oars, and one shook Golde, another Margaret. Their heads rested upon their arms: and they slept deep.

By much coaxing and shouting, they were got through the bowling green to the inn, moving with closed eyes, dragged feet, and hanging heads, each supported by two men, while some midnight murmurs came from a corner of Golde's mouth.

"Now, Mother Higgins, get us two beds for this lot," said one of the men, arrived in the parlour. Mother Higgins, a stout old widow, asthmatic, with a redundant wealth of buxom chins, put a hand behind an ear, and said:

"Two what?"

"*Two beds!*" shouted the waterman.

"Oh, two beds. Who are they?"

"They are from the burnt lighthouse."

"The what?"

"*The lighthouse!*"

"Oh, the lighthouse. They will pay for themselves, I suppose."

"Now, Mother—is that a question, now? You know Mr. Golde, the miller, at Newton, don't you?"

"Mr. Who?"

"*Golde! Golde!*"

"Oh, Golde. Well, Sarah, give the girl the back room on the first story, and put Golde into the empty a-top."

Sarah led the way, and the two sleepers were pushed and manœuvred up the stairs behind the bar. To Mrs. Higgins a stair was a feat not lightly to be undertaken; but Sarah did the kindly office of undressing Margaret of her still damp flimsies, and put her naked to bed like a sleepy child. Above, as the boatmen did the like for Golde, another murmur, like chloroform mumblings, came from his lips: but without articulation. In two minutes the pair, who, through a night and day had braved together a host of perils, together slept peacefully.

But not for long. The vitality of the girl arose. A thought, deep in her consciousness, shook her slumber. At about six in the afternoon her eyes opened. She lay in a state of vacuous languor. Her arms went up, her hands clasped over her head, and a while she lay so, profoundly meditating upon nothing. Then a stark jerk of the body; and a coarse free yawn: and a swift twist; and she lay now sideways, lithe as a panther, a perfect animal. One of her arms, dropping in

lassitude from the stiff stretch, fell over the bed-side, and the palm met a chair. On the chair was a paper; and upon this her fingers unconsciously closed.

She was restless. Thought, as yet unborn in her, was working to birth. She stiffened arrantly again, and up went the paper in her out-shot fist. As she again relaxed, the fist fell into her left breast, grasping the leaf. Soon she became conscious that she held something. She looked at the crumpled ball, smoothed it out, and listlessly lifted it before imbecile eyes.

In a moment she was awake. Thought, recollection, rushed back upon her. She sat up.

The paper was a leaf ruled in red, torn out of an account-book: and on it a bill for a week's board to someone called *Lise d'Arblay*: and it was *the French name* which had so acted as a shock.

She set to shouting. The housemaid, Sarah, a tall wench, came in.

"Oh, I am *famished!*" said Margaret.

"So I should suppose, too, by accounts," said Sarah. "What will you have? We have turkey poult, murinade pork, some mutton casserole, some turbot-and-smelts, an apple-tart, green peas, brocoli, endive, and potatoes."

"I'll have all. Oh, do get it to me

"Sha'n't be a minute," said Sarah.

"What is to become of Mr. —" called Margaret.

"Golde?"

"Yes."

"He's upstairs asleep."

Sarah presently returned with a heaped mixed platter. Margaret began to gorge, everything together, as was the fashion, plate on legs.

"You had a French female staying here, I think?" she said with full mouth.

"We had a female," answered Sarah, "I don't know if she was a French one."

"She spoke English?"

"Oh, yes! such a dandizette, clearly of the upper circles, more like a princess, my dear: her gowns, her worked pelisses, and the magnificent way she dispensed the regents! And for supper, seven-and-six port, dear me! And withal a most condescending polite lady of fashion, I'm sure —"

Margaret gobbled industriously, silent. Then, across pork, mutton, turbot, peas, pickles, brocoli and potatoes:

"What was she *doing* here?"

"Don't know, I'm sure."

"How *long* was she here?"

"Just a se'ennight."

"When did she go?"

"This very morning."

"In the *storm*?"

"Yes; but she is coming back: she left a portmanteau behind."

"What did she *do* with herself while she was here?"

"She went a considerable deal on horseback. Would go about the moor every day; she frequented the neighbourhood, in fact."

"But what *for*? Did she talk to anyone?"

"Not a creature hardly. Some mornings, at a certain hour, she used to go to the grotto down the garden, and—"

“Well?”

“You know the gipsy-men: two of them called once to see her; and in the grotto, after that, she used to talk to one—”

“A dandizette of fortune talking with *gipsies*—?”

“She told me she was taken with gipsies, they being such interesting poor creatures.”

“Did you know that the Duke of Wellington is at Grandcourt Abbey?”

“Oh, everybody knows that. A deputation of the Rank and Fortune of the County, with the Sheriff, a detachment of the S. Devon Militia, and the Plymouth Volunteer Cavalry waited upon him yesterday.”

“How far is it away?”

About a seven mile from here.”

“Was that the way the lady went this morning?”

“Was that the way? I think so—yes.”

At the last word, Margaret in one leap, was out of bed.

“Quick!” she cried, “you have to lend me some *clothes*.”

Sarah stared, but once pushed away, quickly returned with a bundle—shoes, linen, and a brown gown, ankle-long.

“What’s it—?” she began.

Margaret was at once breathlessly at work. “Didn’t Mr. Golde *say* anything to anybody about the Duke when he landed?” she panted.

“Oh, he!—he was fast asleep. No, he said naught. We do not even know the history of your escapades, or anything—”

“Then run — quick — and call the post-master for me!”

“She—’tis a female—can’t come up—you oughtn’t to exert yourself like that: you haven’t had any rest to speak of—”

“Can’t you do as I tell you? *Call* her! Stop— where is it Mr. Golde has his Mill?”

“At Newton.”

“Is that nearer Grandcourt than here?”

“About a three mile nearer, I should say.”

Margaret caught up the bill, rushed half-dressed to pen-and-ink on a table inside the big fireplace, and wrote:

“If I want you, I will come to your Mill for you.—

“MARGARET FERRIS.”

“Don’t wake him,” she said, “his hunger will wake him. Put this on his pillow, so that he will see it. And now—*quick*—the post-mistress.”

Another push sent Sarah through the door. But Margaret was dressed and flying down the stairs, before Mother Higgins, all sighs, had toiled in uphill travail half their height.

“Are you the hostess?” cried she, with hurried breath, hardly stopping—“then you’ve got to tell everybody that *some Frenchmen* are trying to kidnap the Duke of Wellington, in as mean a way as possible.”

And down she flew through a side-door, across the fields, running.

Mother Higgins, on the stairs, stood staring where the phantom of the girl had been, quite bewildered.

“The Duke of Wellington?” she murmured: “trying to entrap the Frenchmen—as many as possible?—what in the world has that to do with me? The young female’s crazy!”

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!—Mother Higgins was deaf. She descended the steps in calculated detail, hoping that Mr. Golde was prepared to bear the charges of the fugitive girl.

CHAPTER X

THE SNUFF-BOX

By noon of that same day, the 20th, at a time when Golde and Margaret felt the lighthouse-top heating beneath their soles, Lise d’Arblay was at Grandcourt, it being still very dark, though the climax of the storm was passed.

News ran then so slow, that when it was heard, as it were from nowhere, it seemed to proceed, in Homeric phrase, Ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ—from God. Post-chaise, mail-coach, stage-coach jingled merrily between inn-station and inn-station; but at the stations themselves, guard, driver, and “boys” took life leisurely, fortifying against the next bit of road. The poor outside passenger mingled democratically with the four or six inside fares in the parlours, and only when all had attained to glairy eyes and hot joy in the stomach, was the journey resumed.

The Duke of Wellington was hourly expecting Opie and the despatches: for no part of England, except the London region, had heard anything of the murder of the officer, and the disappearance of his niece, when the band of gipsies, with forced travel, were already at Seacombe Moor.

The Abbey lies twelve miles from the coast, seven from Wyemouth, in a garden of fertility, contrasting with the barren Moor three miles off. The sombre pile, cross-shaped, stands on a terraced lawn of artificial waters and flower-beds; the horizon being park and upland forest. The South wing, looking towards moor and sea, closely approaches the park, between the two being a tarn whose wavelets lap the darkly-mossed old stones, and from its south bank an avenue of sycamores leads away and away, directly southward through the park, the procession of trunks meeting at a far vanishing-point.

The Duke was alone with the servants: for Lord Elwell, his host, had two days previously accompanied his wife over the hills to Market Graddon, she having been summoned to the death-bed of her brother, the young guardsman, Lord Archibald, who was under the care of a French physician, D’Artois. When Lord Elwell demurred to go, the Duke had said:

“Very well, if you stay here on my account, I shall have to run off.”

And since those lips never uttered words which they did not mean, this threat settled the matter. His lordship went, and was not expected back for yet two days.

The Abbey Library overlooks the lake; and there, amid the double procession of busts and stained old glass, the Duke sat reading by lamplight when, at noon, “Mrs. Opie” was announced.

He ordered her to be admitted. When she appeared, he rose, with bows.

Now glints of silver, though few, mixed with his light hair: but he was never in fuller vigour, erect, without an ounce of flesh on that aquiline visage of blue hawk-eyes, which retained a singular boyishness. He had on a blue cut-away coat with silver buttons, light “trowsers,” a throat-wrapping of brown stock.

“I have the honour to be the bearer to your Grace of despatches on behalf of Lieutenant James Wootton Opie,” said Lise, seated near him, she in very telling Kendal bonnet, and rolloied travelling-gown, gold-clasped, which she held up, and patted with a riding-whip.

As she made her announcement, the steely eyes of the Duke, and the bold eyes of the woman met.

“So, then, what is become of poor Opie?” said he.

“Lieutenant Opie is in the greatest distress, your Grace. Your Grace may possibly have heard of his poor niece, who has the misfortune of a disfigurement of face?”

“Well, I have heard something. I thought it was rather a hoax of those newspaper-fellows.”

“A hoax? Why, no. It has been my pious task to watch over this interesting girl, in her seclusion, for some years. Lieutenant Opie, I may say, is devoted to his relative, in spite of the misfortune, or, perhaps, because of it. She has, alas, lately disappeared.”

“Is that so?”

“I had only left the house for an hour. When I returned, she was gone. So far, all search has been useless. It is credibly supposed that she has been kidnapped by a band of gipsies, for the purposes of exhibition about the country.”

“I am very sorry. Opie is a gallant fellow. So, then, he is looking about for the lady?”

“He is run wild, your Grace, with grief and rage, and has gone tearing harum-scarum into Bedford-shire, which is the chief haunt of the gipsies. He has asked me to present a thousand apologies at your Grace’s feet for his incapacity to bear the despatches in person. With me, he felt, they were safe as with himself.”

The Duke was wondering what was the relation between Opie and the lady before him. She had called herself “Mrs. Opie”: she might be Opie’s brother’s wife, or something. He would not ask. But she volunteered:

“I should have informed your Grace that I am Lieutenant Opie’s wife.”

The Duke bowed, but his eyes twinkled. A gold snuff-box came from his waist-coat pocket, and a pinch went up.

“So, then,” he said to himself “Opie had a wife hidden away somewhere, unknown to all of us. Or else, for some reason or other, the woman is lying like the devil to me.”

He said aloud:

“You and I may have met somewhere, then. I am getting rather an old fellow now, and the memory almost looks as if it wanted to be off. Still, I have a way of keeping a lovely face in my head, when I see it.”

That made her throw the head sideways, coquettishly, saying:

“H’m. Your Grace is too indulgent to my poor face.” Then, in serious tone: “I should perhaps tell your Grace that I have been married some five years: but there are reasons—family reasons—which make it desirable that Lieutenant Opie’s marriage should not, for the present, be known beyond a strictly limited circle.”

“Do not mention it,” said he. “Opie is by so much a luckier fellow than we all thought him. Well, now, but tell me — how did you get here?”

“I arrived by coach at Wyemouth this morning, and have rode to Grandcourt.”

“Then you must be very tired.” He pulled a bellrope. “I am rather in a difficulty, however. They have all gone away, and left me by myself: so you will have to put up with me for host.”

“I return, your Grace, to Wyemouth, at once.”

“I cannot let you do that, you know. I know those shabby coaches too well: they knock one up more than a day’s march. I shall keep you here at least three days, then. Or since they will not let a man be host to a lady, why not let me instal you as hostess for the time being, and then you can consider me your guest. How would that do?”

He said it playfully. Lise smiled. A lackey entered.

“This lady will be here as mistress of the house for some days,” said the Duke: “just put her in the right hands, will you?” Then to Lise: “What I should do, would be to take a good big tumbler of mulled port—you will find an excellent cellar here—and then turn in, and have a good siesta.”

Lise sank and curved into a profound curtsy; handed him the despatches; and went after the lackey.

“She is French” — he tapped the snuff-box bottom—“the cut of the face, and something or other in the accent. So that fellow Opie had a wife hidden away from everybody.” He applied the aroma to one sideward nostril, then to the other. It was a mixture moistened and mixed by Fribourg & Treyer of the Haymarket, invented by that connoisseur, Lord Petersham, an exquisite secret, a breath from Arabia: and the box was most choice, of fretted gold: at this point the iron man and duke tended to luxury. “And a wife in rather good taste, too,” he said disjointedly between two inhalations. “Well, now—” He broke the Government Seals, and commenced a long study.

Outside Lise said: “Do not have my horse unsaddled for the present. I shall ride him presently.”

She made a pretence of eating, but took no siesta that day. At One, she was a-horse again, galloping for the martello-tower, two miles from Grandcourt. There she placed in the dark niche agreed upon with Lovell, the gipsy, this note:

“In the martello-tower this night (Wednesday), at *half after nine*. I must receive word not later than *seven* that all is ready on your side.—D’ARBLAV.”

She returned to the Abbey, and spent the interval between two and six at a bedroom window looking upon the lawn, and the sombre, windy day. Quiet, patient, she sat, hatted. Her cream-white was tinted now with yellow. *Fear* was at her—a Doubt huge as Being; at about six she became restless, and began to pace furiously, kicking her skirt before.

At about six, too, Margaret Ferris, in wild haste, started out from the “Busy Bee” across fields, big with her momentous warning. Lightly sped the swift limbs on their errand of good-will, her feet beautiful as the feet of him that bringeth glad tidings. She guessed that no attempt would be made, save under cover of night: and had hope. Besides, she had left the great news behind—the country-side would rise. She did not dream that the precious words, dropped into Mother Higgin’s ears, were as lost as though shouted into some vague well.

But she would be in time! Unless some scheme, more subtle than she could conceive, were even then in working. “That man they call *Verdier*—” she muttered, panting. Verdier’s cunning loomed terrible now in her eyes—she had felt it.

As she ran, a galloping ass passed her: on its back two panniers, and, with grasshopper knees, the gipsy, Lovell. He was making for Grandcourt, returned from the frigate, with Danda’s notice to Lise that all was ready: and he was in haste, being late.

“A gipsy in a hurry?” thought Margaret: “who ever saw that? But a *giptsy*—!”

She remembered the French lady’s intimacy with gipsies. And this one took the way to Grandcourt—in a hurry. A fervent eagerness to reach the place before him arose in her. She dashed forward. She cried, “*Stop!*”

The man, perfectly stolid, did not turn his head, though presently his gallop slackened into a shuffling amble. She, running hard, could hold her own; but her splendid wind began to fail.

The road wound near Newton village, half-way between Weymouth and the Abbey: and just here she saw patient under a tree a raw-boned butcher-boy's horse, a commonplace of that time, with meat-tray strapped to the one-stirrupped saddle. The boy had alighted for some purpose: and she, instantly on its back, urged forward the hack. The ass began to gallop again, but she, plying the stick, gained slowly, though it became evident that not much of a victory could result for either. The gipsy seemed to have become aware, without once looking back, that he was pursued, and the little ass went clattering into its bravest gallop. After about a mile they were nearly abreast, when she saw a bright something stick from a stuffing of cloth in the pannier nearest her. With quick wit, and circus-agility, she stooped and drew it—a knife.

She slackened pace; the ass forged ahead; and now, keeping to the other side of the path, she dashed once more into full speed. Catching up the ass again, she stooped, and with a slash, cut through the three pannier-straps on that side of the haunch: as it dropped, she caught it by a strap, and let it gently down. With an adroitness so swift was it accomplished behind the gipsy's back, that he had no notion of anything: and they had galloped a mile onward before Margaret, looking back, called out:

“You have dropped the basket with the *child* in it—behind!”

The gipsy, glancing at his haunch, uttered a mad exclamation. He turned, and flew backward, belabouring his animal, screaming a gibberish of imprecations, fist in air.

Margaret now counted that she would reach Grandcourt twenty minutes before him.

But she had hardly started into fresh gallop when two roads opened before her; and down the one which did *not* lead to Grandcourt bolted the butcher-horse. She tore at his mouth of brass; she fought and whispered, flogged and coaxed: but in headlong career the old nag held his dogged course. This was his way home; and this his hour of rest from the day's toil.