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CLARA CHILLINGTON; OR, THE PRIDE OF THE CLIFF.

A STORY OF ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

BY

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

A STRANGE PASSENGER.

The triumph of insolence often appears in social life. Daring, adventurous spirits frequently bear away the prize by sudden effort, which more careful persons have laboured all their life to secure. Ordinarily misfortune travels with too steady steps to overtake the nimbleness of the dashing adventurer.

The skipper of the *Nancy* now made repeated and successful voyages to and from the continent of Europe. The revenue officers were ever on the watch and as regularly failed to capture her. The name of Jack Pegden became more notorious than ever, and his doings to be regarded with superstitious awe.

Everything on board the *Nancy* being ready for another trip, as the skipper appeared on the beach ready to enter the small boat which lay awaiting him, a person wrapped in a black Spanish cloak, and wearing a slouched hat, stood before him, and, in English, spoken with a decided foreign accent, solicited a passage across the channel to the shores of France. To take an unknown person on board the *Nancy* was not the ordinary practice of the smuggler, as such an act might possibly involve both his ship and himself in difficulties. When, therefore, the stranger requested a passage to France, Jack Pegden, with the suspicion his lawless calling encouraged, subjected the person to a severe scrutiny.

The smuggler had an idea that the stranger was a prisoner of war, who, having made his escape, and worked his way down to the coast, had become anxious to be conveyed to his own land. He had often coined a few guineas by such a job, and that he might squeeze as much as possible out of this stranger, he appeared hard to be entreated. By maintaining a pretended dread of foul play, he hoped to find out the character of the passenger.

"I am sorry, sir," replied the smuggler to the stranger; "but it is not my practice to carry passengers."

"Very good; still you do take them."

"Well, occasionally we do; but then they are such as we have some knowledge of."

"Your trade demands the exercise of carefulness."

"Ours is a free trade, sir."

"Exactly so; and it happens that such as you know best you think most fit to be trusted."

"It is customary to place most confidence in such as we know."

"True; and has not the life of Monsieur taught him that such as know most of us, and of our doings, possess the greatest facilities for betraying us?"

"There is something in that; but then we know best how to guard against them."

"Is that true, Monsieur? Do not such as we are best acquainted with possess the greatest advantage over us to do us harm?"

"Such feelings admitted into the mind would soon close the door of friendship."

"And is friendship regarded as such a sacred thing by you?"

"Oh, friendship is very well while it lasts."

"Precisely so; but in that case such as you call friends are no more to be depended on than strangers."

"Still we think we can trust our friends further than others."

"And this leaves us more exposed."

"It may be so."

"Who would be the friend of a naked man? We have no friendship, Monsieur, apart from our possessions. It is this which will make friends with all the world."

On uttering these words, the stranger drew from a pocket a purse of gold, and held it in the rays of the pale moonbeams before the eyes of Jack Pegden. On seeing the glitter of the wealth, the old passion of the smuggler became again inflamed, and he replied:

"Certainly, a man without money has not many friends."

"He has none, Monsieur; while such as command gold possess a host. I am your friend if I give you gold, and this I will do for a voyage to France."

"You see, a man can't help being fortunate any more than he can being unfortunate, for both come around so strangely that it would puzzle the wig off a lawyer's head to know how it is done, and the parsons are nowhere in this matter. I have now had a long run of luck, and am, in consequence, so narrowly watched that it makes me doubly suspicious."

"That may be, but what harm can I do you. I only ask for a voyage to France; I don't wish you to bring me back, and, certainly, I must be entirely in your power while crossing."

"Still, if you don't come back with us, you may with others."

"And should I do so, what injury can I do you. There can be no danger arising from anything done by you in France; it is what is done on the English side which subjects you to danger. Keep clear of your own countrymen, and you know the Frenchmen too well to be afraid of them."

"Jack Pegden was never afraid of a Frenchman."

"Certainly not, Monsieur; why should you be?"

"What will you give me to take you across?"

"I will give you twenty guineas, which I think to be a good price, being nearly a guinea a mile."

"But there is the risk."

"What risk?"

"An escaped prisoner of war," I daresay."

"Will Monsieur carry me to France? I have no time for more talk: if you will, there are twenty guineas."

"I will."

Having placed the money in the hands of the smuggler, he ordered the stranger into the boat, and, jumping in himself, strong arms quickly pulled alongside the *Nancy*. On receiving the skipper aboard, that vessel, which had been standing off and on, was now put about, and, crowding all sail, stood out to sea.

Having a favourable breeze, the *Nancy* cut through the water at the rate of ten knots an hour, and promised, did the wind hold out, to make the passage in three hours. But the breeze did not maintain its strength, and, gradually sinking to rest, it at last became a dead calm. The stranger was found to be a pleasant companion, capable of making friends with the rugged smugglers, telling amusing stories in broken English, and in singing French songs, which, having a noisy chorus, although scarcely a word could be understood by the crew, yet, catching the sound without regarding the sense, they all could join in the singing, and they were well received.

Slowly, in consequence of the calm, the *Nancy* proceeded on her way, yet fast enough for her crew, who had become unwilling to part with their companion. Having at length reached the French shore, the passenger was landed at the little fishing village of Gravelines, and, standing on the strand, bade adieu to the smuggler skipper. But what was to be the course of the stranger? There appeared no purpose nor fixed plan.

Leaving the village, the stranger sauntered along the road toward Calais. Slowly the journey was made, and as though undecided how to act, until on reaching a wood a thicket was entered and concealment sought. For some time the wood was occupied, and then the traveller came forth in the dress of a French woman in good circumstances.

Pursuing the journey toward Calais with greater rapidity, the beauty of the traveller attracted the attention of the passengers, but the stranger had seen too much of the ruder part of life to be annoyed by such trifles. Having resided in France, the passenger by the *Nancy* could speak the language fluently, and with the idioms of a native. This knowledge of the language and manners of the people materially assisted toward reaching the conclusion that, for the present, the part to be acted in the drama of life was that of a domestic servant.

Having decided on this plan, as quickly as possible the stranger assumed the dress of the French peasantry of that period, and appeared in sabots, short frock, and high towering cap, snowy white. In this disguise a situation was to be sought. To commence this new line of life in a city, the stranger felt to be awkward. Not being domesticated, and having much to learn, it was thought better to seek a situation first in the country.

On the road to Calais from Gravelines stood a chateau, which for many years had worn the same uninviting appearance. It was the sight of this place which awoke the thought of becoming a servant. This chateau was one of those houses whose aspect leads a person to question if ever they were new, and from the simple fact that they never seem to get older. Such places appear to have resisted the influence of time and weather so long, that both these destroyers seemed to have considered them as invulnerable and to have given them up in despair. This was a building which, having lost the beauty of its youth, had become so fixed in its aspect as to indicate a strength of constitution that would keep it intact for ever.

The appearance of this country residence, with its uninviting exterior, its shrubbery a wilderness, and the tall, rank grass nodding its plumed head over what had once been a well-shaven lawn, having in the first instance at-

tracted the attention of the stranger, a powerful inclination was felt to visit it for the purpose decided on. There was a character in the aspect of that old French house and its surroundings that was not easily defined, and impressed a person in search of adventure that strange things might be found in its history.

The stranger having, therefore, settled to make trial of a new character if possible in that place, passed through the iron gates, which creaked on their rusty hinges with a melancholy sound as they were pushed open, and up the dreary-looking path to the house. Making an appearance at the door, a little old woman with a yellow skin, with a forehead ploughed in deep wrinkles, on which rested a few gray hairs that had strayed from beneath her muslin cap, and with a pair of small dark twinkling eyes, responded to the ringing of the bell. The age of that old woman might be seventy, it might be five hundred, none could guess from her appearance; for as the chateau itself, she seemed past the power of time to affect.

Stating the reason for appearing there, the old woman examined the stranger closely, and receiving satisfactory replies to her questions, an invitation to enter the hall was extended. Retiring for a moment, the little woman returned in company with a tall thin man, with white hair, and a face that with its piercing eyes, and hooked nose, gave it a striking resemblance to the countenance of a bird of prey. This person claimed to be the proprietor of the chateau, and wore a suit of faded black cloth, with ruffles, and a dress sword. Walking with a quick step into the hall, in a short, sharp voice he enquired,

"What is your name?"

"Lisette," was the prompt reply.

Entering further within the dwelling Lisette found everything in accordance with what the exterior of the house might have suggested. The appearance of the chateau both within and without indicated that the owner of it belonged to a family which had long been going to decay, but which had clung tenaciously to their former dignity.

The day succeeding the night on which the servant at the chateau had left the shores of England on board the *Nancy*, was one of confusion in the camp of the gypsies. The princess had not been seen since the previous morning, and no tidings of what had become of her could be obtained. Since the hour she had forged the note to Charles Freeman she had not been happy. The disgust for a gypsy life had increased with recent events. Her conduct toward her people had been scarcely civil; and she had shown a disposition to escape from their society with every opportunity. This indifference to her tribe had not passed unnoticed, and especially by "Yellow Dick," who had aspired to make overtures to her. This man was a favourite with his tribe, and justly so; for a finer specimen of humanity, clever, expert, and honest, the camp did not contain.

The coming of Sir Harry to the camp aroused the jealousy of "Yellow Dick." He vowed the direst vengeance against him, and more than once his finger was laid on the trigger of the pistol which would have sent a bullet to the heart of the baronet, had not Jethro been watching and interposed his authority. The absence of the Princess now aroused him to madness; and in the fierceness of his passion he resolved to hunt out the master of the Priory, and to shoot him as he would a dog. There rested not the shadow of doubt on his mind but he knew what had become of her; nor was Jethro without his fears on the subject, although he kept his feelings concealed from his people.

With the peep of day the gypsies were astir, and Jethro and his favourite walked from the shore to the woods, vainly searching for some trace of the lost one, when suddenly the sound of a dismal howling and screeching saluted them.

"What noise is that?" exclaimed the gypsy.

"It's that idiot, Mad Tom," replied Jethro.

"Can it be possible that he knows anything of the princess?"

"It is not very likely."

"But the fellow has been better of late; let us find him."

With eagerness "Yellow Dick" led the way to the place whence the sound proceeded. On a boulder, dressed in canvas clothing, and on his head an old woollen cap, from the top of which stuck up a little tuft of red worsted, and known to sailors by the name of a Scotch cap, sat Mad Tom. As they approached he was holding in his hand something which afforded him delight. Gazing on it he turned it from side to side, then putting his tongue far out of his mouth made a horrid grimace, and rolling up his eyes he rubbed his hands over his legs, and clapping them together leaped to his feet and gave another prolonged howl.

The gypsies demanded the treasure. This demand Mad Tom resisted, and placing it in his bosom burst forth into wild laughter. "Yellow Dick" sprang upon him, and in an instant brought him to the ground, nor did he stop until he drew forth an ear-ring of gold. On seeing the treasure Jethro at once recognized it as belonging to his daughter. A feeling of horror stole into his mind, and a cold shudder ran through his frame as he gazed in silence on the trinket.

The idiot having got on his feet, "Yellow Dick" tried to interrogate him as to how he came by the treasure. In this he was to some extent successful.

"Where did you get it?"

The idiot pointed to an adjoining copse, and having done so began to remove his clothes as though in imitation of some one. "Woman—man—to sea," was all that he could articulate; and then as though something pleased him, he burst forth again into another peal of laughter, followed by a terrible yell.

Jethro was stunned by this incident, his courage forsook him, and he returned to the camp taciturn and sullen. While following his leader the quick intellect of the favourite brought an idea to his brain affording him some relief; but for reasons he did not feel inclined to communicate he kept it to himself. The camp of Jethro Lee was now more than ever distressed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LUFF RECEIVES AN INTIMATION FROM HEAD-QUARTERS.

The *Nancy* was being closely watched ashore and afloat. To capture the daring cruiser had now become a point of honour with the coast-guard, and had aroused their sleeping energies into full activity. A strong intimation had been sent to the Watch-house from the Board of Revenue to the effect that Lieutenant Luff would only be doing his duty were he to capture that gallant vessel.

On reading the letter old Luff turned redder, stamped, swore, foamed at the mouth, strode vehemently to and fro the room, then rushed off to the boat-house.

The night was dark and boisterous, and as the angry waves dashed themselves to destruction at the foot of Chalk Cliff, they cast the saline spray of their dying exhalations far on the land. It seemed little short of madness to suppose that the commander of any vessel, no matter how seaworthy, would be daring enough to run his ship across the channel in such a gale.

It was the night that Sir Harry Chillington took his wild ride to Dover in search of the apothecary; and scarcely had he passed the telegraph station, and hardly had the horse-patrol whom he met on the road reined up in front of that little wooden house to obtain a glass of brandy for keeping the cold out, when the coast-guard on duty there, and whose courage had been so severely tried by the passing of the baronet, received a message to repair at once to the Watch-house, which he immediately did, although frightened and under the influence of liquor.

Having collected his men, as in duty bound, that officer addressed them on the work before them, and then dismissed them to their appointed stations. The temper of these defenders of the Revenue was not the most amiable, as muffled in their heavy garments they went forth to be in wait, perhaps for hours, and in the end uselessly.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CONFLICT WITH THE SMUGGLERS.

The anchor of the *Nancy* was weighed, and hoisting as much sail as she could carry, the vessel rushed forth upon the angry waters.

Never did the seamanship of Jack Pegden appear so strikingly perfect as on this occasion. He stood at the helm of his vessel and gazed upon the wild waves seething and hissing around him, with every line on his countenance marked in strongest defiance.

"There will be no Jack Pegden to-night." These words were spoken by one of those ferocious villains belonging to the Ransly gang who were awaiting the coming of the *Nancy*.

"No; I should think not," was the answer returned by his comrade.

"I'm not so sure of that," responded a third. "Jack Pegden is one of the dare-devil kind, and his vessel is as fine a craft as ever left the stocks. If he runs before the gale he can enter the bay, for the water there is as smooth as a mill pond."

"He'll never weather it."

"He won't attempt it."

"Well, you'll see."

"Yes, we shall see; but we shan't see the *Nancy* to-night."

"Hallo! What's that?" and a blue light in the offing told that some vessel was afloat.

"That's him, by jingo!"

"Bah! That light comes from some vessel in distress, and in a second you will hear her minute guns."

The attention of the speakers was now drawn in the direction the light proceeded; and it now became plain to the most incredulous that the light was shown by the smuggler. Being convinced that it was Jack Pegden who showed the blue light, a signal from the shore was given that the men were in readiness for their work.

Other eyes than those of the Ransly gang saw that light in the offing. Old Luff was sitting under the lee side of a rock waiting for the smuggler. For hours the gallant officer had been sitting in that posture, dividing his time between playing a tattoo on the toe of his boot with a stick, cursing the clerk of the Board of Revenue, vowing vengeance on the skipper of the *Nancy*, and watching the surface of the waters with that eagerness with which a cat watches her prey. On perceiving the light at sea, and the signal from the shore, the lieutenant arose from his hiding place to make the round of his men.

The first and second watch visited were standing vigilant and ready for action; but when he reached the third man a curious noise