KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER II.

PORLOCK BAY.

And now it seemed the old warrior's turn to be dependent on the grown woman he had loved and cherished in her childhood. It was true enough that he fretted and pined for her if she stayed many hours out of his sight. It was pitiable to mark how, day by day, the intellect failed in proportion as the goodly form dwindled to decay. The old oak that had reared its branches so sturdily was bowed and sapless now. The soldier of Oudenarde and Malplaquet, who had sat at table with Marlborough and Prince Eugene, was fit for little more than to doze in an easy-chair, longing for his grandchild's home-coming, and nodding, as Parson Gale said, feebly over the fire.

Even that worthy felt struck with something of awe and apprehension while he looked on the wasted limbs that he had heard quoted by old neighbors for their strength, and reflected that the time was coming when he too would no longer be able to sit a horse or wrestle a fall. What had he to look forward to? What resources against that day of debility and stagnation, unless, indeed, he could prevail in his suit with Nelly Carew? Therefore did Parson Gale exert all his powers of conversation, hoping to render himself agreeable to the girl as she passed in and out, furthering the preparations for their simple meal. He drew on his memory, his mother-wit, and his invention for subjects that might be interesting to both his companions. For old Carew he detailed at great length the particulars of a wrestling-match, and subsequent drinking bout, at both of which he had lately assisted in his own parish; while to Nelly he expatiated on the convenience of his kitchen, the coolness of his larder, the luxuries of his best parlor in the parsonage at home; but, in spite of all his efforts, he experienced a dim sense of failure and depression. Notwithstanding his calling, the man was superstitious rather than religious; and when he rose to take leave, could not forbear expressing a conviction that some great misfortune must be impending on him or his.

"I've heard tell of men feeling just like me," said he, holding Nelly's hand rather longer than good breeding required, "and being found next morning stark dead on the moor. There was a woman up at my place only last Martinmas, and she says, 'Parson,' says she, 'there's something coming to me that's past praying for; I know as well as if I saw it. I'm that down-hearted I don't seem to fill my bodice, and there's a din in both my ears like the waves of a flood-tide, so I can't scarce hear myself speak.' It wasn't a month before her only brother got drowned off the Lizard, and will you tell me now, Mistress Nelly, as you did once before, that such warnings are but idle fancies and old women's fables? I'm that down-hearted too; I'm not ashamed to say so. And when it's fallen on me, whatever it is, I should like to know who will care a pinch of snuff what's gone with wild Abner Gale?"

"I wouldn't speak so, if I were you," answered the Girl, who, having disengaged her hand, was now standing at the cottage door to see him mount for his homeward march across the moor. "There are plenty of all sorts to welcome you when you come, and wish you 'good speed' when you go away—you that have so many friends."

"Friends!" repeated the Parson, turning his mare's head homewards, with a bitter smile. "The church wouldn't hold my acquaintance, but the pulpit is large enough for my friends!"

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CHAPTER III.

WAIF.

Deadman's Alley was at all times a secluded thoroughfare; after dark, indeed, its echoes rarely woke to the sound of a footstep, and the watch reflecting, perhaps, that such loneliness saved them a deal of trouble, abstained from disturbing its repose. An empty cask, a bale of goods, or a human body thrown aside in Deadman's Alley, might have remained there many hours without attracting the notice or obstructing the transit of a passenger.

John Garnet, however, was unusually fortunate, for he had wallowed in the gutter but a few minutes, when a girl's step came dancing along the alley, and the lightest foot in London tripped over him as he lay at length upon the stones, not quite unconscious, yet altogether powerless to move. The girl, who had nearly fallen, recovered her footing with the activity of a cat; and smothering an exclamation in some outlandish tongue, paused

exertion, gentle hands pressed a cordial to his lips, and a consoling voice whispered in his ear

"Courage, my young friend. Do not attempt to raise your head. Another sip, Waif. Good. In five minutes he will come to."

In five minutes he did come to, and found strength to ask what had happened and where he was?

"The first question you must answer for yourself," said the grave old man who sat by his bedside, with a finger on his pulse. "To the second I reply, make your mind easy, you are in the house and under the care of the celebrated Doctor Katerfelto, who has won more games of skill against death than any practitioner now alive. Waif, bring me the roll of lint that stands on the top shelf in the surgery. Loook in the middle drawer for some red salve, and put that flask out of my patient's reach."

The girl had left the room, and was back again quicker than John Garnet's languid senses could follow her movements. When she returned with these simple remedies, he did not fail to mark the softness of her dark eyes, the subdued grace of her bearing, the sweet and loving pity that seemed to pervade her whole being while she hovered about his couch, and administered skilfully to the wants of a wounded man. Nor was this tenderness, this sympathy, this almost maternal solicitude, in accordance with her general habits, in keeping with her type of form and feature. She looked more like a panther of the wilderness than the nurse in a sick-room. The lithe and supple frame, the light and noiseless gait, the quick stealthy turn of her eye and limb, ready on the instant for attack, defence, or flight, all this partook of the fierce, feline nature, and all this she inherited from that mysterious race to which she belonged, whose origin history has failed to discover, whose destiny conjecture is at a loss to guess. From her gipsy ancestors she derived her tameless glances, her nimble strength, her shapely limbs with their delicate extremities, her swarthy savage beauty and light untiring step. From them, too, came the wild blood that boiled under restraint or contradiction, the unbridled passions that knew no curb of custom nor of conscience, the cunning that could conceal them till occasion offered, the recklessness that would then indulge them freely without pity or remorse.

John Garnet had never yet seen anything so beautiful as this tawny girl bending over his couch, with gold coins studding her jetty hair, with collar and bracelets of gold round her neck and wrists, with a shawled robe of scarlet and orange reaching to her naked ankles, and broad buckles of gold in her red-heeled shoes.

He thought of Cleopatra, young, wholehearted, and untainted by the kiss of an emperor; of the Queen of Sheba, before she fathomed the wisdom of Solomon. Then he thought the dark eyes looked at him more than kindly, and fell to wondering how she came here, and what relation she bore to this old man in the velvet gown who sat by his pillow with a grave attentive face. But the cordial was doing its work. Ere his wounds had been dressed, the salve spread, and the lint bandages deftly swathed round his body, John Garnet's senses lost themselves once more lost in oblivion; the last words he heard were in the doctor's voice. Listening for the girl's answer he fell sound asleep.

"There is no fear now," said Katerfelto reflectively. "Shall I say there is no hope? He would have made a beautiful subject, and I wanted just such an one, to bring my new discovery to perfection. Look at his chest, Waif. Did you ever see a finer specimen? Some men in my place would be incapable of this self-denial."

Waif, as he called her, turned pale under her tawny skin, but there was a fierce glitter in her eyes while she answered, "I thought he was dead you may be sure, that was why I brought you out to him. He'll get well now. So much the better! Patron! you dare not do it."

The old man smiled, stroking his velvet gown with a white well-cared for hand.

"Dare not, or will not, or shall not," he replied. "It little matters which. No. It is an interesting case as it stands, and to cure him will be almost as instructive as to cut him up. Science, Waif, exacts from us great sacrifices, but she has also her rewards. The man will live, I think. Live probably to be ungrateful. Meanwhile, let us see who and what he is."

Thus speaking, and with a marvellous dexterity the result of long practice, he turned every one of the sleeper's pockets inside out, felt in his cravat, his bosom, his waistband, leaving no part of his dress unsearched, yet without in the slighest degree disturbing his repose.

The girl, holding the lamp to assist, looked down on the prostrate figure, with a new sensation growing up in her heart, a vague wild longing that seemed to covet no less than to pity and admire.

"The outcome is unequal to the pains bestowed," said Katerfelto, holding up a light purse, a tavern bill, and a valueless snuff box, as the fruit of his exertions. "Yet the man is well-born, Waif, and well-to-do,

"Fools—" added the old man. "Fools, who are yet so wise in their folly as to purchase ease of mind at a price they would grudge for health of body. It's a worse trade, Waif, to set a broken leg than to heal a broken heart. We want skill, learning, splints, bandages, and anatomy for the one, but a little cunning and a bold guess will answer all the purposes for the other. There are many men and more woman who would laugh in my face if I told them their head was a workshop and their heart a pump; yet they can believe the whole of their future life is contained in a pack of cards. You and I, Waif, have thriven well in a world of fools—and the fools thrive too—why, I know not. The wisest people on earth are *your* people, but they have never prospered. Is it best to be true, simple honest? I cannot answer—I have never tried"

"I will do everything you tell me," persisted Waif, taking for granted the permission she was so eager to obtain. "I can creep about the chamber like a mouse; I never want to sleep, nor eat, nor drink, nor go out into the filthy muddy streets. I know every phial in the surgery as well as yourself. Hand him over to me, Patron, and I will promise to bring him through."

He eyed her narrowly, and she seemed conscious of his scrutiny, for she turned her head away and busied herself in adjustment of the bedclothes. Then he laughed a little, mocking laugh, and proceeded to give directions for the treatment of their patient.

"You must watch him," he insisted, and though she muttered, "you needn't tell me that!" finished his say without noticing the interruption. "You must watch him narrowly; if he wakes, give him one more spoonful of the cordial; if he is restless after that, come to me. If he wanders in his sleep mark every word he utters, and remember it. Such drivellings are not of the slightest importance, but interesting, very interesting, in a medical point of view. Good-night, Waif. Do exactly as I bid you, and if all goes well, do not wake me until sunrise."

Then he trimmed the lamp, listened at the lattice, and retired, leaving the girl alone with her patient.

How quiet she sat! moving not so much as a finger, with her large dark eyes fixed on the floor, and her thoughts like restless seabirds flying here, there, everywhere; now skimming the Past, now soaring into the Future, finally gathering out of all quarters to settle themselves on the Present. From the moment when Katerfelto, or the Patron, as she called him, left the room, she seemed to have entered on a new life, to have risen in her own esteem, to have accepted responsibilities of which she was proud, to have become a gentler, fairer, softer being, more susceptible to pleasure and to pain. She only knew there was a great change; she did not know that she was passing into Fairy Land by the gate through which there is no return.

Behind her lay rugged mountain and dreary moor, paths that soil and blister weary feet, barren uplands yielding scanty harvest in return for daily toil, a scorching sun, a drenching rain, mocking winds that whirl, and buffet, and moan.—Before her opened the dazzling vistas of a magic region; gleaming rivers, golden skies, velvet laws fretted with gems, bending flowers laden with perfume; glade and thicket, field and forest bathed in in glows of unearthly beauty, rich in tints of unearthly splendor, teeming with fruits of unearthly hues. Would she not enter in and rest? Would she not reach forth her hand to gather, and smell, and taste? Had she not wild longings, vague curiosity, unreasonable daring? Was she not a woman to the core? How could she tell that the Fairy Land was a glamor, the lustre delusive, the beauty a snare? that serpents were coiling in the grass, that poison lurked in the flowers, that the fruits turned to dust and ashes on the lip? How could she foresee the time when she would yearn and strive and pray to get back to the outer world? In vain! Those who have once passed its gate and tasted the fruits in that fairy garden have to do with middle earth no more. Their phantoms may indeed remain among us, but themselves are far away in the enchanted country, pacing their weary round without a respite, fulfilling their endless penance in the listless apathy of despair.

Once the sleeping man turned with a low, deep sigh of comfort, as in relief from pain. Waif's dark eyes gleamed on him with a glance of unspeakable tenderness and admiration. How noble he looked lying there in his wounds, like a dead prince. How graceful was the recumbent form; how luxuriant the dark brown hair escaped from its black riband to wander over the pillow; how white and shapely the strong hand opened loosely on the coverlet. This, then, was what they called a gentleman. She had seen gentlemen in the streets, or when they came to consult the Patron, but never under such favorable conditions for examination as now. What was she in comparison? She, the drudge of a charlatan, half-quack, half-conjuror?

How could there be anything in common between them? She stirred uneasily in her chair, rose, crept to the bedside, and laid her

tles, filled with spoils from neighboring henroosts, stolen by the high-born patriarchs and princes of her tribe.

But she was a good nurse, notwithstanding her royal descent and barbarian bringing-up. Twenty times during the night she smoothed her patient's pillows and straightened his bed-clothes, watched with experienced eye and ear for symptoms of weakness or relapse. Never once did she relax her vigilance, nor so much as relieve her slender, supple form by leaning back in her chair. Unlike most watchers, for her the minutes seemed to fly on golden wings, and when the gray light of dawn began to steal through the shutter, dulling the lamp still burning in that sick-chamber, she could have reproached the summer morning for coming so soon.

Yet it had been a long night to Waif in fact, if not in appearance. Those watchful hours had brought for her the great change that comes once in a lifetime. An ancient philosopher compared our terrestrial career to the letter Y. He has been quoted till we are tired of him, but none the less must we acknowledge the force of his illustration. As we travel along the road we must needs arrive, some in the morning, some in the middle of the day, some (and these last are much to be pitied) not till the afternoon, at a point where two paths branch out in different directions.—There is a guide-post indeed, but it stands so high above our heads that we seldom look at it, choosing rather to trust our passions and inclinations for directions on the way. So we turn to right or left as nature, habit, or convenience prompts us, and on the turn thus taken depends our future journey, and the hope of ever reaching home.

It was broad day when John Garnet woke and tried to sit up in bed. "Where am I?" was his first exclamation, rubbing his eyes with the hand his bandages left free. "And why am I trussed up like a fowl that's been skewered? Ah! I remember now. I *have* been skewered, and you've been nursing me, my pretty maid. I fear I have given you a vast deal of trouble and shall give you more before I can stand up."

She bent over him like a mother over her child. It was such happiness to protect and soothe him, to feel that he might even owe his life to her.

"Do not try to move yet," said she; "you are safe and in good hands. The longer you stay with us the better we shall be pleased."

"Will you nurse me?" he asked gaily, unconscious of the tremble that ran through her frame, while she bowed her head in answer.

"Then I don't care how long it is!" he laughed. "With such a pretty nurse I should like never to get well!"

The blood flew to her face, reddening brow and temples, with a blush of pride and exquisite pleasure, rather than that of resentment or shame.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD STORY.

Katerfelto's business seemed to bring him in contact with persons of every class and character. Men and women were coming to the surgery at all hours of the day and night; the former generally armed, the latter sometimes masked, all muffled in cloaks or riding-hoods, as if their purpose necessitated secrecy and disguise. It did not escape John Garnet's observation, lying idle on his sick-bed, that the conversations he overheard were carried on in a subdued voice, and that everything connected with the doctor's house in Deadman's Alley seemed tainted with the breath of mystery, suspicion, and intrigue.

To this effect he unburthened his mind while watching Waif's stealthy movements as she arranged the room some few mornings after his arrival, and insisted by word and gesture on the necessity of his lying perfectly still if he wanted to get well.

"Waif," said he, in that pleasant, careless voice, which had already taught the girl's eye to brighten and her heart to leap, "is the Patron a wizard, a Jacobite agent, a second Guy Fawkes, or only a great prince in disguise? Why is everything in this house, even to laying the plates for dinner, done with secrecy and caution? Why does nobody speak but in whispers, and why is each succeeding visitor kept waiting in the passage till his predecessor has been dismissed? Why do the ladies come here on foot, my pretty lass, and what does it all mean?

"Don't call me that!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I'm not a pretty lass! It's the way you would speak to a milk-maid. Call me Waif."

"Waif," he repeated. "There's another mystery. Who ever heard of a girl like you being called Waif? Who gave you that name? Not that you ever had godfathers or godmothers, I suppose. But where did you get it and how?"

"The Patron has called me Waif ever since I was a little child," said she simply. "I was known as Thyra with our own people, but of course, when he bought me, he was bound to change my name."

"Bought you!" John Garnet gasped for breath and gave such a bounce among the

"Was he good to you?" asked the other, feeling his free British instincts sadly outraged by the girl's disclosures. "If he wasn't, he ought to have his neck wrung!"

"Oh, yes!" she replied, eagerly, but with a shrinking look in her bright black eyes. "I have nothing to complain of from the Patron. Nothing! I hated my shoes at first, and eating with a knife and fork; but the Patron gave me beautiful clothes, and ornaments of gold, real gold. I soon learned to like being well dressed, and after a time I didn't so much mind sleeping under a roof. But oh! how I missed the lights in the sky! I used to wake up in the night crying, because I thought they had gone out for ever, and I should see them shining no more."

"But what on earth did he want you for?" was the natural inquiry. "What did he do with you after he bought and carried you away?"

"We didn't always live here now. At first, the Patron took me about all over the country. I daresay I know a good many more places than you do. We went to every fair and merry-making, down in the west, as far as the Land's End. It must be a very dark night for me to lose my way on Dartmoor, or anywhere in the Valley of the Exe, or among the coombes between Badgworthy water and Taunton town. That was the first place I danced at to please the people in the fair. The Patron gave me this gold collar next morning, and I've worn it ever since. Would you like me to dance for you now, or sing? Or shall I tell you your fortune? I'll do anything to please you. Only say what it shall be."

The shy and pleading glance that accompanied this accomodating avowal would have melted a harder heart than John Garnet's.

"Tell me of yourself," was his answer; "that pleases me more than anything else you can talk about."

Her bright smile revealed a dazzling row of teeth. "There is not much to tell," said she. "We made money, and we spent money. Sometimes we went to the races, and the Patron used to come in to supper with his pockets filled with gold. Sometimes the people laughed at us, and then we never stayed till nightfall. Once—it was at Devizes—they hooted us out of the town; a man threw a stone at me which struck me in the shoulder. It bled a good deal. Look, there's the mark!"

She pulled her dress down and revealed a cicatrice on a shape that would have made a model for a sculptor. "I flew at him!" she continued, with a fierce glitter in her eyes, "and drew my knife. I would have stabbed him, but the Patron pulled me away. I should like to see that man again. I should know his face among ten thousand, and I would kill him wherever we met. Then we came here and the Patron left off travelling so much. He says he began at the wrong end, and went to seek the fools, instead of letting the fools come and seek him. I used to think I liked moving about better than always sticking in the same place, but I don't think so now."

"And the fools that come so readily to seek the Patron," asked John Garnet—"what sort of fools are these?"

"The wisest sort," answered the girl. "Many a time I have heard him say that those who come for information, begin by telling him all they want to know. The Patron never seems to listen, but his ears are very sharp. Besides, he can always find out things in a hundred ways, watching the fire and the stars, or reading the cards. The last is the easiest, only they sometimes come up wrong, but the stars never deceive."

She spoke with implicit faith. For this girl, there was an inscrutable power that ruled supreme over all earthly fortunes, and dominated all mortal efforts. She called it Fate, and believed that its decrees were revealed in the cracklings of a wood fire, the combinations on a table of numerals, the presence of the knave of spades in a hand of diamonds, no less than in those tablets of fire that her ancestors had studied, when the Pyramids were as yet unfinished, when the Chaldæan was still learning the alphabet of that wondrous language he discovered in the stars of heaven.

"Then the Patron is a fortune-teller," continued John Garnet, looking with undisguised admiration in his companion's face. "I thought he was a doctor—I am sure he has doctored me to some purpose. I feel as if I should be out of bed to-morrow, and in the saddle next day. Perhaps it's your nursing, pretty Waif; but I seem to get stronger every hour.

It was a tell-tale face, and changed color often under the clear, swarthy skin. John Garnet, however (and perhaps this was why women liked him well), detected but slowly the interest he created in the opposite sex; and Waif might have blushed till she was scarlet before he found out the truth, had she not pressed both hands to her bosom with a gesture of pain, and exclaimed, in a choking voice:

"Then you will go away, and I shall never see you again!"

He glanced sharply in her face. The black eyes were fixed and tearless, but there was a world of patient, hopeless sorrow in their gaze; and through John Garnet's