

offering a portion of its contents to his new acquaintance, he proceeded to take a copious supply himself, winding up by brushing off some superfluous powder from his embroidered coat with a laced and scented handkerchief.

"Let me present you to my daughter, the Lady Aline."

Reginald bowed profoundly, and the young lady made a curtsy which would have graced a court.

"We cannot stay here all night, papa," Lady Aline suggested. "Neither can we proceed until the coach is mended. I think we had best return to that poor inn at which we changed horses, and which seems the only place of entertainment for some miles."

"I passed it a quarter of an hour ago," Reginald remarked. "It did not look to me a suitable place for persons of quality."

"The cooking is better than the outside of the house suggests to be likely, and the wine, if it has not paid duty, at any rate is of the best quality; I have had none better at Bordeaux itself."

As the Earl spoke this encomium Reginald noticed for the first time that the good gentleman had clearly been dining not long previously, and had obviously not spared the bottle during the progress of the meal. This fact made him the less inclined to leave the Lady Aline, whose youth and beauty appealed to his sympathy and judgment; if not to his heart, protected only by her father and the servants.

Lord Feversham gave some directions to the postillions to the effect that they should ride off and find a local smith or carpenter capable of patching up the coach, at any rate until it could be effectually repaired in London. Reginald left this man Colbert to help. He himself walked back towards the "Three Crowns" with Lady Aline and the Earl. The latter was glad of the support of the younger man's arm, for the combined effect of the wine he had consumed and the subsequent shaking had rendered his gait anything but steady.

Although it was early in the month of June, the night was coming in cold. The Lady Aline shivered more than once. At length Reginald ventured to offer the use of his horseman's cape, which the girl graciously accepted, shooting him a glance of gratitude as he placed it on her shoulders.

"I thank you, sir," she said, "and trust that you may not go cold that I may go warm."

"Do not fear that, pray," he replied. "A soldier is used to sleeping in the open air in all climates; and, indeed, what you have taken from me was quite unnecessary when walking."

"I think, sir," she said, "we shall become very good friends." Again she shot him a glance; to escape from its effects he had to remember Katherine Allardye and the white rose, which, though now shivelled, he still carried under his surcoat.

"You honor me, and at the same time offer me a reward which is beyond my deserts," he deprecated modestly.

Lord Feversham did not seem to be taking much notice of their converse, but was strutting along upon the uneven road in such an uncertain fashion that it taxed Lieutenant Harbin's resources to keep him on his feet.

"My father is somewhat tired," Lady Aline apologized. "We have had rather a fatiguing day."

Reginald merely bowed, not knowing what other answer he could make.

At length they reached the "Three Crowns," which had a signboard with an ominous crack in it, not, however, perceptible at that time of night, as the light had waned. The landlord came down the steps of the inn, almost as if he were expecting them. A certain suspicion came into Reginald's mind, accustomed to living in a foreign country where treachery ever lurked, and the man who was not on the alert was like to live but a short time.

"Your lordship and my lady have been pleased to return," Host Dicey suggested, bowing obsequiously.

He was a tall, gaunt man, with high cheek bones and a slight cast in one eye. As he spoke his glance rested inquiringly on the lieutenant's well-knit, muscular frame. His expression hardly conveyed the satisfaction which a landlord might be expected to assume on welcoming an additional guest. Reginald's eye, already rendered suspicious, did not fail to note Dicey's lowering look.

"No; I am not pleased to return, Master Landlord," Lord Feversham bellowed. "The coach has broken down, and my lady and I were like to have been killed. So we are compelled to bed here instead of being half-way to London by this time. Get me a posset, man, and be quick about it. See that the beds are well aired, or it will be the worse for you." Lord Feversham interlarded these remarks with some extraneous expressions regarding the landlord, his own remarks, and the coach, which need not be set down here.

"I, too, shall want sleeping accommodation," Reginald put in, "for myself and my servant."

Host Dicey was profuse in his regrets. "Really, sir, you have only to look at this house to see that it will be stretched to its furthest extent to provide for his lordship, my lady, and their company. It is quite impossible, begging your humble pardon, sir; only two miles further, on the other side of the Downs, is the 'Black Swan,' a very comfortable house, where they have ample accommodation, and travelers speak warmly of the cooking. My own poor tavern"—Dicey waved his hand deprecatingly—"does not pretend to be a house of the first importance."

"Nevertheless, I am not going on to-night. My Lord Feversham has asked me to bear him company."

The landlord was about to make further protest, but Reginald stopped him with an emphatic gesture.

"The matter is settled; my man and I are old soldiers, and if you cannot find a sleeping place for us we can do it for ourselves without disturbing either you or your good wife."

Mrs. Dicey had come into the passage by the side of the landlord. Lord Feversham stumbled into the sanded parlor, where he had supped an hour earlier. Lady Aline looked at Reginald before she followed her father. If he interpreted the glance aright, it said: "Mind you carry your point; I want you to stay." It did not require this silent message to determine the lieutenant, for his mind was made up already, and the very opposition of Host Dicey only strengthened both his suspicion and his resolution.

Mrs. Dicey was whispering some suggestion to her husband, to which apparently he assented with some reluctance.

"My wife says she could put a couple of mattresses and some blankets in a barn we have for storing grain; it is not very air-tight, and but poor accommodation to offer to a gentleman of your honor's standing, but it is the best we can provide, seeing that the house is so small."

"I will look at it," Reginald replied curtly. "And if it does not serve, my man and I can sleep on these same mattresses in the kitchen."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Mrs. Dicey; "but that is quite impossible, for we have three men who are to sleep there already, and his lordship and my lady, with my lord's gentleman and my lady's madam, have the principal bedrooms, and the other servants will be in the attics."

"These men seem to have arranged their place of sleeping with much expedition, and to have conveyed it with remarkable celerity which I fail to understand, seeing that five minutes ago neither you nor they knew that the occasion would arise."

"My wife heard the cries, and, guessing what had happened, arranged at once with the men if need be; that was why she did not come forward at the first."

"I compliment madam on the facility of her intelligence," Reginald remarked with a bow. His ironical tone was not lost upon the landlord and his wife, but no reply came ready to hand, so there was a sullen silence for a minute or two. It was broken by the door of the parlor being opened and Lord Feversham roaring for the posset he had ordered. Reginald walked into the room. Lord Feversham, after calling out, had once more subsided on to a seat by the wall, half bench, half settee. He was nearly asleep, and seemed barely conscious of the younger man's entry. The parlor was only lighted by one oil lamp in the middle of the room, over the round oak table, and by branched candelabra of metal at either end of the mantelpiece. Over the latter was an oblong gilded mirror before which Lady Aline was standing. She had her back to the door and the room, and seemed to be lost in meditation. Wearing the low dress of the period, having cast off both her own outer wrap and the cape the lieutenant had placed on her shoulders, the young girl showed the stately and beautiful column of her white neck, from which the hair was caught up and fastened with a diamond spray on the top of her head. The gleam of this diamond ornament, in the clearer light cast by the candles at that side of the apartment, caught Reginald's eye at once. Then he saw that round her neck she wore a necklace of similar stones, which must also be of very great value. The lieutenant could not help stopping for a minute to take in the view of the lovely face in the mirror, but his thoughts were more immediately concerned with the precious stones Lady Aline was wearing, with a young girl's lack of sensibility to danger.

Reginald moved forward, and as his step sounded on the floor Lady Aline turned. Her eyes had lost their dreamy look of abstract contemplation, and were now full of her usual vivacity.

"I hope you have settled your affair satisfactorily; I am afraid that joining yourself to our party is like to give you some inconvenience—to-night, at any rate."

"Inconvenience is a thing of which I think nothing; I am only too thankful for this meeting, and that your father gave me the invitation. To tell the truth, Lady Aline, I think you may ere long need a man with a clear head and a capable arm."

"I am not afraid now," she said, "since I am under shelter of a roof, albeit if not of the best, or indeed, suited to our quality, but I must confess that on that dreary common"—she gave an effective little shudder—"I was more than a little frightened, which fact so affected my poor judgment that I even took an officer of the King for a highwayman." She laughed merrily, but Reginald was quite grave.

"I do not think your safety is any the more assured here than it was in the coach or on the Downs; the landlords on this road out of London have not the best of reputations as regards the treatment of hapless travelers, and I have been informed that since these unhappy dissensions have separated the leaders of the State, and paralysed the executive, things have gone rapidly from bad to worse. Your father, and even you yourself, my lady, cannot be unaware of these circumstances. I wonder his lordship permits and you yourself take the risk of wearing those jewels, which must be of great price, in your hair and on your neck."

Lady Aline rested her hand affectionately on the necklace of diamonds she was wearing. "Lud!" she cried. "I should not like to have this stolen from me; I love it with all my heart. It belonged to my mother. She gave it to me on her death-bed, placing it on my neck with her own weak hands." Lady Aline's eyes suffused with tears. "I have worn it ever since by day, and it always rests in a narrow box under my pillow at night."

Reginald shook his head gravely, but his eyes were full of sympathy with the pathos of the young girl's tone when she spoke of her mother. He glanced at Lord Feversham as he half sat, half reclined on the

settee. Certainly he did not seem an efficient guardian for his motherless daughter.

At this moment Host Dicey entered with his Lordship's posset, and after handing it to Lord Feversham he came forward to see if the lieutenant intended to give any orders. As the landlord asked the question, "Will your honor be pleased to take anything?" Reginald noticed that he cast a greedy eye on the jewels about which the lieutenant and Lady Aline had but just been speaking.

The lieutenant curtly declined any refreshment. He had supped at another wayside inn an hour earlier.

Lady Aline intimated that she would like her woman summoned, as she intended going to her sleeping apartment. The maid had arrived with Lord Feversham's man a few minutes after the Earl and his companions had reached the "Three Crowns." Just as Lady Aline spoke there was the sound of horse's feet, which doubtless indicated that the other servants had come back. Lord Feversham roused himself at the sound, and got up from the settee. He wished to go out and ascertain what had been done about the coach, but the strong egg-and-wine posset had finished what the dinner partaken of earlier had begun, and movement without assistance had become an impossibility.

"Can I go out and inquire for you, my lord?" Reginald inquired.

"I thank you, sir; you will be doing a service. I've had a tiring day, sir—a very tiring day, and will betake myself to bed. Tell those varlets that the coach must be ready without fail by nine o'clock of the morning, to-morrow, or it will be the worse for some of them."

"I will do your bidding, my lord."

The Earl tottered out of the parlor. Lady Aline and Reginald were left alone in it. The latter went forward to the girl's side, eager to take advantage of the chance of speaking while they were by themselves.

"I should like to have an opportunity of seeing how your apartments are situated in the house, without seeming to do so," the lieutenant said.

Lady Aline raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"You still have your suspicions, sir?"

"They have strengthened considerably rather than the reverse. I am certain that rascal landlord has an eye upon your jewels, and I feel sure the coach accident was arranged in some way before your equipage left the inn yard."

"What do you propose to do?" Lady Aline inquired. She was taking it all quite coolly. The lieutenant admired her calm courage very much.

"I hardly know yet, but at any rate I should like to find out which is your room, and whether there is any fastening on your door, and, if so, what."

"I have a pistol with two barrels in my possession, and I have learnt to use it at a shooting gallery in Paris."

Reginald smiled. "It may be of service at a pinch, but a human target is a very different affair from a metal disc."

"I do not think my hand would fail me," Lady Aline replied. "I have thought of a way by which you can see the arrangements of my father's and my sleeping apartments. It is very simple," she suggested with a laugh. "You will offer me your arm to take me upstairs. In France the civility is common enough. In England—" She stopped, with a captivating little embarrassment.

"In England we are more or less uncivilized," Reginald assented, filling in the blanks. They both laughed. Decidedly the ice of first acquaintance in their case had thawed very rapidly.

Host Dicey in a minute or two ushered in the French maid, a vivacious girl only a year or two older than her young mistress. She took up Lady Aline's wrap and at the same time took stock of Reginald, whom she had seen on the Downs, but now viewed with more interest. She saw that the lieutenant and Lady Aline had advanced in intimacy since that first meeting, an hour or two before. With the quick appreciation of her sex and nationality, she decided that the two young people were eminently suited to one another.

"This gentleman will kindly give me his arm upstairs," Lady Aline said to the landlord, who stood obsequiously holding the door open. For a moment Dicey seemed inclined to offer some objection, but, thinking better of it, held his tongue. Nevertheless his annoyance clearly appeared on his face as he ushered them into the hall, and lighted two candles, one for the mistress, which Reginald carried, the other for the maid, Antoinette.

The "Three Crowns" was built more for the accommodation of passing travelers who came for bite and sup, to change horses and make their way further on, than as a resting place for the night. The lower rooms were spacious and fairly lofty, but the staircase from the ground to the first floor was narrow and crooked. The bedrooms were small and ill-furnished, while the only way to the attics was by means of a ladder. A solitary oil lamp, with dirty glass case and blackened chimney, was the only illumination of the staircase and upper landing. With the aid of the flickering candles it showed the miserable accommodation offered.

"This is not a fitting place for you, Lady Aline," Reginald said as he threw open the second door on the right, which had been indicated by the host as the sleeping room of the girl and her maid. The latter had a mattress placed for her in one corner. A worm-eaten four-post bedstead in the centre of the apartment was intended for Lady Aline. The Earl evidently occupied the next room, as his snores already woke the echoes, while Adolphe's footsteps could be heard creaking on the bare boards, as he bustled up and down, putting his master's things in something like order.

The chamber assigned to Lady Aline had only one door and one window. The latter had a heavy frozy curtain drawn in front of it. Reginald at once stepped across the room, after asking Lady Aline's permission to do so, and examined it. He had placed the candle

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