

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE HOOFS

Now, Lise, after a time wishing to have some guiding sound, had quickened pace; then, hearing nothing, had gone yet faster; and now had arrived at the certainty of some calamity. She reined and sat troubled, and terrified, and angry, and puzzled.

Suddenly—behind her—she heard afar the dark Hi! Hi!

Of all the crazy improbabilities and distracting surprises of topsy-turvydom this, to her mind, was the most crazy. She knew the voice! Here was the Duke of Wellington, evidently alone, hurrying after his captors, calling anxiously for them!

Nearer grew the dark voice, with a “Hi, Frenchmen, Hi!” and a “Hi! Hi! Hi!”

Before this paradox reason succumbed. But one thing was clear: he believed them before, and she had decided that they must be behind.

It remained to her, either to reveal herself and tell him to change his course, or to hurry after her friends. Upon this latter she resolved, and, making a detour with noiseless slowness, re-found the footpath, and set off galloping northward.

The French were again near the meeting of footpath and castle-road, when Margaret, hanging behind them, all wonderment at this northward flight, drew out of the way of the cantering hoofs.

“That woman again,” she muttered: “now, anyway, he’ll know the beast in her true colours, I should think!”

The French hailed: Lise drew up.

“What *has* happened?” she asked.

“Happened!” replied Danda. “Your friend here let go hold of the man on his parole, and the English fox—”

Lise,” said Verdier, “I think I told you not to make a row with your horse’s hoofs.”

“Nonsense!” she cried angrily—“turn back—and fly, fly—he is on the road behind you—calling for you—!”

They were off southward, brushing past Margaret, unsuspecting, came to the point of their deviation, and on, with continuous sharp trot, beyond. From this point the path curves to the right, and loses itself in Seacombe Moor. The Duke had gone to its termination, then, meeting untracked bush, turned back, walking now, tired, hopeless of finding them. Occasionally still he lifted his voice in a ‘Hi!’

“Well, then,” he muttered at last, “if not to-night—to-morrow.”

But presently afterwards on-coming feet reached his ears. He smiled.

“Ah, I thought they would be looking up again somewhere,” he said.

They were quite near before he said coolly:

“I am here, you see.”

Verdier stepped forward with invisible bows.

“We are most sorry, your Grace, if, by any blundering of ours, we have caused your Grace anxiety.”

“Well, now,” the Duke said to himself, “this fellow is a gentleman.”

He added:

“No, it was rather my own fault. I got into a hollow tree somewhere, and stayed in it too long.”

He was among them again. But as the march reformed, he said:

“But my promise no longer holds good. Understand that I mean to run off, if I can.”

“Then may we now take hold of your Grace’s arm?” said Verdier.

“No. I mean to say, if an extraordinary chance happens, as happened just now. Otherwise I shall stay with you. Let us be going.”

The march recommenced: three, then the Duke, then three; then, behind, Lise; then Margaret.

They reached the Moor, and now the Duke walked in the middle of a narrow circle. Anon Verdier would strike a flash, and look at his compass. The course was south; eight miles, then the shore, then the boat, the frigate, and victory.

Abreast went Lise and Margaret. Anon a sound, dark and ghostly, broke the silence. The Duke faintly heard it, and wondered; Verdier heard it, and was angry; Margaret heard it, and it became intolerable to her.

It was the strike of a walking hoof against some stone, an occasional tramp on hard earth. Lise now kept nearer, resolved not to lose them again, guided by rare glints of Verdier’s flint; and her hoof-sounds were heard,—always singly, and most vaguely, seeming to come from the depths of space, the bosom of nowhere.

Margaret they affected with irritation and a growing rancour; broke in upon her agonised effort to think; molested and embarrassed her. For now again the thought, “What am I to *do*?” tormented her. All the old hopes, of Golde, of rescue-parties, recurred, and turned to despairs. It was well on in the small hours: but long, long, before a ray pierced the blackness, the party would be on board the frigate. The shore couldn’t be far off, and the boat: for here was Seacombe Moor. And she was following just like a little child, or an old woman, feeble, without wits in her. But *something* she would do, she vowed: straightway would run and do it. Only what? The possibility of again misleading them, in the then order of march, was gone. There was the boat—if something could be done to that! This was her thought, when again the hoof-sound from nowhere threw her into confusion.

“If I could only find out where *you* are, I would soon do for *you*!” she said, with shaken menace of head.

The boat! Again she began to think of this— And again a hoof-sound: but this time she knew where and how to make it cease for ever. The nag had neighed. The previous ghosts of sound were a different matter to this definite whinny: and Margaret turned to the left.

Lise had no idea that Margaret was now near the party. The cracking of a twig would have aroused all her suspicion: but Margaret approached with absolute caution, lifted skirts, dainty step. Soon the regular hoof-sounds were in her ears, a snort, then the laboured breathing. He passed close before her. Her warily-stretched hand touched his haunch.

And Lise only saved herself from a backward fall by a clutch of the lax reins: the horse, in a spasm, had reared straight, Margaret having buried in his haunch the knife from the gipsy’s pannier.

Where her blow fell, whether into Lise or the horse, she did not care, nor know. But she was not long in doubt: out, as the nag dropped from the curvet, went its hind-legs in a kick of agony; and away went Margaret with them, and lay sprawling, moaning low.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE BOAT

What caused the curvet Lise did not know: the nag settled into its former walk, and she went unconscious that thick gore oozed from a profuse wound behind her.

Onward, over grass and gorse, with steady tramp, went the men.

They crossed the canal by a bridge perilously near Seacombe: but Seacombe lay in nepenthe profound as the last sleep.

A long way behind sprawled Margaret, half on her face, a hand on her hip, where the kick had fallen like a swung club. She was crying, but it was rather from rage, and soon the tears dried, and she began to think again, reverting to the boat: but it lay motiveless in her brain; then to Golde, and he lay motive-less in her brain; then to the boat, in vain. Suddenly she sat straight with a cry of pain, of joy: she had connected the boat and Golde, and had invented.

She blessed herself for having written to him that night. It would be impossible, she knew, to reach Wyemouth before the French the shore. Even of Newton she was not sure—how far it was, how far the shore was. But she sprang up, tried to estimate directions, and determined upon a course. She set out slowly, with limping difficulty, started into a forced run, had to stop, ran again, and found it now less painful. Finally, in virtue of that natural power of mind and body to rise to the necessity of the case, she was able to run continuously, though with distress.

Now, Golde, about midnight, had awoke ravening. A lamp burned in the room, and the first thing he spied was Margaret's note: he was to be at his mill. But a stronger reason urged Golde: the vacuous hole within him. The inn was silent: and though Newton meant a yearning trudge of three miles, yet a certain oyster-patty, neat's tongue, and veal-surprise at the mill offered speedier satisfaction than the process of rousing the inn. With the lamp he crept down, undid a back door, and went across fields. The mill stood well outside Newton on a very steep ground, timber-framed Elizabethan, dark with age, and had the look of madly struggling to keep its perpendicular, as a man tripping too fast downhill, tries to stop, projecting a leg. It had been added to, altered, and added to again; and salient bits and gables, oriels and tiny turrets with finials, made it an eccentricity almost droll. Within, the rooms were antic as possible, triangular, pentagonal, numerous, comically tiny; everything seemed to slant; things hung askew; door-bottoms did not run level with the flooring, nor either with the ceiling. At the back the old green wheel, and the works.

Golde uttered an "Ah!" after a crowded meal, and sat back lazily throeing with digestion. He had known how to enter and provide himself with light, food and porter, without waking his old housekeeper. When Margaret, guided by his light, began pounding at the door, he sat thus alone; and down he went.

Now her sustained fight against the sprain collapsed; and she almost fell upon him. He bore her up the inconsequent, crochety stairs, laid her in an easy-chair.

"I am sorry, miss," he said, "to see you in that way."

"The Duke—is *taken*"—her nose and forehead screwed together for pain.

"You don't say that, miss."

"He is! By now he is not far from the *sea*. There isn't any hope left, unless you get there at once, as fast as ever a horse can take you."

"There is no horse," he said, "there's a little ass—"

"Oh, don't say you haven't a horse! An ass can't carry us *both!*"

"Wouldn't it be better if you stayed still, and rested, miss, a bit? You seem in pain enough, too."

"That is nothing at all! A wretched nag kicked me. Can't you get a horse—?"

"We could, yes, by going into the village and knocking it up. Let me see—it is near two o'clock—"

"That's no use! we haven't an *age* to spare! You must go alone on the ass, then\_\_"

"I tell you what we might do," said Golde, whose slow mind now hit upon the right thought: "do you know those new-fangled hobby-horses that've come up?"

"Yes! have you one?"

"I have, miss."

She jumped up.

"Can it carry two?"

"Just what it was made for," said Golde. "I bought it a bargain at the sale at Wyemouth two months since. And warmish exercise I have found it, too."

"Be quick, then, Mr. Golde, do!" said Margaret. "Can it go as fast as an ass?"

"Equally, I should say. But what is it we are going to do when we do get there?"

"I will tell you. Bring a lantern, that's all."

Golde got a lanthorn, descended to an old cellar, and came dragging the hobby-horse. He settled Margaret on the saddle in front, holding it upright, swung the lanthorn to the handle-bar, and sprang astride to his seat, making a backward dab at the ground with his toes. They were off, in long spurts of motion, Golde leaning far forward to the handlebar, spurning the ground with alternate feet, his legs going at a terrifically wide angle of urgency.

The light of the boat came into view, steady, and dainty, and clean.

"Try and hide the lantern," said Margaret.

Golde threw over it a red handkerchief.

"And how do you take to this kind of travelling, miss?" he said on heaving breaths.

"It does jerk," she answered.

For the bicycle—without crank, pedal, chain, or rubber tyre—was devoid of undulancy, and with every backward thrust of Golde's toes at the scrubby ground, the sudden spurt and spasm of the hobbyhorse shook them with strong jolt, like rowing on very rough sea with oars that ply, not together, but alternately. A faint light, however, from the covered lanthorn revealed the rudest spots, and guided a career of some six miles an hour.

Margaret said: "I did not think you took to sports and fashion, Mr. Golde."

"It isn't so much that, miss," Golde panted, "but when a man lives all alone by himself—"

"You don't mean you are not *married*?"

"No, miss, strange to say. It never happened to me, somehow. I suppose it is that no one ever took a fancy to me."

"They will *now*, when they hear all you have gone through, and how you saved the Duke with your hobby—horse."

"Ah, now you are joking!"

"No. A woman likes a man who has been through things, and seen adventures. You will have all the girls at Wyemouth and Newton wanting to live at the mill, Mr. Golde."

Golde was intimately tickled.

"And much good they'll get of their wanting, too," he said sheepishly. "The chances are that the one I should like won't have me."

"Oh, but that's faint heart. Send me to her, and let me tell her of the *lighthouse*, and how you saved me out of the sack, and see."

"You wouldn't have to go very far, then, miss."

"Stop it, Mr. Golde! There is no need for that, you know."

"I am serious, miss."

"You are like all the *men*! The first thing that comes to the tongue."

“Well, I don’t know. I look upon you as a most brave lass, and a shrewd one, and a taking one. I should be a happy man to-morrow—”

“Hark! I hear the sea!”

“We are not far from it now.”

“Keep straight for the light, will you?”

“And what is it you propose to do when we get there?”

“Don’t you see?” she said. “It is very *late*, isn’t it? The Frenchmen have been wandering: they lost the Duke twice. The men in the boat must have expected them hours ago; they must think that something very bad has *happened*. If they see a false light in-shore now, going one way and another, like a boat tacking, and getting always nearer to him, what will they think?”

“Well, and a good plan, too,” said Golde. “They will think that a craft of some kind is coming to take them. Is that your meaning, miss?”

“Yes—and they will think that they must be a long way farther out than they supposed, and a long way nearer their *ship*. There can’t be many in the boat, because a lot have already landed. And they won’t know how many are coming to take them. It will be madness if they don’t put out their light, and take a short cut to their ship.”

Now the frigate’s port-light, too, very small, like red Mars, appeared; the hobby-horse was in the midst of the loud rumour of the frothy surf; and opposite burned the steady boat-light.

The strategy began: Margaret, in one hand, held high the uncovered lanthorn, that the vessel feigned might seem bigger; and Golde, spurning with alternate toes, sent the hobby-horse running obliquely eastward; then, with large-curving tack, westward; then eastwards, approaching always the shore. Before they reached the region of dry sand, the boat-light vanished. But they continued the alternate career till Golde’s toes sank into wet sand, and Margaret quenched the lanthorn under her woollen shawl.

She had estimated with some accuracy the mind of the boatmen. They were only three: they had long been anxious: and they could not doubt that the tacking, growing light, which infinitely puzzled them, was hostile. Her estimate of their courage alone was at fault: they did, indeed, make for the frigate, but only in order to return with another boatful of armed and desperate men.

A mile inland with steady tramp, the Duke in their midst, came on the belated Frenchmen.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### TO SEACOMBE

The light which the French saw, and thought their boat-light, was the lanthorn held high by Margaret.

Danda cried out: “We are there at last!” A moment after, they noticed the movement with amazement, their boat being sailless. Then the light *tacked!* and, their stupor at climax,—vanished!

“They can’t be far off now,” Margaret said: “we had better get out of their *way*. We have done for them now, anyway.”

Golde rode towards the moor.

“Hark!” whispered she. Then, with certainty: “Yes! here they come. We must get off this thing, Mr. Golde: it makes a noise.”

They dismounted and stood still. On came the sounds, and passed them close in voiceless tramp. Then from the shore vague words came up to them rolled in the noise of the waters.

There is nothing for them to *do*," said she, not careful to whisper, since the surf filled the French ears, "even if the boat is there, the men in it would hardly hear a hail in the noise. And they're *afraid* to hail; and the boat, I think, isn't *there*."

"There I agree with you, miss," said Golde. "They are in a bad way, certainly. I could almost pity the poor brutes."

Yes, *I'd* pity them!"

"I pity the poor Duke, anyway. He'll have a poor night's rest of it. They'll simply keep him a prisoner till the boat puts in an appearance again."

"If we *let* them, you mean!" cried she, exultant and flushed: "just let them wait there an hour, and see if they don't get some *bullets* in their head!"

"It would be what they deserve, too," remarked Golde. "And there is no doubt, miss, you have no lack of schemes passing in your head. What may the next be, if I might ask? I am ready for it, whatever it is."

"How far is Seacombe from here, Mr. Golde?"

"I should say about a four mile."

"It is the nearest town, isn't it?"

"Yes, much."

"Has it got a church in it?"

"A church and a chapel."

"Well, then, let us go and ring up Seacombe quick, and bring it out upon these French beasts!"

"I am with you, miss. That is, if the boat doesn't put in an appearance while we are gone, and take them off."

"But if it did, we couldn't do any good by *standing* about here. Let us go at *once*."

"I don't know," said Golde, "but it looks to me as if I saw a light out yonder a moment since."

"I don't see any."

"No, nor I now."

"Come on, then—make your *hobby-horse* go, Mr. Golde! It's a race: and they'll have to look sharp, or we have them sure!"

Golde helped her up, mounted, and went rocking and toeing in the direction of Seacombe. But it was a race in an unsuspected sense. For, some feet off sitting stock still, Lise d'Arblay had heard every word, and, hearing, understood the cause of the boat's disappearance. Margaret had done this. Margaret had been with them all through, the secret cause of all their woes! Margaret was with them still, alert, hardened against them, bent upon their ruin! And she would succeed, too: only she had Lise to reckon with! Down upon the horse's haunch dashed her whip, and the panting nag was away.

Horse, then, against hobby-horse: and Seacombe was the goal. From the lanthorn Margaret soon took off her cloak, and the light was a guide to Lise behind. With quick invention, Lise had already decided what to say, what do, if she could reach the village three minutes in advance. Bitterly now she reproached herself for lacking some weapon, for the possession of which she would have forfeited her fortune, or a limb.

Upon the toiling bicyclists stole the galloping hoofs.

"It is clear, miss, that someone is after us on horseback," panted Golde's labouring chest.

"Yes—I know who it is," answered Margaret. "It is a beast of a woman who is the cause of all."

"Well—a woman!"

“Yes. It is her horse that kicked me. She is the wife or mistress to that Verdier. He calls her *Lise*. The Duke thinks her name is Mrs. Opie, but it is D’Arblay.”

“It looks, miss, as if she will be beating us.”

“You mustn’t *let* her! Do, pray, Mr. Golde!”

“I don’t seem to see what she could do at Seacombe, even if she does put us behind a bit.”

“She is a vile woman, that. She will do *something!* She must have heard what we were saying in the *dark!*”

“Mightn’t it be a good thing to cover over that lantern, miss?”

“It might. Why?”

“We offer a very fair target for a pistol, don’t we?”

“But would you be able to *see?*”

“No, you are in the right there. Still, I think I should cover over that lantern, miss.”

She covered it.

On came the spattering hoofs. Five minutes from the start Lise was two hundred yards behind; in seven they were abreast, and Seacombe three miles ahead. Side by side, ten yards apart they sped, Lise’s whip plying, Golde spurting with all his careering legs, each a constant unconquerable presence with the other.

“Don’t let her beat us!” Margaret tossed the hiss behind her.

A moment, and she was rolling on the ground, Golde with her: he had run into a gorsy depression. Ahead, as they lay, they heard the lessening hoof-beats.

She leapt up. “If we had had a *light*, you see—!”

Her first care was the lantern: it had been jerked some distance, but still burned.

“Ah, that was a nasty bit, miss,” said Golde. “I hope you have not met with an injury. We might still be able to get there within four or five minutes of her.”

“Come, then!”

And again they were up and off, this time lit, Lise being a thousand yards ahead. But something was wrong with the horse: she felt that. He no longer answered to the whip, save on his left haunch, when a throe beneath her, a slight kick-out, was the response. She began to know that her speed was slackening: there was a sense of failure, as if he yielded beneath her weight: she was not strongly and bravely borne. Yet he could not be so tired! she whipped and whipped. Once there was a tottering gait an instant; later he stumbled, nearly lifting her over his head. But he continued to run: and always the whip went.

It became clear to Margaret that they were rapidly gaining upon her. Never was Golde so in earnest: in his unconscious eagerness to gain her smile, his short power of wind seemed to multiply itself; and with widely-careering legs, in alternate rock and rush, navigating the encumbered heath, he went toiling on the toiling hobby-horse: toiling—for ominous creaks, and presently, as they stole near Lise, a singular clack of metal upon metal, were heard at every backward toe-thrust, the machine swaying in the middle at the jerk of each repeated impetus, like a thing protesting against the work demanded of it. But they were well within a mile of Seacombe. Golde, conscious of some weakness, did not relax, but even, with a certain merciless vehemency, put forth his last reserve of vigour; and while on this pitch of effort, once more heard the galloping hoofs abreast, heard them struggle an unconquerable presence, heard them yield defeated behind. He found breath to say:

“We shall leave her out on the moor yet, miss!”

And farther receded the hoof-beats during three minutes, till the hobby-horse quietly parted into a front and a back wheel, the front lying over Margaret. And Golde was at her side, lifting her, and she, with bruised arm, was saying: "It cannot be far off now; on foot, then!"

And before Lise reached them they were off the lanthorn with them. And when Lise dashed past, Golde knew that Seacombe could not be half a mile, and panted:

"We shall be there within five minutes of her yet!"

But even this final estimate proved wrong: for Lise had hardly cantered by, when her horse shivered through a horrible long heave of the flanks, tottered, dropped dead. He had been bleeding through the wound of Margaret's knife for nearly two hours. When the race began his eyes were glazed; his head hung low. It had hastened the end.

He fell upon Lise, who for some time lay shocked and fettered. The two ran by, believing her well on towards Seacombe. But three minutes after they began to run down the long street, Lise was still out on the moor.

So Golde and Margaret won the race of horse against hobby-horse from Wyemouth coast to Seacombe village.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE ALARM

But they did not know their victory: and with prone run down the silent street, made paces for the church.

It stood in meadow at the end, small but rich, Edward II. Decorated. Golde knew its position exactly. They passed through a gate up the steps of a frontage pierced by a rich and deeply-recessed Norman arch under a gable-niche containing a statue of St. John. Here Golde hoped for entrance. But, holding the lanthorn, saw only the brass knocker by which criminal fugitives gained sanctuary, and the locked keyless door, though the short iron bar hung unsecured.

"We shall have to knock up the *sexton*," said Margaret.

"No, this way, miss, please," answered Golde. "There is a door around there in the vestry, which it is more likely—"

Round they ran through old slant tomb-stones.

The vestry stuck out sideways, a cubical box against the church-wall. Golde found a small door, secured by a hook and eye, ran through a little north chantry of dainty Perpendicular, past a pulpit of corbel and crocket, and over storied grave-slabs in the nave floor. By an inner handle they opened and flung wide the portal for the entrance of Seacombe.

Not a sound in the village: it was past three; and the faintest breeze arose, premonitory of day.

"This way, miss, for the steeple," panted Golde.

It was square, battlemented, at the south corner of the façade, the only thing crudely modern in St. John's. One entered by a door within the church. They looked about for the ropes, and not seeing any, climbed a ladder-stair to the stage above; and here, through holes in a higher floor, came three ropes. They deposited the lanthorn near the door, and took each a rope. Suddenly Seacombe was awake, staring scare. Loud went jargoning the turbulent bells in affrighted clamour through the night. Fire! And out looked a thousand wondering heads, the savour of snoring beatitudes still fresh in the nostrils, to find for answer only darkness and the insistent alarum of the bells.

High through the reverberations, cried Margaret:

“I wonder what that *woman* is doing flow!”

“It remains to be seen!” bawled Golde.

It remained not long: before the first sound Lise was hastening down the street. She had visited it before, but was uncertain of the position of the church, when forth clashed the innovating clangour upon the timid silence. She flew, entered, passed the font, the line of blue mosaic beyond which women once might not advance, looking, spied the turret-door, peeped in. Light streamed down. She hurried up, not even careful to go soft in the tumultuous verberations which brayed through the narrow tower. She was at the door; looked in; the backs of both were toward her. She introduced an arm, straining to reach the lanthorn: it was too far; she entered, stood there with them an instant; and they did not see her.

Suddenly Margaret cried, “*Look!*” —but too late.

Lise was gone; they were in darkness. The door was closed upon them, and fastened outside.

The turret was littered with rubbish, dust, ancient refuse. On the lowest floor stood in a corner a dust-heap of old torn documents, shavings of repairs, bits of cloth and wood. When Lise saw this, she smiled: it was what she needed. By armfuls she heaped it at the stair-foot, then held the lanthorn-dip steadily to the pile. A flame shot up. Outside were remote sounds of a crowd. The bells had ceased. She threw the lanthorn upon the burning heap and slipped out quickly, locking the door by a bang behind her. Into the church now streamed old and young, slovenly women half-nude, children. No fire, certainly, was in the village, and none knew what to make of the *reveille*. In some minutes the building was the thronged focus of the village: Babel reigned—a tempest of tongues. In rushed a plump rector, red-faced from his winey slumber, with one stocking, his night-dress bagging at the breeches-waist under small-clothes. Who had rung the bells, and for what, became the question. When the sexton entered, belated and dazed, and could give no account of things, it began to seem as if Beelzebub himself was abroad. Women screamed guesses across the church-breadth one to another. Parson and bell-man, apothecary and “post-master,” dignitaries all, assembled near the altar-screen. The object of Lise was time: a minute more or less might be everything. Only when the ferment grew superlative, and there was a movement of investigation towards the steeple, did she run up the pulpit-stairs, and in the circle of lonely marble stood.

Clustered pillars of Purbeck and carved bosses, fan-traceried roof and panel walls, all was a vagueness in the ruddy clair-obscuré of chance lanthorns snatched by hurried hands. Only half observed Lise, till the parson roared “Silence!” and there was silence, and vacant mouths.

“My friends!” she began, filling the church. “It was *I* who rang the bells!”

Here was light, the beginning of light. The murmur hushed; she proceeded.

It was essential, my friends, that I should arouse you. You know, don’t you, that a menagerie has been on the moor, and was burnt down last night by some accident?”

“Aye! ’tis so! go on!”

“You think perhaps that all the men in it perished in the flames, or are gone where their business calls them—”

“No! no!—three of ’em are here now!”

This was a nonplus. She hesitated: but proceeded:

“At any rate, there are two others of them, to my knowledge, not only alive, but near you now. I happened to be passing over the moor a while since, my friends, as I have to be at Lessing, nine miles hence, by early cock-crow; as I came along, I heard two people in the dark; I stole toward them, and heard their talk—a woman and a man they were. They averred that the menagerie had been set fire to by you Seacombe folk, and they were coming straight here to give you tit-for-tat,

by burning down Seacombe while you were in your beds, friends, beginning, they said, with the church. They found out that I was listening, and chased me, friends. I know they can't be far off, if they have not already set fire to something while I was ringing—”

At this point there was sensation, commotion: for now, in truth, the church was perceived to be full of a thin smoke.

Again arose the outcry of fire. Through the uproar screamed the voice of Lise:

“Friends! you see I told you true! and the incendiaries are in the village still! The only way to secure them is to form a cordon round the village, all of you, and wait for hours—till morning—to block their escape—”

But this suggestion was mostly unheard, the people now being turned toward the turret-door, where fast came oozing dark smoke from every cranny; when some rushed to open it, they found it locked and keyless; the sexton was impotent: the key had stood there for years, nor was there a duplicate that he knew of. The air thickened every moment to a darker grey, the lights showing lurid, the crowd jostling between and over the pew-backs, shoes falling off women fainting. Now a stout farrier shouted above the din, bidding some follow him: these crushed their way to the frontage, and ran down to the smithy, seizing upon crow-bars and sledges; hastened back then, made to the turret-door, and a vigorous bombardment began.

Lise, seeing this, and fearing the rescue of the two, coolly doomed the whole village, and hastened out.

And soon strange panic was added to the turmoil by a crush at the front, by a heart-startling rumour: the portal had been barred on the outside, and now a man came bellowing from the vestry that there, too, escape was barred, while above the turmoil and short-winded *mêlée* of the blinded people out clanged once more, with mystifying unexpectedness, the noisy bells, adding to distraction sound. For a real fire this time rang Golde and Margaret: for, as the sledge-men with unlooked-for quickness crushed a hole through the turret-door, the interior sent forth a belch of sparks and redundant smoke, hurling the crowd into a backward jam: and immediately it was seen that the inner surface of the door was well alight, and the steeple in flames.

Now it was the turn of the portal, blows thundering upon lock and wood-work, and at the vestry-door a thunder of blows; and above, the quarrelling bells; and within a hubbub of voices, gasps and screams. When the pent-up crowd at length streamed forth, a great mouth of flame had opened within between church and turret.

Outside, they assembled before the façade, filling the churchyard, spreading up the street, gaping at an up-gliding cloud of flushed smoke, through which thronged processions of sparks and flashes from turret-top and window-slit. Far it disparded the solemn dark with a scintillating mist, till a tongue of bright flame shot, and the fire-dawn was turned to red day.

Some talk had been going on about forming the recommended cordon: but before any movement could be made, two shapes appeared to the astounded crowd scampering round the turret-top. (Lise had long since disappeared, no one knew or asked whither.)

The man, seeming to stretch down arms of appeal, was answered by a shout of execration.

The eyes of both were wide in panic. It was impossible to misunderstand the nature of the shouts below.

“It does look, miss, as if we were down for this time, and no mistake either,” heaved from Golde's short breast.

She was running round, he behind her, looking for the lightning-conductor, remembering the lighthouse. But lightning-conductors were not common: here was none. The turret was, however, covered from top to bottom with ivy, and this fact occurred to the girl's swift mind.

“Down by the *ivy*,” she panted, “it will break our fall.”

“Our necks, I think, you mean, miss,” answered Golde; “and a very safe way of doing it, too. Do, pray, don’t think of that!”

“’Tis better than *burning!*”

“’Tis quicker, yes; and just as sure.”

Golde, as always, clung to life for as great a number of seconds as the heavens would grant it him: the turret was nearly eighty feet high.

“I am going—!” she called.

“Oh, miss, miss—” cried Golde.

Her leg was actually over the top, but she stopped: for she had chosen the shortest side, separated from the church by a platform low down seven feet wide, but just beneath her was a Gothic window pouring out processions of sparks, and these had thinned the ivy above. At the sheer precipice her heart failed: and as she paused, she noticed what caused her to tingle: the window was on a level with the church-coping. If she could leap from one to the other—but the window was too small to admit a standing body the only possibility seemed to lie in the placing of a bar or a beam across, so to furnish a bridge.

With this thought, without a word, she flew down scorched stairs into thick smoke brightly lit by a streak of flame, which had even shot through the roof on one side. There hung the three bells.

The moment when the bell nearest the flaring side would drop to the very bottom was not far.

In the burning room she looked wildly around: but no bar or beam met her sight: only the doomed and silent bells, waiting. She saw a ladder, indeed, but its three steps were only four feet long. Foiled, she ran back, to be met by a stone from below which cut her temple.

In the heart of the mob was not one gentle throe. A dramatic Providence, it seemed, was here at work, burning those who had thought to burn. And when humorous old Steve, the fiddler, he of the sharp face, bright eyes, and fumbling toothless mouth, hit upon the idea that Providence was weak alone, and hrew a stone, this inspiration caught the whole mob. It chanced that a conical heap of broken stone for paving lay near, and this, once discovered by another genius, began to grow less, and went showering upwards, falling mostly short.

But a few reached, one cutting Margaret, and immediately another gave out a clang, striking on metal: and this sound drew her interest, and inspired her invention.

“Mr. Golde, here!” she cried: “let us see if we can move this—”

It was a rod, round above, square at bottom, ten feet high, at its summit a weather-cock glancing now with creaks at the gadding of the morning breeze.

Golde, without question, set to work at her bidding. They laid hold of the rod with desperate wrestle. It did not budge, being embedded in the masonry, and clamped to it by two rectangular cramps.

They desisted. The fire spread. Now a stone flew by.

“Well, miss, there is nothing in that,” panted Golde.

“It is the only thing *left*,” she wept. Suddenly she vanished again, flew down, placed the ladder-steps beside the smallest of the bells, and with cheeks hot from the near flame, was about to mount, when the mass of metal disengaged itself from the eaten roof, and down with huge clatter tumbled, rending with it all the flame and burnt flooring in that corner. Back she leapt, dismayed by the bigness of the downfall; but in a moment was under another, mounted, and with furious effort disengaged the tongue from its socket. Faltering under the 85 lbs. weight, she again reached the top.

“Now, drive at that thing, Mr. Golde!” she cried, “and drop the bell-tongue on these *people* when you’ve done.”

Whereupon Golde, with this ponderous sledge, did drive, and the mason-work began to spatter, and the flaky old iron to fly, crack, and writhe and presently there were no cramps there worth mentioning, and the bar was nodding in a dusty hole.

“Now, miss, I think it will come to a pull,” gasped Golde, winded.

At their upward strain it yielded, and, one at either end, went rapidly down, and out at the Gothic window. The farther it went, the greater the strain to keep its outer end, though the lighter, up to the coping-level; but by the bell-tongue and their own hung weight, the other end rose and rose with jerks, and fell, with a push, upon the coping, a bridge secure.

The flooring was half consumed, three sides aflame, and as Margaret clambered to the sill, down crashed bellowing another of the bells. She let herself down at full length, and commenced a hand-walk across, a hollow space of fifty feet below. But now the mob, missing them, had edged round, and a rain of cruel missiles surrounded her, striking her back, her head, or flopping spent in her skirts, amid hoots and ribald jeers. Now Golde, too, trusted his weight over emptiness, going astride, clasping with the arms, winning himself along with slowest caution. When he was half-way across, Margaret stood waiting on the leads behind the coping. He reached her with bleeding jaw.

And now was the run, no longer from the fire, but the stones, round the coping, in search of descent. There were buttresses, but without foothold. They went balancing in close flight along the coping-top, making for the chancel-end, where it was dimmer, till Margaret cried:

“The vestry!”

Its flat roof lay thirty feet below—a deep drop: but here, too, covering vestry-roof and church-wall, grew thicknesses of ivy and white briony.

“Just let me try first, miss,” said Golde, “and see how it treats me. If it wasn’t for those foolish men and women down there—”

“I may as well go first, Mr. Golde—”

“No, lass—remember your sprained leg. Just let me go, and receive you as you come.”

He stepped hesitantly over the edge, and in a moment went clutching and tearing at the yielding masses of tendrils, bumping to a seat astounded as a fat monk from beneath whom, about to sit, the chair is pulled. And now came Margaret, all a disarray of wild skirts, and Golde, as he caught her impetus, fell with her, and together they rolled a little in the ivy there, tightly held, and lingeringly. Here they were secure from pebbles, and for some minutes sat so among exuberance and leaves, watching the square flame-pyramid at the turret-top.

“That boat must have come back by this, lass,” said Golde, and laid his hand on hers: “I have an idea that this is a bad business.”

For answer she jumped up, and at once went down the vestry-wall, tearing at the tendrils, in a drop of twenty-five feet. She alighted upon soft ivy-grown mould; and looked up to discern Golde hesitating: and soon he, too, was with her, a much-bumped man. They found themselves in the midst of the rough-handed and noisily-vengeful villagers of Seacombe.

## CHAPTER XXV

### THREE CHEERS

“Drive un back into the turret—let un burn!” cried the snuff-man.

“Take ’em round to my shop, let’s gi’ ’em a pill a-piece!” said the apothecary.

“Under the pump with them, and quench some of their fire!” cried the rough-nosed rector.

“*You silly fools!*” shrilled Margaret.

“No, no, lass,” said Golde, who, meanwhile, was being roughly hustled, “listen to me, folks, please. You have got on the wrong track somehow—” he backed towards the vestry-door, and lifted himself on the step. The dusky light of lanthorns shone here and there on a rude visage, leaving vague interspaces of heads; while in buttress-recess, in the shadow of oak, or church, was the very blackness of darkness, though broad overhead the sparkling fume solemnly informed the night. “On the wrong track somehow— We are two perfectly innocent people—”

“Oh, aye—us’ll show ye innocent soon!”

“Well, but you will give a man a chance to talk, I hope,” proceeded Golde: “violence is not likely to help you to the truth, and it’s the truth you want, I daresay. You are thinking, I shouldn’t wonder, some of you, that it was we who set fire to the church: and nice people were they that did it, and much luck may they expect, too—”

This was too ponderous for the occasion. The mob would not stand it.

“Oh, come on, ye it wur right enough: under the pump with ’em, as passon says!” cried some.

But Margaret had no taste for the pump. She leapt to Golde’s side. Her tongue went flying.

“I haven’t got any *patience* with silly fools like you!” she screamed—“to believe the first lying Frenchwoman that comes and stuffs your head with a lot of lies, as if you oughtn’t to have more *sense!* Whatever it was the woman told you wasn’t *true*, can’t you understand, not a word of it! She chased us across the moor because she heard us saying we were coming to get you to rescue *the Duke*, before *the boat* came back, and it was she who stole our lantern, and set fire to the church, and you have got to get ready now, the whole of you, and come with me and Mr. Golde to the shore to catch *the Frenchmen* who have kidnapped the Duke, that is, if we are not too late already, after all this time, just through your silliness in believing a lot of lies of a lying Frenchwoman, Englishmen like you—!”

But she spoke to brains already captured and prejudiced by Lise. There was a burst of derision, a movement of menace, shouts of contemptuous query:

“Which Duke?”

“Which boat?”

“What about the menagerie?”

“Which *menagerie?*” screamed Margaret. “What has the menagerie to *do* with it? The Frenchmen—”

“Ben’t ye two from the menagerie?”

“No!” cried one of the menagerie-men staying at Seacombe: “the girl is, but I don’t think she’d set fire to a church. The man don’t belong to us.”

“The man is Mr. Golde of Newton Mill!” cried a woman, who, having heard Golde’s name, had peered and recognised him.

Well, here was contradiction, and no knowing what to believe. But the minds of the boors were hopelessly preoccupied by Lise’s nicely-plausible story.

“What about burning down the whole of Seacombe?” bawled Steve, the fiddler.

“I don’t know what you are *talking* about!” Margaret cried. “Listen to me a little, can’t you? The Frenchmen have kidnapped the Duke—”

“Which Duke?”

“But this is stupidity! The Duke of Wellington, of course! What other Duke does anybody care anything *about?* Can’t you understand, some of you? A lot of Frenchmen have come in a

vessel to take the Duke to France, and they have got him from Grandcourt, they have him now at the shore, only they've no *boat*, because Mr. Golde has frightened away their boat with his *hobby-horse*; and we came to you to rescue him, only the vile French-woman shut us up in the tower, and set fire to the church—"

At last, here and there, a boorish mind opened to her earnest, prone, shrill pleadings. The crowd divided into a minority in favour of her improbability, and a majority in favour of Lise. The danger of the pump at any rate vanished. The parson adopted Margaret's side, for the pleasure of becoming alarmed at public affairs; the apothecary and the fiddler led the opposition. There was an interval of general noisy jargoning.

Then Margaret had a thought.

"But where is that Frenchwoman?" she cried.

"I don't suppose you have been silly enough to let her *go!*"

Where was Lise? That became the question. It was soon known that she had disappeared, and this suspicious circumstance brought over adherents to the right side. Out went the rector's hand, shaking Golde's in a warm grip; some old dames came to tears with murmurs of "Poor thing! and to think, after all—"

At this point there was a clatter of broken chancel-windows heard, and out swarmed a belch of rufous smoke, throwing the crowd into backward rout. Margaret, running, too, was full of rage and inward fret. Everything seemed conspiring to delay the end for which, with so much strain, they had come to Seacombe.

But the rector lifted his sacred plumpness to a tomb-stone, and there was a speech. He said:

"I venture to address to you, dear friends, a brief, but pointed, discourse on this occasion. It would be folly, and an insult to the Understanding, if we refused to credit that there is some iota, or tittle, of Truth in the evidence of these witnesses, nor should we be either sensible or polite. Two, it has been wittily said, are better than One. And though it would be folly to deny a certain vagueness in these reports as to 'Frenchmen,' 'Frenchwoman,' and 'the Duke,' yet I, for my part, am ready to hold out to them the right hand of fellowship. Mr. Golde, it seems, is a Man of Respectability in the neighbouring Parish of Newton, and his Companion is known to the homeless men staying among us. While, therefore, deploring the great catastrophe which has resulted in the destruction of our dear old Church, let us beware lest we punish the Innocent for the Guilty. I therefore give my voice for investigating their Report. Let us go out. If there is, in truth, a Rescue to be effected, let us effect it. The French have felt the weight of British arms before, and run like curs before it; let them have a taste of Seacombe men to-night, if it be indeed true that they are near us. I myself, late as is the hour, offer myself as a volunteer—"

This was cheered.

"But it won't be any good," shrilled Margaret, "if you don't go *now!*"

The rector took no notice of her impassioned cry.

"All who have fire-arms," he went on, "let them—"

Truth is, there ain't no Frenchmen there," shouted the fiddler: and this, too, was cheered.

"No?" cried Margaret, "and who burnt down *the lighthouse?*"

This was very plausible. It won conviction.

They had been wondering at the cause of the lighthouse fire.

"Those who have fire-arms," went on the rector imperturbably in his slow gross bass, "let them assemble at the end of the street forthwith—"

"But *which* of us has fire-arms?" asked the fiddler.

There was no answer: a rusty match-lock leaned in the rector's kitchen; otherwise there was no gun in Seacombe.

But a humorous idea occurred to the fiddler. "What about the cannon?" he called.

A full cheer, mixed with laughter, went up: and instantly, like wild-fire, a contagion of devilry spread through the mob of boors, the suggestion blending well with their humour of apathy and half-belief hardly one realising the affair as momentous.

At the mention of "the cannon," they became volatile, rowdily adventurous, eager for a sortie, caught with laughter. Seacombe stood on the edge of a low cliff, and "the cannon" were three sakers which had lain on rotten carriages pointing from the cliff seaward since Armadadays, the jest and pride of the village, utterly disintegrated, light with age. But the rector was no longer heard: the mob had rushed to a decision, like the decision of a single man. A detachment ran off toward the cliff, some stopping to procure ropes. In a minute all were hastening different ways about the street and alleys. "Don't forget them flags, Tom!" shouted the butcher to the post-master, who, after Waterloo, had decorated the tavern with two ensigns. "And, mind the flute, Steve!" "And don't forget that drum o' yourn!" With these exhortations they dispersed, while the main body ran toward the village-end to wait.

A few minutes, and the rescue-party was ready, the rector in their midst, near him Golde and Margaret virtually prisoners, she sternly silent with rage and contempt. There were first three ringing cheers, and defiance to Frenchmen; and with lanthorns, and two flags flying, and the drum and flute making holiday, and three lads rattling galas on tin-pots, with a horn, two dust-bells, a watchman's rattle, and two of the cannons trundling behind, they started down the incline to the moor, a moving, junketing hubbub.

And it was thus that Seacombe set out toward four o'clock in the morning to confound the wiles of the French.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE CLIFFS

The morning came slowly, and there was still no sign of it when Seacombe arrived at the point of coast indicated by Golde and Margaret. Of Frenchmen now, however, there was nothing to be seen: and no wonder: for Seacombe had come out as to carnival, with drums and hilarities.

And there, as they stood, confusion of tongues ensued. Margaret alone was fixed in silence, pale lips tight, her brain all conflict and guesses. That boat, anyway, had had plenty of time to return, and take them. "They are gone, sure!" she muttered, the words cutting her heart like the keenest personal pang. If the boat had not come back, then the Duke, she reasoned, must be free! for he would refuse to run with them at the sounds of Seacombe, and they were too few to carry him, without a good fight! But she could not hope: *nothing* conceivable could have prevented the boat's return: the Duke, she believed, was asleep in the frigate's cabin.

But to make sure?

"You see," the rector was saying, "we have put you to the proof: but here are no Frenchmen!",

"Stop—just lend me your lantern," she said, snatching a lad's. "You have to follow me, all of you! We shall soon know—"

She went along the high-water mark, the lanthorn held over sands light-coloured, shelly, and toilsome. The villagers trudged behind with bent backs, examining the strand. But though silent

now, they were well lit up to anyone in the darkness above. After a time Margaret fell eagerly to her knees, with the cry:

“Here is their track!”

This was a dry band of footprints in shapeless *mêlée*, a mere indication of feet. The villagers peered, but with blank minds. At all events some party of men had been here, and their faith in Margaret grew.

A gleeful outcry from her: “They are still on land!”

The inference was hasty, but not groundless: for having edged farther down to the fallen tide-edge, in wet sand she saw three distinct foot-prints, the heels toward the sea.

She jumped up, crying: “It is *that* way they are gone!”

She pointed between west and north, following the direction of the trodden band.

The whole company of smock-frocks, eager now, was ready to be off over the moor.

“But stop,” said Margaret, “it is no good running about the moor, where they wouldn’t have any business. If they are on shore, they are near the *sea*—”

“Along the sands, then,” said the rector.

“But we don’t want all those lanterns,” she went on; “why can’t you put them out, and have some sense, and keep quiet like decent people?”

Seacombe was now more subdued; out went its lights, and in silence it followed Golde, who went swinging the lanthorn in front. The loud surf was in their ears: the talk by the track had been uttered in shouts.

For ten minutes they trudged. The wind was freshening, and a gentle rain began to fall. And now, once again, Margaret, with a cry, fell upon her knees: she had come upon another oblique track; and this time there could be no doubt: the toes pointed seaward, losing themselves at the line where the surf came gently rolling.

The significance of this was felt by the dullest yokel. Even higher up the drizzle had given consistency to the foot-prints. From end to end of the track hurried Margaret, her bosom crouching low, eyes shrewd as gimlets. There was a momentous silence. Golde, close to her ear, said:

“Miss; are they gone?”

“No!” she screamed, leaping from her scrutiny, “they are here somewhere! This is a *false* track! All the prints are the same *size*, made by a woman’s shoes! She wants to make us think that they have gone on board—and they are here!”

Amid the silence which followed, a strange sound was heard: a splash, three splashes, quick-repeated.

“You hear?” cried Margaret—“*there* is the woman. Come — quick — this way — to the cliffs!

All went after her, still westward, but also somewhat northward.

The splashes were made by Lise, who, standing on the bank above, and hearing Margaret’s outcry of discovery, had started into a run to reach her friends. Treading in her riding-skirt, she had splashed, half falling, into a salt-water pool.

On returning from Seacombe she had run straight, and to her amazement found the French still by the shore, with no sign yet of the boat. Approaching them, in a deep man’s-voice she had said: “*Camille!*” and when Verdier joined her, related what had happened. He determined to move away, told her where they would await the boat, and bid her hang behind, in case of danger from the village. The clamours of the yokels had soon reached her, and half the way from Seacombe she had followed them.

When they reached the first track, she was on the bank above, and when they surmised that the French were still on land, she ran forward, and made the false track by stepping back and fore

without turning, so that her foot-marks pointed all sea-ward. Here she had waited, and on Margaret's discovery of her ruse, started towards the cliffs, with a three-fold splash which revealed her whereabouts.

She flew—they after her. It was essential that she should reach her party before the Duke could catch sound or sight of another soul on *the* moor. The cliffs, two miles to the west, were the aim of both pursued and pursuers: a mass of Portlandstone, rising abruptly from the moor, and following the coast-line, till you come almost to Wyemouth. Their eastern wall, a mile long, runs north and south over the moor, sloping down toward the north, till it gently meets the plain. The two faces, the south and the east, meet at right angles, the south or sea-face being honeycombed by a succession of roomy caves; while in the east face overlooking the moor there is also one hollow, known as "Scobble's Cave."

It was towards this east face that the race was directed. But it was soon over. Lise ran north, making voluntary noises, and when the rescue-party was well started, shot off in a silent, gingerly run toward the high end of the cliff, where her friends should be waiting. The divergence was rapid, and soon the rector began to blow; the cannons, indeed, left behind, no longer impeded them, but the run, by common consent, slackened to a trot, and soon to a discontented walk.

"I shouldn't fret, miss," said Golde, with a pat on Margaret's shoulder: "there is nothing for it but patience, and plenty of it, too."

"Let me alone, Mr. Golde," she answered wearily. "What patience can anybody have with people who can't run a yard?"

Lise now had approached the cliffs with flying heels, then slackened, listening eagerly for a sound of the French. They were to wait close against the cliff-face overlooking the moor, near the shore. But in the dense darkness preceding dawn she actually butted upon the sheer rock: whether they were north or south of her was uncertain: and every instant so precious! She began groaning "*Camille! Camille!*" in low guttural, walking warily. The drizzle fell heavily now.

"Thank the good God!" she gasped presently, as a sound reached her strained ears.

The Duke had said:

"You see, now, it looks like coming to rain. You should have brought some tents with you, if you meant living out here on the moor."

"*Camille!*" groaned Lise.

In a moment Verdier was with her.

"Another minute," she said, "and all is over! There are men, many, many, searching for you—from Seacombe! *Camille!* For the good God's sake—"

She was livid with fright.

"Isn't there a cave, or something, about here?" he asked.

"Yes! it must be further north—a little. Scoble's Cave—it is your hope—run—run!"

Verdier pelted. He took a sudden interest in the rain.

"Your Grace," he said hurriedly— "If your Grace will walk quickly with us this way, I think we can find your Grace shelter from this shower."

And northward, in rapid walk, they moved, Verdier's hand groping against the wall for the narrow cave-mouth; while behind came Lise.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### SCOBLE'S CAVE

Up to now, neither sight nor sound of the rescue-party had reached the Duke: a short distance from the cliffs a series of hillocks blocked the general level of the moor from sight, hiding Margaret's lanthorn.

When therefore Verdier called: "In here—to the left," the Duke walked into a long passage hardly wide enough to admit three abreast.

They went in file, Verdier last, then Lise.

"There is a pool of some sort," she whispered at his ear, "you must not hesitate—you must go right through, and hide on the other side, far off. They will be certain to come in here."

"A pool?"

"Yes—it comes abruptly—walk fast, and you will be into it before you know, in the dark—"

"But — 'tis rather too much to expect of him, you know. He won't go through."

"You must make him somehow!"

"Don't be absurd, my dear. He is getting frightfully moody and angry, as it is."

"You must make him! If he could once be got well in—you must make him run—now."

"And how, pray?"

For answer she slipped by him, and ran rapidly, but silently, cringing against the wall. Once, twice, she stumbled, with echoed sound. But she slid swiftly beyond the foremost, and beyond still ten yards: then stopped, and lanced a shrill cry of piercing distress.

The whole party, with mixed impulses, ran forward, the Duke eager as the rest.

"Lise has wits," muttered Verdier.

But Lise's cry was not all simulated: in it being mixed a note of real surprise, dismay. Suddenly, as she stopped her dark run, there had appeared before her—light! Terror seized her lest she should be seen, though, in fact, a bend hid her, and the light was of a kind which hardly revealed an object near it.

Still, as the Duke rescued himself from a stumble—his third in the short run—he was momentarily conscious of a female form,—Margaret's he was sure—rushing like a phantom in the opposite direction. The next moment they all dashed, spattering and struggling, into a morass.

Lise had called it "*a pool*", had said that the pursuers would be "certain to come in"; had spoken of it as being "in the dark": and in each case there was misstatement, due to the fact that, in spite of her Intelligence-Department scrutiny, she did *not* really know the country-side. She had visited Scoble's Cave one day, and seen a black, oily tarn slumbering where the passage ended, and the rock opened in a circular vaulted cavern. The sun, shining up the passage, had shown her that the walls rose sheer out of the unctuous water; and she had noted a fetid ill-odour, like garlic and rotten eggs. But she did not know that the fluid surface was only an inch deep, and that far down lay a barelymoist swamp of decomposing phosphoric offal, sea-fowl refuse, putrid fish, algæ, all the carrions and waste-products of the sea; nor that above this mawkish and pestilent mass there arose, in darkness, a luminous exhalation, a white and garish haze of light; nor that, for no consideration would a yokel of the country-side enter this place by night.

At that time, when witches rode, and the mind was in a state ready to believe whatever is extraordinary, Scoble's Cave had a bad name. Individuals, supposed to have entered it, had vanished, never to be seen again. The definite suction of the morass was sufficient to account for this, but the fact itself, together with reports of strange sights seen here, inspired sensations of vague immense awesomeness in reference to the Cave. Wyemouth, however, was a good-sized town, and freer-minded, and the Cave was the stock resort of its fishermen on the way over the moor each Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, in the passage being deposited rolled seines,

creels, oars, logs, hand-nets, etc., while from time immemorial the tarn had been the repository of all the useless fish, and unsold, decaying residues of the hauls. It is doubtful, however, if even a Wyemouth fisherman would have entered the Cave by night; and it is possible that not a living soul had seen the wannish sheen which then emanated from it.

The morass is simply a phosphorus-swamp, precisely similar to that of Spendi, though for some reason less famous, its feeble luminosity being identical with that of a decaying haddock in the dark: for, originally a fish-pool formed by the sea's overflow into the cavern, in the course of ages it became a mere bog of fishy products.

But it was deep; and the French and the Duke were carried by their impetus almost to the middle. Some feet down, the substance is of the consistency of dough, and they were able to take some floundering steps: but then the full horror broke upon them: the insidious doom below, soft but strong, had caught their feet; the higher layers afforded no prise for upward effort; the marsh was sucking them in.

The more they floundered, the quicker the end. Huguenin, the first to plunge, had sunk in an agony of struggle to the chin, had gulped a first potion of the fatal filth, and was about to disappear. The Duke saw the backward hanging head; and knew that nothing could now save him. Most were still a chest above, he highest; all save him, fighting hard against the foul tomb that held and drew them. He had noted the effect of Huguenin's struggles, for objects within the mist of light were distinct, though all beyond lay dark: and he cried out:

"Don't dance about, any of you. That only makes the matter worse, it looks like."

They glanced at him: there he stood in the sickly nebulous glare, slowly sinking, his brow twitching. A minute before he had been weary, languid, sullen; now, in the sudden peril, his eyes lifted with interest, keen, but calm: so keen, that before he sank an inch, he had estimated every possibility of the situation so calm, that the working of his mind was quasi-disinterested, as a mathematician is concerned with his problem for its own sake.

But puzzlement twitched his wry-pulled forehead: the roof was out of reach; the walls were smooth, and out of reach.

Danda, in his angry struggles, was nearly gone. Huguenin had bubbled his cry, and perished.

"It rather looks as if we were in for it," the Duke said to Verdier near him, "unless—"

"Well, your Grace?"

Verdier's cheeks were ashen.

"Unless one of you has some twine."

Of all things *twine* seemed the most useless: but one tossed a coil. To his oak-stick, floating near, the Duke tightly tied it, round and round, near the ferule; then, the stick horizontal in his uplifted arm, he oscillated it, taking aim, and cast it. The effort sank him an inch. It flew straight through the middle of the passage, and fell. He drew it back, slowly, with one manœuvring hand: and back it came to him—but empty, and ineffectual.

And again he cast, and again it returned ineffectual; and then again, and it returned ineffectual: with every hurl he sank an inch.

"Ah," said he, "the old stick is not turning out so good a friend as it has been. Well, then, we must only keep him on his travels."

And again he cast with calm accuracy, and again it returned—but not alone. The curved end had caught in a wide-spaced wicker-work, and brought a creel with it.

Something of this kind he had expected, remembering his stumblings over obstacles in the passage, and their softness underfoot.

“Ah,” he said, “I thought there was something. Some more like that, and we shall get on very well.”

He drew in the creel: pushed it towards Verdier, to lift himself upon.

And out, with wrinkled, speculative brow, he cast again: but it returned ineffectual.

Immediately, however, five, six creels were cast in swift succession by invisible hands. Lise had stood quivering and paralysed in the passage, till she comprehended the meaning of the stick-and-twine, and flung the creels.

“Well,” said he, “Margaret knows how to succour both her friends and her enemies.”

Creel after creel came flying, and with them old sacks, logs, a swab, a tiller; and down as the floating objects sank beneath their weight, so up they won the feet from the reluctant clutch of the slush. In three minutes they were on the other side, no longer seven, but six.

Here was a passage in the rock, nearly opposite that of entrance. But passing through, they stopped simultaneously, gazing in the extremity of surprise: for each saw the other shrouded from neck to toe in a feeble halo, not of light, but of the mere scum and frivolous froth of light, like the shimmering ghosts of huge glow-worms: and so phantasmal, mournful, was the impression, that when Verdier laughed, it was with a certain nervous tremor.

Through the passage, clearly visible to one another, they came out on a level space between two spurs of the gentle slope at the back of the seaward-looking cliffs.

Verdier here called Danda aside, proposing the ascent of a bill, in order to sight the light or boat or frigate. And up the slope they began to trudge.

By now, Seacombe had arrived at the mouth of Scoble’s Cave, and there was a prompt movement to hurry past. It was the rector who called out:

“They may be in there!”

Seacombe did not relish the suggestion. Even Golde did not volunteer to enter.

“We had better *look!*” said Margaret; and she entered, followed by Golde and the rector. Lise, having heard their approach, had slipt out of the passage to the moor. They passed through, and the moment the miasma shone before them, Golde cried out:

“Miss, miss, come back—!”

The rector, a local man, gave no second look, but ran back to scarce the villagers with awful news, followed soon by the two. They had seen a fearful thing: the creels and bags slowly sinking under the luminous haze were now barely indicated in dusky vagueness, and seemed the backs of drowned men: while still sticking straight up in the sheen was the right hand of the perished Frenchman.

And Seacombe ran, haltingly, obliquely, away from the cliff toward the shore, scared by the horror that the malicious pool had claimed yet another band of victims. But near the shore, with eyes wide in awe and pity, they stopped, doubtful, excited, and looked back.

And as they looked, an appalling spectacle met their gaze. Poised in mid-air they beheld six forms, like headless phantasms in shrouds, as it were, of the fugitive pollen of moonshine, wavering in a wan lilac luminosity.

It was impossible to doubt that these were the ghosts of the men lately perished.

The French and the Duke stood on the hill-brow just climbed; but any outline of the hill itself was invisible in the blackness, and they seemed to hang suspended in air.

And suddenly, the Duke, for some purpose, raised his luminous stick in what seemed to Seacombe a menacing gesture: and with the action, Seacombe was gone—scattered like chaff—in headlong panic homeward, Golde and Margaret with the rest.

And it was thus that Seacombe, having gone out with timbrils and with dances to defeat the wiles of the French, returned singly and in fear, having seen a sight.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE SHORE

The six shimmering men looked for the light of boat or ship, but saw only darkness. Here was a mystery before which the French stood aghast and helpless: and the speedy advent of morning, their terror before, became their hope.

Both, they believed, must for some reason be hiding their lights, and could not be distant: with the earliest beams, the situation would change.

They descended, since it rained a little, to take shelter in the west passage of Scoble's Cave, walking in loose order, hardly now keeping any surveillance: for all were visible from the neck downward, and the Duke, the tallest, was distinguishable.

And so they went, till, in the descent, they came to a path between bare cliffs, and now fell into single file, four, then the Duke, then one, at varying intervals. The Duke had designedly stepped into the path at the moment when one only was behind him. His brows were twitching; a smile, half scorn, half mischief, curved his lips; something worked in his mind: he was going to escape.

He was weary now of the adventure.

"I must turn in somewhere," he said to himself "and get some good sleep."

His presence here was due to a promise: but it had been qualified by the condition: "unless some extraordinary chance offers." The passage through the luminous morass was that: he decided to use the luminous morass.

His means were simple and sure as possible: he made himself invisible. First, he went treading with studious noiselessness; then, at a sharp turn of the defile, he stood, and quickly, but without haste, threw off his coat, of which the inmost lining was hardly damp, except at the tails, which were wet through by the surface-fluid. With it he covered his legs, lining outward, and was now invisible, save for a triangular spot on his waistcoat, and a hint of light on the tail-lining; so, as the man behind turned the corner, he laid his waistcoat, lining outward, over the sheening tails. He had vanished, the hand which held the coat being behind it. He stood back against the rock over his stick. The whole was accomplished with whirlwind-rage, juggler-coolness. The man behind came, passed, and seeing a longish interval, slightly quickened his pace. The Duke put on his waistcoat, and, the coat still about his legs, followed their sounds down the winding path. He heard them enter the Cave-passage so close was he, and a moment stopped, thinking: Wyemouth should be his aim, and his shortest way over the moors. But he had no intention of being recaptured this time, and the open moor, with his glowing spots, might mean recapture. The shore, on the other hand, was full of possibilities—windings, crannies, caves: and he turned southward into the narrowing interval between two hills, till, through a split, he emerged upon the sands, and walked rapidly westward toward Wyemouth.

It was not till Verdier addressed some remark to him in the cave that they awoke. That he should slip them *now*, when he had stood in garments of light—this added to their stupor a touch of madness, a rage of incredulity. The simple method of the sagacious and many-counselled mind did not occur to them. Danda was like a maniac. Verdier, in prone rush, cried:

"Come on! he can't escape!"

He ran up the hill-path alone, to the cliff-brow, whence both the hill's slope and a reach of shore were visible; the slope was smooth and treeless grass: the Duke was not there. Along the shore he had already passed behind a bluff: Verdier saw nothing save a lanthorn-gleam near the shore. But it vanished so instantaneously that he thought it an illusion of fancy. He ran back down the hill.

That lanthorn-gleam had vanished under Margaret's shawl. She had not run far from the spectacle of the men shimmering aloof in shrouds of moonshine. Her mind was strongly rational—she was “hard-headed.” She had stopped to look back, panting, but impudent, like a frightened-off dog, which yet rallies and faces round, head erect, ready to fly again. The rest ran on, all scattered, Golde with them, leaving her alone. As she stood looking, rather wild-eyed, frightened, defiant, the French moved to descend: and with their movement the spell broke. She gave forth a little sob, mixed with laughter.

“Bah! why it's *them!*” she said—“they are not drowned—though one of them is. It's that *pool* which makes them like that!”

The French, in their intense scrutiny of the sea, had not noticed her lanthorn.

She remained wondering what she was now to do, once more alone. Her hip, as soon as she found time to think of it, began to pain her again.

“Oh, I do *wish* Mr. Golde would come back,” she thought: “I don't think a man ought to run like that.”

Wearied and at a loss, she stood uncertain; then along the shore, she saw something: two coat-tails and a walking-stick taking a stroll by themselves—the Duke. She thought it must be a Frenchman sent for some purpose along the beach, and covered her lanthorn.

Soon she saw Verdier appear at the cliff-brow, and again covered the lanthorn. He ran back hurriedly.

“Something must have happened,” she thought, “I am not going to stand here, and do nothing.”

And at once she ran to the beach, and along it; by the cleft through which the Duke had passed she entered the level space between two hills, and away yonder to the north saw the French running about like ghosts gone mad, widely separated. Her heart bounded with a vague premonition of good, and, eager to know, she went trotting ever nearer, when footsteps were heard behind, someone dashed by her with heels of furious speed, and sounds of—a skirt.

She, too, doubled her run, treading noiselessly in moist marl.

“Come! come!” cried Lise imperiously, within hailing distance of the French.

They flocked round her. She had gone shoreward to spy for the boat's light, and seen the faint luminosity which promenaded: the Duke had passed close to her, unsuspectingly; she had divined that it could not be one of her friends, and who it was.

“He is gone along—along the shore!” she gasped, in accents of agony, plainly audible to Margaret, her face distorted, pallid as death: “along the shore—quick—by the back of the hills—run—far forward—there are the clefts—wait on the shore—in a cave till he come—”

Without a second's delay they were gone.

The cliffs and their hills behind are arranged in separate masses, with valleys and clefts, by which is passage from moor to beach. For the French to fore-run and intercept was therefore easy, they running straight along the moor, he walking all the long sweeps of the fore-shore.

But Margaret had heard, and never did her feet put on such shoes of swiftness. The French had hardly dashed into westward race, when she was off southward to the sands. *This* time, anyway, there would be no mistake! Off then, she flew with the heels of a young hind, laughing to scorn the hip-pain, no longer careful to hide the swinging lanthorn.

But Lise saw the lanthorn, and knew well that it represented the weak spot of all their hope—Margaret Ferris. But for Margaret all had long been well, and over. Yet Margaret, this time, must be stopped—else good-bye to everything. And Lise had no gun to shoot her dead.

But she had an instant brain: she could intercept Margaret as the men were intercepting the Duke! running at the back to emerge upon the shore ahead of her—if she were swift! And she, too, went flying.

And somewhat in advance of Margaret she did come out upon the sands, and a minute waited for the on-hasting lanthorn. It happened low down, near the tide-rim, where the sand was less toilsome. When Margaret was within a yard of her spring, Lise had her, crying in her deep, intense, and panting guttural:

“Not *this* time, Margaret Ferris!”

She might as well have sought to bar the progress of a cyclone. The tussle, filled with the hissing of infuriate cats, lasted not a minute. Down upon the head of the Frenchwoman crashed the lanthorn: and Margaret flew forward, the other lying weeping in the sand.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HOMICIDE

Long before the Duke was in sight, the French were waiting behind a large rock on the sand, till he should come.

He was walking leisurely, not far from the sea-edge. The fine roll of the surf was good to him to hear. He had put on his coat again, feeling fairly secure, thinking of nothing but a bed, and the splendid perseverance of the ever-preaching sea. The morning breeze fanned his hair.

Margaret hasted upon him with furious expedition, then suddenly, at the last moment, tentatively. She was not quite sure of her reception. Unfortunately, she had broken her lanthorn upon Lise, and he could not see her honest face, nor she his.

“My lord—” she said, quite close.

He half-turned his head, continuing his walk. He knew the voice.

“Well now, Margaret,” he said.

“My lord—stop, will you?—there is not an *instant* to be lost.”

He walked on, neither faster, nor slower, without answer.

Then, all at once, the full tragedy of the situation broke in upon her—the possibility that he might not listen to her *this* time: the one thing that she had not taken into account.

“My lord, don’t you believe what I *say* to you?” she wailed.

He did not answer.

“Don’t you believe what I say, sir?”

“Well, and what is it you say, Margaret?”

“The Frenchmen are on in front, my lord—they have run on in front behind the cliffs to wait for you—they must be in front now, waiting—will you turn back with me, my lord?”

Her head was screwed round, vainly seeking, with agonized interest, to peer into his face. It was as hard as the marble images of it which now frown upon the public places of England.

They walked on a minute, she not knowing what in the world to do. He said:

“It does not look, Margaret, as if your side was going to beat.”

“You are *right*, my lord,” she answered—“it *won’t*, not if you keep walking on like this another five minutes.”

“Is it that you still pretend that you are on my side, then?”

“What other side should I be *on*, my lord?”

“On the enemy’s, I gather. What if I tell you that I saw you in the cave?”

“Which cave, sir?”

He did not answer. He meant the momentary phantom of Lise rushing through the passage.

“You never saw me in any cave, sir,” she said; “you might have seen Mrs. Opie. She is lying yonder in the sand now. I’ve *killed* her, I hope.”

“She is not, then, asleep at Grandcourt, Margaret?”

“Will you come with me, my lord?”

“Or out with a party of the servants looking for the Duke of Wellington, eh?”

“Won’t you come? Do, sir! Pray, do, my lord! I promise you—I *promise* you—if you will only trust me, just this once more—my lord—”

“You are impudent. And your impudence makes you rather a bad ally to your friends.”

“Ah, sir, what a man you are!”

“Have you a mother?”

“No, sir.”

“No one dependent on you?”

She was surprised.

“No, sir.”

“Well, do you know where I am going now?”

“You are going among the *Frenchmen!*”

“No. I am going to Wyemouth. And I am going to take you with me, to give you a lesson. You have put your own head into the noose, Margaret.”

“I shouldn’t mind if you would keep yours out of it, sir. But I don’t know what noose it is you mean.”

“The noose means the House of Correction, Margaret, and the Constable!”

Saying it, he caught her wrist in an iron grip.

And now she began to cry, suppressing her sobs, lest the Frenchmen should hear. Only, she said, wailing:

“Oh, this is too *hard* of you, my lord!—believe me, I would have *died* to save you, sir!”

And in that cry something there was which reached and wounded him—sorely for an instant: and at that moment—once more — in spite of everything, she had conquered him. He believed her.

An instant only: his stubborn heart would not yield. For two minutes longer he walked silent, his grasp on her wrist, hearing the convulsive catches of her breath. Then, all in a moment, she was free and running, her hand wrenched from his: and he a prisoner.

The stick went up, and dropped listlessly.

“Does your grace admit yourself a prisoner?” asked Verdier.

He did not answer. He was thinking of something else: of Margaret, mortally angry with her — or with himself. Verdier asked again:

“Does your grace admit—?”

“Let me see,” he said sharply, “how many are, there of you?—five. Well, very well.”

The faintest hint of grey was in the east, but over sea and land darkness; nor as yet could any sign of ship or boat be seen; and to fill the time before the light, they set out to return to the secrecy and shelter of Scoble’s Cave, drizzle still falling.

The Duke walked preoccupied, his head bent. Had he not done her wrong? She had told him right! Perhaps knowing that he would not now believe, and *therefore* persist in going wrong? Was she, then, a Machiavel of craft? or a very angel of kindly purposes? If he had wronged her, he had wronged her quite beyond pardon!

She, all the time, was hanging behind, at safe distance, limping, hands clasped before. She had heard some mention of Scoble's Cave among the party, and knew that thither they were returning. When they turned into the cleft of the cliffs leading to the Cave's western passage, she would not venture after them on that side; yet they were like a magnet to her; she could not leave them: and ran round to the Cave's east passage.

Here she thought herself alone: but two minutes before, Lise having also accompanied the return, but in advance, had run round, like Margaret, to this east passage, to wait and be near.

And so at the inner end of the passage, the two women met; and in the luminosity of the morass saw each other's face.

Margaret gave a little cry of joy, a cruel cry. In that moment she forgot everything but one.

They had come running; and the men, walking very slowly, were still some way off, when the women looked into each other's eyes.

They wasted no words, feeling the meaning of this meeting. The long contest would end here. The Brahmin doctrine of "the Ferine Soul" found illustration in their stare. The true hatred—the hatred of hell—is when woman meets woman.

Neither had a weapon: but Nature is always armed: here were the thews to embrace, and the hands to squeeze, and the claws to rake.

Margaret flew at her with the cry of "*Beast!*"

and at the same time the lady of fashion became a mere Fury, blood-thirsty, visage all inflamed. They became involved in a mere chaos of distracted intensities, pounding, tearing hair, clothes, flesh, pushing and pulling, tugging at the windpipe, and finally rolling together on the narrow space between passage-end and morass.

The aim of Margaret was to get her enemy into the morass itself. But it was not so easy: both were strongly built: one an athlete, the other large, a woman-of-the-world, and venomous. When they fell an entanglement of womanhood, it was difficult to say which was uppermost. At all events, Margaret made a grand effort to lift herself, and succeeded: but as she rose, Lise rose with her; and as with one heave of the whole frame, she thrust Lise forth, Lise had her still; and together, with simultaneous cry, they splashed, still struggling wildly, locked in maddest ecstasy, a considerable distance from the edge.

Either, by herself, must have perished, choked with filth, unless quick help came; thus desperately locked, all the help of man could avail them nothing.

When their cry shrilled out, the men were in the cave-passage on the other side: all rushed in, and at the edge stood looking, helpless and amazed.

"Let go each other!" shouted Verdier, pale as marble.

He might as well have shouted to the Portland rock. The mire had the women well by the feet; they had sunk to the neck; and still they struggled, seeking to destroy each other. The minute before the fatal slime must bubble in their gaping mouth was come.

The Duke with the rest, stood looking, his brain working mightily. He was asking himself questions of the most awful abstract import, grappling with doubts as to the relative powers of God and Man in the face of certain eventualities; and, at the very same time, was weighing like a judge, with nicest quick subtlety, evidence as to a host of minute details.

His measuring eye had seen at a glance that no human power could save both women, so fixedly locked. But he could save *one—if* he chose: one at the expense of the other. Only, had he the right? That was his bold question: and boldly his capacious intellect expanded to the breadth of it, and answered—Yes.

He would do a murder.

“Just give me your pistol,” he said coolly to one.

The man hesitated.

“No—I won’t shoot you,” said the Duke—“*make haste!*”

There was need for frightful urgency. The women were nearly gone. Yet when he had the pistol, he, too, hesitated.

For there was *another* question to be solved! The question of—which? One of the women was here doing noble duty; one engaged in an attempt against himself heinously wrong. But which? The wife of his friend, Opie?—or Margaret, who had led him, to his certain knowledge, into the arms of his enemies; who, to his certain knowledge, had lied to him?

He hesitated—and there was need for haste.

It was a terrible moment for him. His soul wrought intensely. To do right *now—to* see as the Judge of all the Earth saw—this was his effort, his task. By one of those mysterious travails of the spirit, akin to the operation of Intuition—by the fierce working of that affinity with Truth which is the chief trait of every noble mind—he decided, and decided well.

The pistol sounded, and a shriek rang through the cave.

“Oh, Lise! Lise! Lise!” cried Verdier, when the smoke had thinned, covering his face, with passionate sobs.

## CHAPTER XXX

### “HAIL, HOLY LIGHT!”

In spite of the relaxing of Lise’s arms Margaret was about to perish, her chin already sunken, when, once more, the Duke’s action—so intense as to resemble tempest, so calmly exact as to resemble the planetary intercourse—saved her. He threw off his long coat, calling upon the French for theirs. Then, with his own hurrying hands tied them sleeve and sleeve; a moment later a coat-tail fell with nicest calculation before Margaret’s face, and as she caught it, they drew her, holding high their end.

The Duke pulled her up, seated her on a block of rock. She was fainting, her colour ghastly, eyes closed. He bent over her assiduously, gently. But it was quite harshly that he said:

“How do you feel?”

She heard that voice and smiled. She knew what had happened! He had killed her enemy. for her! He had believed in her at the last!

“Well, now, how do you feel?”

She *would* not answer; she wanted him to on asking; she smiled.

“Well, you have gone rather near to it this time, Margaret; you must now set about and come round again.”

“Ah, my lord—” she sighed, and smiled.

The voice of Danda was heard. “We must be going! Bring the girl too!”

“And why the girl?” said the Duke.

“She is our prisoner, your Grace; our prisoner last night, and escaped Verdier through his paroxysm of grief.

“Is that so . . .? . . . Well, but she can’t go now. You must wait.”

The white exhalation of the morass was nearly invisible now, merging in vaguest silver into the growing day, as a veiled bride faints upon the bosom of her lord. It was morning. Margaret would not move.

“Now—” said Verdier.

“Can you come now?” said the Duke gently.

“Yes, my lord.”

“Well, then—”

She rose bedraggled, with bruises, but erectly tall, a great brightness in her golden eyes.

They went out. It was late September, and the morning had come suddenly: already it was magnificently broad and bright.

Southward through the cleft they came upon the beach, and here were startled by the sight of a man some distance away. He ran from them a little, then stopped, looking. Margaret recognised Golde, and waved her hand.

Golde, like her, had not run far from the phantoms: but by the time he recovered himself had lost her. He ran about a little, and, from an elevation sighted the lanthorn-shine: but it disappeared: she had seen Verdier at the cliff-brow and covered it. And since then he had been seeking her painfully over moor and shore.

All eyes now turned seaward: there lay a little fleet of little boats anchored beyond the surf-line, Wyemouth craft, and there all night, unknown to the French, had lain. But of their own boat, of the frigate, no trace.

At this, however, they hardly wondered: for the shape of the bay in which they stood afforded limited purview of the sea.

“We shall sight them from the headland there,” said Danda—“come on.”

“I hope the boat isn’t on the sea at all now,” said Verdier, “she might well get noticed by someone. We can take one of those craft there, as soon as we sight the frigate.”

“Why the devil did the frigate hide her lights?” queried Danda.

“There was some reason or other, I suppose,” Verdier said nonchalantly, and siffled through his teeth-edges. Then: “Your Grace must be exceedingly hungry and tired!”

He did not answer.

“Ah, well,” whispered Danda, “we will soon give him bed and breakfast,” and his inward-tending upper lip, longer than his chin, tightened viciously.

They walked westward, Margaret and the Duke in the centre. Golde following small, at a perfectly safe distance.

The musical caw of a large snow-white bird, scarlet-legged, was on high; over-sea a flight of gulls swung, skating the air with alternate wingtip dipped in the brine; in the neap-tide surf was a certain quietude now; and down by the water-edge lay rank abundance of brown seaweed twine; and all in the blithe fresh morning was the sea, the sea.

Round the curve of sand they went to a thin promontory, rising toward its end, whence was wide prospect of the sea; and near it the little fleet of boats, useful in case their own were not in sight.

And at the terminating bluff of gneissoid rocks, rugged and seamed with wet algæ, they stood, exposed to possible prying eyes, but no longer careful, since it was beyond doubt that all, at last, was safe.

But for some minutes they looked everywhere, and did not see the frigate.

Murmurs, hisses, curses, arose and multiplied. But to one another they said nothing, nor looked at one another, feeling now the intolerably harsh frown of Fate. Danda's face, quaint as a bat's, was a rigid pallor. The boat was not visible: the frigate was not visible. Here was a touch of the Inscrutable: this way lay—Madness.

“Well, your Grace—” Verdier said at last, with a wry and pale attempt at laughter.

He was interrupted by a cry from Margaret. She had fixed her eyes, by a natural instinct, upon the scene of her great struggle with Verdier—the lighthouse. There it stood, black and burnt, distant and solitary. Her powers of vision were excellent. And suddenly:

“There—*there's* their ship, my lord!” she cried, pointing—“oh, my lord, my lord—!”

Her jubilant hands clapped with cruel glee. What she called “their ship” was five bow-timbers sticking above the water on Raddon Rocks. For, almost immediately after the boat had returned to the frigate during the night to procure more men, the frigate had run upon the lighthouse rocks.

That guiding light the Frenchmen had themselves quenched. . . .

At that laugh of Margaret, Verdier fixed her with a look of hate.

“Well, certainly, Margaret,” said the Duke, “it rather looks as if our side were going to beat, after all.”

*Our* side! He coupled her lovingly with him now! A sweet pain, like mixed honey and peppermint, went rankling in her heart.

But Verdier was a fellow of invincible mind, persistent, quick-willed, great in desperation. No sooner had he made out the wreck through screwed-up eyes, than he was resolved. He called Danda aside; whispered:

“I am off to Wyemouth—the French barque that hailed us two days since was bound there—is there now. I shall get her. That cave there—take the Duke: and wait till I send the barque's boat to this point.”

Turning to the Duke, he said:

“Your Grace, I am going away for a time. But your Grace sees that there will be four of us left. And your Grace is one, unarmed. Will you go with them to save a row? I am dreadfully sorry to put your Grace to all this annoyance—”

“A general should disband his army, and let go his prisoners, when he has nothing to give them to eat,” said the Duke. “Well, but I will go with the four, to see what becomes of you.”

Verdier slipped down and ran along to the sands. Here he sent a flying shot at Golde, who, however, had retreated before him, keeping that safe distance of his. Verdier disappeared through a cleft, making over the moor for Wyemouth. The others came slowly along the headland.

“Do you see that man yonder on the beach, my lord?” asked Margaret.

The Duke, bending down his ear to her, looked.

“Yes, I see.”

“That is Mr. Golde, sir.”

“And who is Mr. Golde, Margaret?”

“He is the man who went through all *the adventures* with me last night, and the night before, my lord.”

“Is that so? Well, then, he must be an admirable fellow.”

“He is not a bad kind of man, sir. But he doesn't like getting killed.”

“I see that—I see. That is why the fellow is hanging off over there.”

“But I shouldn’t like you to think he is a coward, my lord. There is nobody braver when it comes to the push. And he is very kind-hearted, and good.”

“Well, Mr. Golde is a happy man, Margaret, since you like him so much.”

She coloured.

“But this is what I wanted to say, my lord: that you needn’t be kept bothering with these men any more, because there are three of us now, and only four of them.”

“Well, but I don’t wish to see you and Mr. Golde shot down, Margaret. The four have guns, and we have none.”

“But are we to go on quietly, and do nothing, sir?”

“It is rather a good thing to know how to wait sometimes, Margaret.”

“They say that is how you won the battle of Waterloo, sir.”

“Well, there is something in that.”

“But, my lord—there is that Verdier who has just run off I can’t *tell* you, sir, what a beastly artful man that is.”

“He seems to me rather a gallant fellow. If I had the judging of the rascal, I should condemn him to be hanged, and then go to his funeral afterwards.”

“But, my lord—won’t you listen to me? He is a most *cunning* man, that man! and whatever it is he is gone to do, he will do. I could see it in his *face*.”

“And have you something to propose, then?”

“Yes, my lord! When we get to the cave-mouth, I am going to run. They can’t come after me, because not enough of them will be left to guard you. They can only shoot at me. Will you stand in front and prevent them, sir?”

“Why, yes. But what is it you mean to be after when you have run off?”

“Mr. Golde ought to have followed that Verdier, sir: but he didn’t *think* of it. He is not very much a one for *thinking* of things. I want to run and tell him to hurry off to Wyemouth, and rouse the people against Verdier. I believe that is where Verdier has gone to. He has gone to see if he can get a *ship!*”

“Well, but suppose you get shot?”

“You are not going to *let* them, sir!”

“Well, then, we shall see.”

The four were parleying hotly in French; and so, all talking, they crossed the sands to the cave. It opened in a roomy area beyond a passage ten yards long. They entered in double file: two, then the prisoners, then two. It was when the last were five yards within the passage that Margaret whispered, without looking at him:

“Now, my lord!”

He saw that the order of march was about as unfavourable as possible; that it would have been better strategy if she had started some seconds earlier; that the passage was too broad. He regretted his consent, perceiving danger: there were four pistols: somebody was going to be shot: he or she. Round glared his strong sure eyes, drinking in every possibility of the instant, and quickly he stooped to her with:

“*Don’t go!*”

He was the fraction of a second late. She was gone.

The two hinder men shouted an exclamation, one staggering, struck by her rush, she herself falling upon her hands beyond him.

“*Shoot!*” shrieked Danda, who had been of the van, but now of the rear, all having turned.

As one pointed, the weapon was vigorously struck downward; and by the time the man who had been staggered was prepared to fire, the Duke was before the four, facing them, yet seeing through the back of his head, as it were, the progress of Margaret. There came an instant when he perceived that he must guard her from three different shots at the same time. From one he saved her by a strike-out of the left fist, from the second by a downward sweep of the right hand. Before he could deal with the third, the percussion-cap was exploded, and he knew it; but the round-shot, passing through his right palm, fell spent on her skirt, just as she flew round the corner, and disappeared.

They made a rush to follow: but the Duke's arms, stretched across the passage, barred them.

"No," he said, "you may as well let her be off now. If you go after her, I shall run away."

They saw the crucified and sacrificial palm, dripping, the hard glint in his eye—and desisted.

He went with them into the interior.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE BARQUE

Margaret flew. And Golde, seeing her come, ran to meet her—with suspicious glances at the cave-mouth, for he had heard the pistol-shot afar.

"We have got to go to Wyemouth at once, Mr. Golde!" she said: "their ship is wrecked on *the lighthouse*, and that Verdier is gone to get another, you see—oh, I wish we had the hobby-horse now—"

"There *is* a French ship in Wyemouth Roads, too," said Golde. "I have been hunting for you all the morning, lass."

"Have you—? I thought you wouldn't be far. . . Come!"

They started, steering their run for a cleft in the cliffs not far from the cave-mouth. The earth and its birds, sun and sea, were wide awake now, all blithely brisk, alert; but the men and women were still asleep; the shore was as deserted as at midnight; and far and near over all the land was hardly a human sound.

A little way they ran together, their nimble tread up-borne by the soft and passive sand, till Margaret stopped suddenly short, and with wide and solemn eyes stared into the wide and solemn eyes and bloodless face of Golde.

"O God, Mr. Golde!" she whispered, "what is *that*?"

She did not wait for answer: but flew back to cave just escaped—with winged feet—into the mouth, down the passage.

"*That*" was a multiple roar of wild beasts—of two tigresses, of a lion—the escaped menagerie beasts, which, knowing themselves in inhabited country, had herded within this cave, frightened, for a day and a night, famished now, mad with pangs. On the entrance of the French and the Duke they saw a meal from God.

Precisely what happened Margaret could never analyse: it was a whirl of frenzy. The cave was crowded with reverberations. One man was already rent to pieces, and close against the furthest wall she saw through the half-dark the Duke beneath the fangs of Apollyon.

At her cry—that voice which, alone of voices, they feared—the three beasts turned upward an emerald glow of eyes, paused in their jubilee, and cowered. But only for an instant: Nature was stronger in them than their fears. One tigress, springing from a wriggling crouch, brought down Danda in his flight, and above all sounds rang the intensity of his dying shrieks; while the other,

wanton for slaughter, daintily discarded her first victim, and instantly had another man beneath ravening claws and hanging jowl.

Now Golde, too, appeared in the mêlée, his chest heaving at the weight of a huge pointed rock in his arms; and as one of the tigresses, with instant fastidiousness, dragged the last of the French beneath her talons, down upon her skull crashed the stone, and she fell dead.

The Duke, from the first, had sought the wall, and when he fell beneath the lion's rush, fell only as to the legs, the wall supporting his back. Then Margaret's cry was heard, and Apollyon, more timorous of her than the tigresses, looked up with hurried guilt, and hurriedly turned again to finish, and fly: but the snatch of his teeth carried with it the Duke's stick only: he had lost a moment, and in the next was faced by the eyes of Margaret.

What, at that instant, filled the Duke's mind was the daring of the girl.

"Pass that pistol there," he said, pointing to a weapon on the ground—"then run."

She did not pass the pistol: but with a menace of crimson rage dashed her fist into the lion's face, and he, with a throat-murmur ran, and some distance away stood facing her, half-defiantly. At the same time she beheld the living tigress about to spring upon Golde, and with aggressive stamp, cried:

"Ah, you *Fan!* you *dare!*"

The tigress backed a step, while a shot from the Duke entered its skull. Margaret, seeing him take another pistol from the ground, now said:

"He won't hurt, my lord—if you will please spare the poor brute's life—he belongs to me—"

Apollyon was backing away towards the wall.

One only of the four French, saved by Golde's rock, had run out unharmed; and the next day was in the Wyemouth House of Correction.

Golde, Margaret, and the Duke went leisurely eastward across the sands, and northward over the moor toward Seacombe, for a horse to take the Duke to Grandcourt.

"To think that that foolish beast, Pol, should have torn your hand like that, my lord," said Margaret, pointing to the bullet-wound in his palm.

"Ah," said he, and smiled, "the fellow mistook me for a Frenchman, you see." Then, turning to Golde on the other side of him: "That was gallantly done with the stone, Golde."

Golde was timorously tingling at his nearness to the Great, with a constant tendency in his hand to go up and snatch off his hat.

"It was a privilege, your Grace, to be able to save that poor man's life. Though they have served me some ugly turns, too, these men—your Grace."

"Oh, my lord, my lord!" cried Margaret—"there—there—is where Mr. Golde rode the *hobby-horse!*"

"Is that so? Which hobby-horse?"

As her hand fell, it fell somehow into his: and she told him, while Golde tingled and tingled, of the tacking ride, and of the race with Lise, and of the polyglot alarum of the bells, and of how Seacombe, having gone out with timbrels and with dances, returned singly, and in fear. It was not a walk, but a saunter through the blithe broad morning, she limping a little, the dry clasp of his hand filling her with comfort, her tongue loosed.

"And oh, my lord, I am so glad you saved Pol's life! Do you know why—chiefly?"

"No. Tell me."

"Because when that Verdier goes back to the cave, Pol will make short work of *him.*"

"And it would be little more than what that man deserves, too," hazarded Golde.

"Ah, but I rather fancy Pol will come off second in that battle," said the Duke.

He walked looking far away over the moor, with wrinkled speculative brow, smiling all the time. Something he wanted to say, and did not like to say it. At last he ventured bluntly:

“I am coming to the wedding.”

Margaret’s heart gave a big bound—and Golde’s.

“Which *wedding*, sir?” she said, her eyes on the ground.

“Well, you have been telling me about it all the time, Margaret, and did not know. You must let me hear. And you, Golde.”

“And thanks to your Grace, too, for saying it!” said Golde.

She did not answer. She was white as a corpse. They were near Seacombe now. And half-an-hour later, when the Duke rode northwards, they two, on the slope of the hill, stood watching. And as he disappeared on the yon side of the bridge, Golde, who held her hand, turned his mouth and touched her lips, most timorously, gently, half-expecting her to spit and hiss like cats.

But she bore it tamely, with cast-down eyes, a little disgust in her nether lip. And presently an awful sigh came from her lifted bosom; and she said:

“Ah, Mr. Golde! I never expected that it would come to this.”

They walked back into Seacombe hand in hand.

It was still early; and about this time Verdier returned to the cave. The Duke’s prophecy proved correct: he had no sooner perceived the half-eaten bodies of his comrades, and the crouching lion, than Apollyon fell dead. At nine o’clock he was sitting out at the promontory-end, legs dangling, a hand supporting his chin, siffling through the teeth-edges, brooding with melancholy under-glance upon the frigate’s timbers on Raddon Rocks. And now, round a point of land came the stately French barque, crowded with white wide sails, like a countrywoman in Sunday-best, all starch and crinoline. Verdier had won her captain by a fabulous bribe: and at the sight of her, he threw back the head, all red, and laughed madly.