

The Draper's Niece

An Episode in the Life of Dick Ryder

'Twas late at night when I reached Wimbledon Common, out of the west, where I had been patrolling the roads for some two months or more, and with mighty little success, as it chanced that year I love the west country, not only because I have as a rule found there fat pockets joggling home untimely or a nag or mate or fine noblemen in rich chains, very proud but tender to pick, but I have also a sentimental leaning towards that part, and that's the truth I will not deny. There are some that hanker after the Great North Road, and boast that there is no better toby ground 'twixt Stevenage and Grantham, while I have even known 'em to set up Finchley Common or Hounslow for choice. Old Irons, who never had much self-respect, and was not above turning common crib-cracker if it so served him, was wont to go no further than Finchley when he was lacking a goldfish or two.

"Sink me," says he in my presence one to the landlord of the "King's Head," who spoke of his score there, "I will pay you to-morrow," which he did, sure enough, by a visit to Finchley and with not so much as a charged pistol. That was never my way. Give me a creditable fellow that shows fight and gives you wits some exercise. There's the true spirit in which to take the life of the road. I would not give a pint of mulled ale for it else.

But the west is after my heart, being big and populous and swarming with squires and comfortable warm folk. I know the North Road and was once very well known there myself, and celebrated on the Yorkshire Moors, a cold, uncivil place indeed, there are few parts of the kingdom I have not traversed in my time. Well, I was newly out of the west that May night, but on this occasion in no very good humor, as you may imagine when I say that I had been forced to leave a belt of guineas behind at Devizes—so close upon me were the traps. Indeed, I was very nearly taken in the night, all owing to the treachery of an innkeeper, roast him! 'Twas a fine, mid night, and I was for lying in Clerkenwell at a house I knew, but I had reached no further than Rochampton Lane when of a sudden I reined in, for I remembered an inn there that I had sometimes used, and, to say the truth, I was thirty.

"Well," thinks I, "maybe I will lie here and maybe not. I will let fortune decide," and I was turning the mare into the lane, when something comes up quick in the thick of the darkness and rushes on Calypso.

The mare started and backed into the hedge, and I raised my voice, as you may guess.

"Why," says I, "you toad!"—and the Lord knows where I should have gotten to if a gleam of white in the blackness had not at that instant disclosed to me the blunderer. 'Twas a woman, or at least a slip so young and silly that maybe she should not be so styled, and I had no sooner made that out and ceased in the middle of my obligations than I made another discovery. It was her voice that did it, for no doubt she was mightily in terror, seeing me so wrathful, and the night being so black and lonely.

"Oh, sir," she calls in a trembling voice, "I did not see you—" and here she broke a-weeping.

Well, Dick Ryder is not the man to stand by while a pretty woman weeps (for I would have sworn she was pretty enough), and so down I popped off Calypso and approached her.

"Why," said I, "I love not to see a miss like you in tears, and as for my words, I pray forget them. I thought you were some blundering, hulking bully that was meat for my bodkin, or my whip, or no more. But as it is," says I, "there's no more ado. So dry your eyes, my dear, for I am no ogre to eat pretty children."

"Oh," she says, with a gulp, "I was not afraid of you. I only feared I had angered you justly."

"Oh," said I, trying for a look at her face in the darkness. "Why, I see you are a very brave girl, for sure that I'll swear you are. And if those pearly drops be not for me, why, I should like to know what opened the wells, my dear, and then I will see if you have broken the mare's leg with your onset, and get to bed like any honest, sober man, that leaves the witching hours to maids and mases and innocent children, as is only right and proper."

"I do not suppose the girl took me, for women have but scant appreciation of Irony, but she spoke glibly enough."

has thrown out a ha-lamb like you, miss—well, 'tis he or she I will have awake and up, and something more besides, rip me if I don't!"

I had put her down as a child from her stature, which was small, and her body, which was slight, but I was to be undeceived in that presently.

"'Tis my uncle," she sobbed. "He has shut the door on me. He will not let me in. He vows he has done with me."

"Maybe," said I, "he has some cause for his anger. But unless are not hard masters, even to young misses that know not the world, nor their own minds."

"Nay," she says, "he has a reason for his anger and he will not relent. He has threatened me before and he is full of burning fury. He will not have me back," she said, in a voice of hesitating timidity, and, seeming of a sudden to have taken in the shame of her situation, she began to withdraw into the night.

"Not so fast, young madam," said I. "You have broken my mare's leg, I believe, and I must have a talk with you. What's the reason?" says I. She paused, and then in a tremulous, quick voice said: "He will not hear that George Riscley shall marry me."

"Oh, ho!" said I. "I begin to smell power. And he has turned you out of doors?"

"No," she faltered, "He would not admit me."

"I begin to see beyond my nose," I said. "You were walking with this George, and returned late?" She hesitated. "Why, come," I said, rallying her, "I'd ha' done the same myself, although you would not credit it of a prim and proper youth like me. You were back late?"

"Yes," says she, in a low voice. "Well," said I, "old Nunks shall take you in, never fear, so come along me, and show me where Nunks lives and times and fuses."

At that I threw Calypso a bridle over my arm, and began to go along the road, the little miss walking by my side something reluctant, as I guessed, but cheering as she went. Her uncle, says she, was a draper in the city, with a good custom and a deep purse, while this George was but a pretence with small prospects.

"Well, I have no prospects myself," said I, "but I warrant I can get what I want in the end. 'Tis the same with George. Let him worry at it as a dog a bone. I'll wager he is a handsome fellow to have taken a pretty girl's eyes."

"He is very handsome," says miss, with enthusiasm, "and he is the best judge of calico in the city."

Says I, smacking my thigh, as we walked on together, quite friendly. "That's the lad for my money, and I don't wonder at you."

Whereat, poor child, she brings me forth tales of her blessed George's goodness and inestimable virtues, and how his master trusted him, and how his neighbors loved him.

"Well," said I, "best let 'em love him too much, or maybe this paragon will slip you."

And on that she came to a halt, and, falling very tremulous again, pointed at a house.

and at the same time I threw the bridle over Calypso's ears and stood free before the old villain.

He looked at me a moment, the flame of the candle wagging before his face, and the grease guttering down the candlestick. You do not understand, sir," he said, in a quiet voice "I have to give my niece lessons; I have to teach her by severity, but since it is probable that she has been sufficiently frightened by this night's adventure, and come to reason, let her enter. A-d so saying, he stepped back and held the door wide.

That he was of a savage, uncontrollable temper was evident, but I had not reckoned with the old bear's cunning, and I vow I was to blame for it. So old a hand as Dick Ryder should not have been caught by so simple a trick. Yet he was miss's uncle, and how was I to suspect him so deeply? At any rate, the facts are that, on seeing him alter so reasonably, and seeing him step back with the invitation on his lips and in his bearing, I too stepped back from the doorway to leave room for miss to enter. Then, of a sudden, bang goes the door to, shaking the very walls of the house, and a great key is turned on the inside, groaning rustly.

I will confess I felt blank, but I recovered in a moment, when out of the window above the old rascal stuck his head.

"Let her go back to her lover," he says, with a sneer, and then the head was withdrawn and the window shut tight, and the house was plunged in darkness.

You may suppose how this usage annoyed me, who am not wont to be treated in so scurvy a fashion, or to come out of any contest so slabbly. I was on the instant for flying at the door and employing barkers and peep too soon with your eyes shut, and so I held my temper and my tongue, only showing my teeth in an ugly grin as I turned to Mrs. Nellie.

"Why," says I, "the old chap has said the truth. And there is something in his whimsies after all. It seems that George and I must fight or tuss for you, my dear. You must remember that I had not seen her face all this time for all the streaming candle the old gentleman carried, but I gathered that she was in distress from the note of her voice, which trembled.

"You cannot mean it, sir," she cried, and shrank away into the darkness, whence I caught the noise of sobbing.

"Why, bless you, child," said I, "I would as leave frightened a sucking babe as pink-and-white-and-fleece, so I would, child."

"Sir," says she, staying her tears, and speaking with an air of dignity, vastly entertaining, "I am past eighteen."

"Well," says I, "if you are as old as that I would I had a mother like you, granny. But as for old Suet-vender, rip and stab me if I do not pay him back in good coin before two hours is out. And in the meantime you come along with me, grandam."

I think she was confused and flustered to be so addressed, not understanding my sarcasm, but she followed me obediently, not having any ideas of her own, poor soul. I led the way towards Rochampton, where I had made up my mind she should be meanwhile, in the care of a wench I knew at the inn I was fashioning in my mind a plan for the confounding of the old tub-of-lard as I went, for I never lose time, but am speedy at my aim, yet all the same I talked with Miss Pretty jovial, for she was a shrinking slip of a girl who was beginning now to get scared, and no wonder. When we got to the tavern, I came into the taproom and called out for Costley, who had the house then, but it since dead of good liquor, and out runs he in his apron, with a lively face, for he was in a merry state enough, the hour being late.

"What, Dick Ryder!" says he, in surprise.

"Yes," 'tis Dick Ryder," says I, "and he wants a bed along of Sally for a little madam, and supper for both."

"A madam!" he calls out, and laughs broadly. "'Tis unexpected of you, Captain," says he. "At least, 'tis put in an amazing odd way. But, he cries out, bursting with his news, "Old Irons is here!"

"What, for I was no friend of Old Irons."

"Yes," said he, eagerly "You'll along of him?"

thought she was insulted, maybe, by some of Costley's fellows, and I ran to the door. But there she was with her arms about the neck of this Jack-a-dandy.

"What's this, miss?" said I, beginning to think there was some truth in old Nunks's words after all and at that she stepped into the inn, in her excitement, and I saw her plainly to the first time. Lord, there was nothing in her face that would not have convinced any court at Old Bailey forthwith. She was prettily handsome, like a doll that turns eyes up or down and smiles out of pink cheeks, in which were two dimples mightily enticing. Up she comes in a rush, almost breathless, and breaks out to me.

"'Tis he, 'tis he, sir."

"Who is he?" said I, sharply.

"'Tis Mr. Riscley," she says, somewhat bashful, "He has been supping here, and is setting forth for his lodging."

"I commend his discretion," I said, dryly. "An excellent good place for supper, so it is, especially for young bloods like that Well," says I, "since you're content, as it seems, I will leave you and young Cupid, and be about my business."

At that she looked dumfounded. "But—" she begins, stammering, and paused.

I threw a glance at Riscley, who stood by with an air something 'twixt arrogance and uneasiness. I plumbed his depths, for I have come across many such as he in my (time-few feathers enough and nothing behind 'em. But it was true that the cock's appearance did not better her case, beyond the show of mutual affection, so I considered, and the idea I had taken soon bloomed forth in my mind. There was Old Irons, and here were we. I could have laughed aloud to think how I was for binding all the threads in one, to say nothing of Nunks's on the Common. So I turned about to Costley.

"I was wrong," says I, "I will do Captain Irons the honor to sup with him, and this young gentleman, I make no doubt, will join me."

"I beg your pardon—I have supposed," he stammered.

"'Tis a friend," I heard her whisper. "If it were not for him I know not what must have happened to me."

"Well," says I, "Miss here will sup at any rate," at which I saw his color move.

"I will take the pleasure myself to keep you company, sir," said he, and forthwith we marched into the room. Here was Old Irons, rude, jovial and common as ever, but happily not too far gone as yet. He stared at my guests hard enough, but seemed to be at a loss what to make of them, or how to deal by them. So that he was for a time pretty silent, casting glances of perplexity at me and frowning, as if he would invite me to say what I was doing. He was drinking, however, of humpty-dumpty, which soon loosened his tongue.

"What cock and pullet have ye got here, Dick?" says he, in a loud whisper.

"Friends of mine," says I.

"Oh!" says he, and stared, then passed off into a chuckle, with his eyes twinkling on Miss, at which my apprentice in the fine clothes, not knowing, poor fool, what sort of a man he had to deal with, fired up and demanded haughtily why he laughed at a lady. But Irons only roared the more, paying no more heed to him than if he were a babe in arms.

"Shut your mouth," says I to him, seeing the girl's color fly about.

my very words to myself."

"Well," said I, bluntly, "you shall have you wish, old man, and this young gentleman, too, who I see is regularly jumping for to join us."

"I—I know not what you mean," stammered the peacock. "Having supped, and being called on to retire to my lodging, which is far hence, I will take the opportunity to thank you, sir, for your hospitality, and be gone."

Now at that I was only confirmed in the opinion I had formed of him, as nothing but a cur of no spirit, for here he was quite willing—nay, anxious—to fly off and leave his lady in the hands of those whom he knew not, with never a roof to cover her. He had taken a fear of Irons, maybe, or perhaps his suspicion was due to my masterful air. But I was not going to let him escape that way, specially as he was part of the plot I was laying. So I put my hand on his shoulder.

"Sit down," said I, cheerily. "You must not begone till you have put something inside that brave coat of yours. Moreover," says I, "here is a lady in trouble, and if I read your honest face aright you are not the man to leave a poor maid in the lurch—not you."

"Rip me, no—he's a brave young gentleman I can see it in his cheeks," chuckled Old Irons.

"I do not know what can be done," said the other, in confusion. "I am willing to help in any way. But her uncle refuses."

"Well," said I, looking on him attentively, "you may be thankful that you have me one who, however inferior in courage, does not need to cry mercy to your wits. For here's my plan, plain and pat."

And I gave it them there and then. It had come into my head as I walked along the road with Miss Nelly, but I had the whole form perfect on me when I had encountered the apprentice and heard Irons was in the tavern.

Old Irons and I were to make an entry into the house, and the peacock was to make the rescue, by which means, as you will see, the way would be cleared for the reconciliation. But no sooner had I told them than cries the peacock, stammering.

"But—but—I could not—" "Tis not seemly, I will be no party—" "Tis time I was gone home."

"Oh, very well," says I, "Then we will adventure without you, and 'tis I will rescue Miss Irons."

The girl's eyes lighted up. "You will do it, George," says she, beaming. "I believe it will convince my uncle of all that I have said of you."

"But," says he, in a troubled voice, and glancing from Old Irons to me and from me to Old Irons, anxiously, "I do not know who these gentlemen are."

"Sink me," says Old Irons, in a coaxing voice, "d'ye think we are really on the toby? Why, bless you, young master, we are both noblemen in disguise, so we are, and would think shame of so job, if it were not to make an honest girl come by her own. We're only a-posing as crib-crackers," says he.

"George!" says the girl, in a voice of soft entreaty that would have persuaded a topsman.

"No good will come of it," said he, with an air of protest. "'Twill fail, and he cast his eyes up in despair."

upon the window when the time was come, at which he should spring in with cries of alarm and fury, falling upon the rascals that had dared break into the merchant's house. At which Irons and I were to make off, and the old gentleman rising in terror from his bed, should discover us in flight and his deliverer, George, full-armed, in possession. Yet it did not fall out quite in this way, owing, I believe, to Old Irons' muddled head, and his stopping on the stairs.

At any rate, we were no sooner come to the hall, after Irons had visited two rooms, than we were surprised by the figure of the old gentleman moving down the staircase in his nightdress, and a large blunderbuss in his hand.

"Stand," says he, seeing Irons in the faint light. "Stand, rogue, or I fire!"

Old Irons uttered a curse, and, edging into the shadows, put up an arm to slip the catches of the window. But his knuckles fell on it with a rap, as he withdrew the catch, and, immediately after, there was a loud, shrill cry, the window flew open, and there was our peacock in the midst, calling in his falsetto:

"Surrender, or I will blow a hole in you—surrender by—"

I could have broken out laughing at the sight, only the situation promised to grow hot; for Old Irons, taken aback at this, and never very particular when on his lay, jumped up sharply and smashed at together with his pistol-butt, while, to make confusion worse, the old man in the nightcap let go of his blunderbuss. Such a screeching arose as would have astounded a churchyard of ghosts, for the truth was, old Nunky hit George and simultaneously down came Irons' blow on his head. That sets his finger to work on the trigger of the pistol I had given him, and ere I was aware something had took me in the big toe, and set me cursing.

"Here," says I, grabbing Old Irons in the darkness, for he was ready to destroy both in his wildness. "This is no place for a tender-hearted chicken like you or me. We're no match for savage fire-eaters like these. We'd best go," and I dragged him through the window, and we made off together. When we reached the inn I called out the girl.

"What has happened?" she cried, eagerly.

"Best walk home sharp. I'll wager Nunky will be calling for you presently to reward a gallant youth that has risked his life for to save him!"

Her eyes glistened, and, Lord, I believe the poor fool thought George had been brave. She clasped her hands. "Oh, I must thank you, sir," she cried.

"Nay, never thank me," said I, "for, if I mistake not, Old Irons has taken thanks for us both, and would have had more if it had not been for young Jack-a-dandy."

"Split him!" cries Old Irons, "I would I had hit him harder."

"Hit!" she cries, and clutches at me.

"Nay, never fear," I said. "'Twas not Irons, but Nunky's blunderbuss. Faith, he took both wounds like a lamb. I would I had his courage and was to be comforted like him. But he is in no danger."

"Oh, sir!" she says, gratefully, and, if she were a fool, she was prettily enough, and her innocence touched me, for she had scarce understood anything of what we spoke.

"But run home," says I, "and I'll warrant you'll find him a-rubbing of his head and Nunky a-hugging him for joy and gratitude."

But even ere I had finished she was gone, flying lightly into the grey of the coming dawn, and, as I heard afterwards from Costley, what I had forecast was pretty accurate. But I had finished with Miss then, and the next business was to divide with Old Irons. 'Twas the first time that I had ever engaged in a job with him, and I vow 'twill be the last, so scurvy was he in the partition. But, then, I had always a detestation of so ungentlemanly a game as cracking cribs.

Educational St. Michael's College IN AFFILIATION WITH TORONTO UNIVERSITY Under the special patronage of His Grace the Archbishop of Toronto, and directed by the Basilian Fathers. Full Classical, Scientific and Commercial Courses Special courses for students preparing for University Matriculation and Non-Professional Certificates. TERMS, WITHIN PAID IN ADVANCE: Board and Tuition, per year, \$160 Day Pupils, \$100 For further particulars apply to RRV. J. R. THIPPY, President.

Loretto Abbey.. WELLINGTON PLACE, TORONTO, ONT. This fine institution recently enlarged to over twice its former size, is situated conveniently near the business part of the city, and yet sufficiently remote to secure the quiet and recreation so essential to study. The course of instruction comprises every branch suitable to the education of young ladies. Circular with full information, as to uniforms, terms, &c., may be had by addressing LADY SUPERIOR, WELLINGTON PLACE, TORONTO

School of Practical Science ESTABLISHED 1876. Toronto. Affiliated to the University of Toronto. This School is equipped and supported entirely by the Province of Ontario, and gives instruction in the following departments: 1.—Civil Engineering, 2.—Mining Engineering, 3.—Mechanical and Electrical Engineering, 4.—Architecture, 5.—Surveying, 6.—Analytical and Applied Chemistry. Special attention is directed to the facilities possessed by the School for giving instruction in Mining Engineering. Practical instruction is given in Drawing and Surveying, and in the following Laboratories: 1.—Chemical, 2.—Analytical, 3.—Mining, 4.—Steam, 5.—Metallurgical, 6.—Electrical, 7.—Testing. The School has good collections of Minerals, Rocks and Fossils. Special attention will be received, as well as those taking regular courses, for the following Laboratories: 1.—Chemical, 2.—Analytical, 3.—Mining, 4.—Steam, 5.—Metallurgical, 6.—Electrical, 7.—Testing. The School has good collections of Minerals, Rocks and Fossils. Special attention will be received, as well as those taking regular courses, for the following Laboratories: L. B. STEWART, Secy.

ST. JOSEPH'S Academy St. Alban Street, TORONTO.. The Course of Instruction in this Academy embraces every branch necessary to the education of young ladies in the Academic Department. Special attention is paid to MORRIS LANGRISH, THE ARTS, FINE ARTS and PRACTICAL DRAWING. Pupils on completing the Practical Course and passing a successful examination, conducted by the Board, are awarded Teachers' Certificates and Diplomas in this Department. Pupils are prepared for the Degree of Bachelor of Music of Toronto University. The Studio is affiliated with the Government Art School and the Commercial College. The Primary and Commercial Courses, and Diplomas awarded for proficiency in Penmanship and Typewriting. For Prospectus, Address: MOTHER SUPERIOR.

St. Jerome's College BERLIN, ONTARIO, CANADA. Thorough instruction in the Classical, Philosophical and Commercial Courses. Special attention given to the German and French Languages. \$12 per annum pays all necessary expenses except books. Write to: RICHARD JOHN FRASER, C.R.D.D., President.

CONSERVATORY OF MUSIC COLLEGE STREET. DR. EDWARD FISHER, Musical Director THE BEST EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES AND STRONGEST FACULTY IN CANADA School of Literature and Expression Mrs. IRENE NICHOLES CRYER, Principal. Eloquence, Pedagogy, Physical Culture. Calendars and Syllabus Free

WINTER TERM AT THE NORTHERN Business College OWEN SOUND, ONT., BEGINNING JAN. 5, 1904. Our courses teach Business and shorthand departments are up-to-date, thorough and complete. The demand for young men as office assistants is much greater than for young women. Prospectus may be obtained on application to THE PRESIDENT.

LOYOLA COLLEGE MONTREAL An English Classical College. Conducted by the Jesuit Fathers. There is a Preparatory Department for junior boys and a Special English Course for such as may not wish to follow the ordinary curriculum. Prospectus may be obtained on application to THE PRESIDENT.

BERNARD CAIRNS Leader in RUBBER STAMPS, STAMPS, ETC. 10 King St. W., Toronto Accredited Typewriter Toronto Map, 2nd