RED EVE

By H. RIDER HAGGARD

A Great Story of Chivalry and Mystery and Love in the Middle Ages

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CHAPTER V.

Gray Dick Shows His Archery.

So sorely did the horses need rest that Hugh and his people could not ride from London till the following morning, and evening was closing in before they found themselves drawing near the gate of Windsor Castle. In the market place of the little town they pulled rein, while one of them went to search for a good inn at which they might lie, for the place seemed very full of people. Suddenly as they stood there, wondering at the mighty, new-built keep which towered above them, a trumpet was blown and from round a corner appeared a gay procession of noble looking men, and with them some ladies who carried hawk on wrist, all mounted on splendid horses.

Now the people who had gathered to study the strangers or tout for their custom, took off their bonnets and bent low, saying: "The King! The King! God save him."

"Which is His Grace?" asked Hugh of one of them, whereupon the man pointed to a royal-eyed and bearded knight, still in early middle life, who rode toward him talking to a gallant youth at his side.

A thought came into Hugh's mind that the present time is always the best time to strike. Leaping from his horse he advanced bowing and stood in the pathway of the King. Seeing this, two of the fine court lords spurred their horses and rode straight at him, thinking to drive him back. But he held his ground, for their insolence made him angry, and, catching the bridle of one of the horses, threw it on its haunches so sharply that the knight who rode it rolled from his saddle into the mire, whereupon every one laughed. In a moment he was on his feet again and shouting:

"Out of the road, jacknapes dressed in your grandfather's mail, unless you would stop there in the stocks. Do you know whose path you block?"

"That of His Grace," answered Hugh, "for whom I have a message that he will be glad to hear, and, popinjay, this for yourself. Were it not for his presence it is you who should stop upon the road till you were carried thence."

Now, noting this disturbance, the King spoke to the youth at his side, who came forward and said in a pleasant, courteous voice, addressing Hugh:

"Sir, why do you make trouble in these streets and tumble the good Sir Ambrose Lacey from his horse with such scant ceremony?"

"Sir," answered Hugh, "because the good Sir Ambrose tried to ride his horse over me for no offence save that I would deliver a message to His Grace, which he will wish to hear."

"This is scarcely the time for the delivery of messages," replied the young man, "but what is your name and who sends the message? I am the Prince Edward," he added modestly, "so you may speak to me without fear."

"My name is Hugh de Cressi, Your Highness, and I am sent by the reverend father, Sir Andrew Arnold, of Dunwich, and have followed His Grace from Westminster, whither I and my men rode first."

Now the Prince went to the King and spoke to him and, returning presently said:

"My father says that he knows both the names you give well enough and holds them dear. He bids that you and your people should follow him to the castle, where you will be entertained, with your horses. Sir Ambrose," he added, "the King desires that you should forget your choler, since he saw what passed and deems that this young stranger did well to check your horse. Follow on, Hugh de Cressi, the officers will show you where you and your men may lodge."

So Hugh obeyed and rode with the rest of the train and his folk through the gates of Windsor Castle, not unobserved, since many of the Court did not love Sir Ambrose and were glad to see him tumbled in the mire.

Not half an hour later, after they had stabled their beasts and just as Hugh, followed by Gray Dick, who would not leave him until he was forced, was advancing toward a hall which he was told that he might enter, an officer came up and said that His Grace desired his presence before he supped. Pointing to Gray Dick, at whom the officer looked doubtedly, he asked that he might accompany him as he had much to do with the message, and this was at length allowed. Then they were led through various passages to a chamber, at the door of which the officer wished to take away Dick's bow. But he would not give it up.

"The bow and I do not part," he said in his croaking voice, "for we are husband and wife and sleep together as the married should."

Now as he spoke the door was opened and Prince Edward appeared.

"And do you eat together also, good fellow?" he asked, having overheard the talk.

"Aye, sir, we feed full together," replied Dick grimly, "or so thought some on Blythburgh marsh a few days gone."

"I should like to hear that tale," said the Prince, "but meanwhile, since both my father and I love archers, let him pass with his bow, only keep his arrows lest it should happen to grow angry here."

Then they entered the chamber, led by the Prince—a fine place with a vaulted like stone roof and windows of colored glass that looked like the chancel of a church, but at the head of it, where the altar should have been, was a kind of dais. On this dais were set some high backed oaken chairs with many lanterns behind them in which burned tapers, that together with a great wood fire gave light to the chamber.

In one of these chairs sat a gracious lady who was embroidering something in a frame. This was Queen Philippa and talking to her stood the tall King, clad in a velvet robe lined with fur, while behind, seated at a little table on which lay parchments, was a man in a priest's robe writing. There was no one else in the room.

Hugh and Dick advanced to the foot of the dais and stood there bowing.

"Who are these?" asked the King of the Prince. "Oh!" I remember—the man who upset Sir Ambrose and said he had a message," and he laughed.

"Aye, Sire," answered the Prince, "and this dust colored fellow is his servant, who will not part with his bow, which he calls his wife and says he sleeps with."

"I would all Englishmen did the same," broke in the King. "Say, man, can you shoot straight?"

"I know not, Sire," replied Gray Dick, "but perhaps better than most, for God, who withheld all else from me, gave me this gift. At least if I be not made drunk overnight I'll match myself against any man at Court, noble or simple, and stake twenty angels on it."

"Twenty angels! Have you so much, fellow?"

"Nay, Sire, no more than one; but as I know I shall win, what does that matter?"

"Son," said the King, "see that this man is kept sober tonight, and tomorrow we will have a shooting match, though, sirrah, if you prove yourself to be but a boaster you shall be whipped round the walls, for I love not tall words and small deeds. And now, Master de Cressi, what is this message of yours?"

Hugh thrust his hand into his bosom and produced a sealed packet which was addressed to "His Grace King Edward of England, sent from Andrew Arnold, priest, by the hand of Hugh de Cressi."

"Can you read?" the King asked of Hugh when he had spelled out this superscription.

"Aye, Sire, at least if the writing be that of Sir Andrew Arnold, for he was my master."

"A learned one and a brave, Hugh de Cressi. Well, break seal; we listen." Hugh obeyed and read as follows:—

"Your Grace:—

"Mayhap, Sire, you will remember me, Andrew Arnold, late master of the Templars in this town of Dunwich, in whose house, by your warrant for certain services rendered to your grandsire, your sire and yourself, I still dwell on as a priest ordained. Sire, the bearer of this, Hugh de Cressi, my godchild, is the son of Geoffrey de Cressi, of this town, the great wool merchant, with whom Your Highness has had dealings:—

"In truth I have," interrupted the King, with a laugh, "and I think the account is still open—against myself. Well, it shall be paid some day, when I have conquered France. Forward."

"Sire, this Hugh is enamored of Eve Clavering, daughter of Sir John Clavering, of Blythburgh, a cousin of his House, a very beauteous maiden, commonly known as Red Eve, and she in turn is enamored of and bethrothed to him"——

Here Queen Philippa suddenly became interested.

"Why is the lady called Rev Eve, sir?" she asked in her soft voice. "Because her cheeks are red?"

"No, Madam," answered Hugh, blushing, "because she always loves to wear red garments."

"Ah, then she is dark!"

"That is so, Madam; her eyes and hair are black as ash buds."

"God's truth, Lady," interrupted King Edward; "is this young man's message of the color of the eyes of his mistress, which, without doubt, being in love, he describes falsely? On with the letter."

"Out of this matter rose a feud yesterday, during which Hugh de Cressi killed his cousin, John, fighting a l'outrance, and his servant, Richard the Archer, who accompanies him, commonly known as Gray Dick, slew three men with as many arrows, two of them being Norman knights whose names are unknown to us, and the third a grieve to Sir John Clavering, called Thomas of Kessland. Also he killed a horse, and when another Norman tried to grasp his master, sent a shaft through the plam of his hand."

"By St. George!" said the King, "but here is shooting. Were they near to you, Grey Dick?"

"Not so far away, Sire. Only the light was very bad or I should have had the fourth. I aimed low, Sire, fearing to miss his skull, and he jerked up his horse's head to take the arrow."

"A good trick! I've played it myself. Well, let us have done with the letter and then we'll come to archery."

"Sire," read on Hugh, "I ask your royal pardon to Hugh de Cressi and Richard the Archer for these slayings, believing that when you have read these letters it will be granted."

"That remains to be seen," muttered the King.

"Sire, Sir Edmond Acour, who has lands here in Suffolk; Count de Noyon in Normandy and Seigneur de Cattrina in Italy"——

"I know the man," said Edward to the Queen, "and so do you. A handsome knight and a pleasant, but one of whom I have always misdoubted me."

——"is also enamoured of Eve Clavering, and with her father's will seeks to make her his wife, though she hates him and by the charter of Dunwich, of which she is a citizen, has the right to wed whom she will."

"It is well there are not many such charters. The old story—brave men done to death for the sake of a woman who is rightly named Red Eve," mused the King.

"My Liege, I pray that you will read the letter herein enclosed. Hugh de Cressi will tell you how it came to my hand, since I lack the time to write all the story. If it seems goods to Your Grace, I pray you scotch this snake while he is in your garden, lest he should live to sting you when you walk abroad. If it please you to give your royal warrant to the bearer of this letter, and address the same to such of your subjects in Dunwich as you may think good, I doubt not but that men can be found to execute the same. Thus would a great and traitorous plot be brought to nothing to your own glory and the discomfiture of your foes in France, who hope to lay their murderous hands upon the throne of England. Your humble servant and subject, ANDREW ARNOLD."

"What is this?" exclaimed the King, starting from his seat. "To lay hands upon the throne of England! Quick with the other letter man!"

"I was charged that it was for Your Grace's eye alone," said Hugh, as he unfolded the paper. "Is it your pleasure that I read it aloud, if I can, for it is writ in French."

"Give it me," said the King. "Philippa, come help me with this crabbed stuff."

Then they withdrew to the side of the dais and, standing under a lantern, spelled out Sir Edmund Acour's letter to the Duke of Normandy, word by word.

The King finished the letter, and, still holding it in his hand, stood for a minute silent. Then his rage broke on."

"He of England," he quoted. "That's your husband Edward, Lady, who is to be overthrown and killed that Philip's son may take my seat and be crowned King at Westminster," which God is to bring about before the year is out. Yes, and and my cities are to sacked and my people slain, and this French dog Edmund Acour, who has sworn fealty to me, is to be rewarded with wide English lands and high English titles. Well, by God's blood I swear that, dead or living, he shall be raised higher than he thinks, though not by Normandy or my brother of France. Let me think. Let me think. If I send men at arms he'll hear of it and slip away. Did not good old Sir Andrew call him a snake? Now where's this girl Red Eve?"

"In sanctuary, Sire, at the Temple Church in Dunwich."

"Ah! and she's a great heiress now, for you killed her brother, and Acour, although he has wide possessions in sundry lands, was ever a spendthrift and deep in debt. No, he'll not leave unless he can get the girl, and old Sir Andrew will guard her well with the power of the Church and his own right arm if need be, for he's still more knight than priest. So there's no hurry. Tell me all you know of this story, Hugh de Cressi, omitting nothing, however small. Nay, have no fear, if you can vouch for your man there, all of us in this chamber are loyal to England. Speak out, man."

So Hugh began and told of the de Cressis and the Claverings and their feud, and of how he and Eve had always loved each other and of their meeting in the reeds of Blythburg Fen, and of the death of John de Clavering at his hand and of the others at the hand of Gray Dick, and of the escape of Acour from the four arrows. He told how he and Eve swam the Blyth in flood though the ice cut them, and hid on the moor while Gray Dick led the Claverings astray, and came at last safe to sanctuary. He told how Acour's letter had been won from his messenger by Sir Andrew's loyal guile. He told of the penance that Sir Andrew had laid upon them because of the new shed blood of John Clavering, of the flight from Dunwich and the shooting of the horses of the Clavering men, and of their ride to London and to Windsor. He told everything, save only the tale of what Sir Andrew had seen in the House of Murgh in far Cathay.

When at last he had finished, and though long none there grew weary of that story, the King turned to the clerk and said:

"Brother Peter, make out a full pardon to Hugh de Cressi of Dunwich and Richard Archer, his servant, for all slayings or other deeds wrought by them contrary to our general peace. Make it wide, and bring the same to me for execution ere I sleep tonight. Make out a commission also to the Mayor of Dunwich—nay, I'll think that matter over and instruct you further. Hugh de Cressi, you have our thanks, and if you go on as you have begun you shall have more ere long, for I need such men about me. You also, strange and deathlike man named Gray Dick, shall not lack our favor if it proves that you can shoot but half as well as you have boasted, and unless you lie, both of you, as it seems that you have done. And now to supper, though in truth your news does not sharp the appetite. Son, see that this gentleman is well served and that none mock him more about the fashion of his armor, above all Sir Ambrose, for I'll not suffer it. Plate and damascene do not make a man, and this, it seems, was borrowed from as brave, aye, and as learned a knight as ever bestrode a horse in war. Come, Lady," and taking the Queen by the hand he left the chamber.

That evening Hugh ate his food seated among the knights of the Household at a table in the great hall, at the head of which—for the King supped in private—was placed the young Prince Edward. He noted that now none laughed at him about the fashion of his mail or his country ways. Indeed, when after supper Sir Ambrose Lacey came to him and asked his pardon for the talk that he had used to him in the Windsor street, he was sure that some word had been sent round that his business had brought him favor with the King and that he must be treated with all courtesy. Several of those who sat round him tried to discover what that business was, but of this he would say nothing, parrying their questions with others about the wars in France, and listening with open ears to the tales of great deeds done there.

"Ah! would that I could see such things," he said, to which one of them answered:

"Well, why not? There'll be chance enough ere long, and many of us would be glad of a squire built like you."

Now at lower tables in that vast hall Hugh's servants, and with them Gray Dick, sat among the men at arms of the King's Guard, who were all chosen for their courage and skill in archery. These soldiers, noting the strange-faced, ashen-haired fellow who ate with his bow resting on the bench beside him, inquired about him from the other Dunwich men and soon heard enough to cause them to open their eyes. When the ale had got hold of them they opened their mouths also, and, crowding around Dick, asked if it were true that he could shoot well.

"As well as another," he answered, and would say no more.

Then they looked at his bow and saw that it was old fashioned and of some foreign make, like his master's mail, but a mighty weapon such as few could handle and hold straight. Lastly they began to challenge him to a match upon the morrow, to which he answered, who also had been drinking ale and was growing angry, that he'd give the best of them five points in fifty.

Now they mocked, for among them were some archers, and asked at what range.

"At any ye will," answered Gray Dick, "from twelve score yards down to one score yards; and now trouble me no longer, who if I must shoot tomorrow must sleep first and drink no more of your strong ale that breeds bad humors in one reared upon dyke water."

Then, seizing his bow, he glided away in his curious stoatlike fashion to the hole where he had been shown that he should sleep.

"A braggart!" said one.

"I am not so sure," answered a grizzled captain of archers, who had fought in many wars. "Braggarts make a noise, but this fellow only spoke when we squeezed him, and perhaps what came out of those thin lips was truth. At least from his looks I'd sooner not find him against me bow to bow."

Then they fell to betting as to which of them would beat Gray Dick by the heaviest points.

Next morning about nine o'clock the King sent a messenger to Hugh, bidding him and his servant, Richard, wait upon him. They went with this messenger, who led them to a little chamber, where His Grace sat, attended only by the clerk, Brother Peter and a dark browed minister, whose name he never learned.

"Hugh de Cressi and Richard Archer," said Edward, motioning to the minister to hand Hugh a parchment to which hung a great seal, "here is the pardon which I promised you. No need to stay to read it, since it is as wide as Windsor Keep, and woe betide him who lifts hand against either of you for aught you may have done or left undone in the past contrary to the laws of our realm. Yet remember well that this grace runs not to the future. Now that matter is done with and we come to one that is greater. Because of the faith put in you by our loyal and beloved subject, Sir Andrew Arnold, your godsire, and because we like the fashion of you, Hugh de Cressi, and hold you brave and honest, it has pleased us to give you a commission under which we direct the Mayor of Dunwich and all true and lawful men of that town and hundred to aid you in the taking or, if need be, in the slaying of our subject, Sir Edmund Acour, Count of Noyon and Seigneur of Cattrina, whom we command you to bring before us alive or dead, that his cause may be judged of by our courts and the truth of the matter alleged against him by the Reverend Father Sir Andrew Arnold therein determined. Nevertheless, we command you not to wound or kill the said knight unless he resists the authority of us by you conveyed and you cannot otherwise hold him safe from escaping from out this our realm. This commission you will presently go forth to execute, keeping its tenor and your aim secret until the moment comes to strike, and as you perform your duty, of which you will return and make report to us, so shall we judge and reward you. Do you understand?"

"Sire," answered Hugh, bowing, "I understand, and I will obey to the last drop of my blood."

"Good! When the parchments are engrossed my officer here will read them to you and explain aught that may need it. Meanwhile we have an hour or two during which your horses can eat, for there are no fresh beasts here to give you, and it is best, to avoid doubts, that you should return as you came, only, showing your powers if any should attempt to molest you. So let us have done with these heavy matters and disport us for a while. This servant of yours has made a common boast that he will outshoot any of our picked archers, and now we are ready to go forth and put him to the proof of the butts. Let him know, however, that notwithstanding our words of yesterday we shall not hold him to blame if he fails, since many a man of higher degree promises more at night than he can perform in the morning."

"Sire, I'll do my best. I can no more," said Gray Dick, "only I pray that none may be suffered to hang about or pester me at the butts, since I am a lonely man who loves not company when I use my art."

"That shall be so," said the King. "And now to the sport."

"The sport!" grumbled Gray Dick, when he and Hugh were alone together. "Why, it is other sport we should be seeking, with Acour and his knaves for targets. Go to the King, master, and show him that while we linger here the Frenchman may slip away or work more and worse treasons.

"I cannot, Dick; the parchments are not written out, and His Grace is bent upon this pleasure match. Moreover, man, all these archers here—yes, and their betters also—would say that you had fled because you were an empty boaster who dared not face the trial."

"They'd say that, would they?" snarled Gray Dick.

"Yes, they'd say that, which would be bitter hearing for you and me. Well, they shall not say it. Yet, I tell you, master," he added in a burst of words, "although I know not why, I'd rather bear their scorn and be away on the road to Dunwich."

"It may not be, Dick," replied Hugh, shaking his head doubtfully. "See, here they come to fetch us."

In a glade of the forest of Windsor situate near to the castle and measuring some twenty-five score yards of open level ground, stood Gray Dick, a strange, uncouth figure, at whom the archers of the guard laughed, nudging each other. In his bony hand, however, he held that at which they did not laugh—namely, the great black bow, six feet six inches long, which he said had come to him "from the sea" and was fashioned, not of yew, but of heavy close-grained wood, grown perhaps in Southern or even in far Eastern lands. Still one of them, who had tried to draw this bow to his ear and could not, said aloud that the Suffolk man "would do naught with that clumsy pole," whereat Gray Dick, who heard him, grinned, showing his white teeth like an angry dog.

Near by, on horseback and on foot, were the King, the young Prince Edward and many knights and ladies, while on the other side stood scores of soldiers and other folk from the castle, who came to see this ugly fellow well beaten at his own game.

"Dick," whispered Hugh, "shoot now as you never shot before. Teach them a lesson for the honor of Suffolk."

"Let me be, master," he grumbled. "I told you I would do my best." Then he sat himself down on the grass and began to examine his arrows one by one, to all appearance taking no heed of anything else.

Then came the first test. At a distance of five score yards was set a little "clout," or target, of white wood not more than two feet square, which had a red mark or eye three inches across painted in its centre and stood not very high above the sward.

"Now, Richard," said the King, "three of the best archers that we have about us have been chosen to shoot against you and each other by their fellows. Say, will you draw first or last?"

"Last, Sire," he answered, "that I may know their mettle."

Then a man stepped forward, a strong and gallant looking fellow, and loosed his three arrows. The first missed the clout, the second pierced the white wood, and the third hit the red eye. The clout having been changed and the old one brought to the King with the arrows in it, the second man took his turn. This time all three of the arrows hit the mark, one of them being in the red. Again it was changed and forth came the great archer of the guard, a tall and clear-eyed man who was known as Jack Green and whom, it was said, none had ever beaten. He drew and the arrow went home in the red on its left edge. He drew again and the arrow went home in the red on its right edge. He drew a third time and the arrow went home straight in the very centre of the red, where was a little black spot.

Now a great laugh went up since clearly the Suffolk man was beaten ere even he began.

"Your Dick may do as well; he can do no better," said the King when the target was brought to him.

"A boon, your Grace. Grant that this clout may be set up again with the arrows fast. Any may know them from mine since they are gray, whereas those I make are black, for I am a fletcher in my spare hours and love my own handiwork."

"So be it," said the King, wondering, and the clout was replaced upon its stand. Now Gray Dick stretched himself, looked at the clout, then at the bow and set the black-winged arrow on the string; then drew, as it seemed but lightly and carelessly, as though he thought the distance small. Away flew the shaft and sank into the red a good inch within the left arrow of Jack Green.

"Ah," said the onlookers, "a lucky shot indeed."

Again he drew and again the arrow sank into the red a good inch within the right-most shot of Jack Green.

"Oh," said the onlookers, "this man is an archer, but Jack's last he cannot best, let the devil help him how he will."

"In the devil's name then be silent," wheezed Gray Dick, with a flash of his half-opened eye.

"Aye, be silent, be silent," said the King; "we do not see such shooting every day."

Now Dick set his feet apart and, arrow on string, thrice he lifted the bow and thrice let it sink again, perhaps because he felt some breath of wind stir the still air. A fourth time he lifted and drew, not as he had before, but straight to the ear, then loosed at once.

Away rushed the yard-long shaft, and folk noted that it scarcely seemed to rise as arrows do, or at least not half so high. It rushed, it smote and there was silence, for none could see exactly what had happened. Then he who stood near the target to mark ran forward and screamed out:

"By God's name, he has shattered Jack Green's centre arrow and shot straight through the clout!"

Then from all sides rose the old archer cry of "He, he! He, he!" while the young prince threw his cap on high and the King said:

"Would that there were more such men as this in England! Jack Green, it seems that you are beaten."

"Nay," said Gray Dick, seating himself again upon the grass, "there is nought to choose between us in this round. What next, Your Grace?"

Only Hugh, who watched him, saw the big veins swell beneath the pale skin of his forehead, as they ever did when he was moved.

"The war game," said the King, "that is, if you will for here rough knocks may be going. Set it out on of you."

Then the captain of the archers explained this sport. In short, it was that man should stand against man clad in leather jerkins and wearing a helm to protect the head, and shoot at each other with blunt arrows rubbed with chalk, he who first took what would have been a mortal wound to be held worsted.

"I like not blunt arrows," said Gray Dick, "or, for the matter of that, any other arrows save my own. Against how many must I play? The three?"

The captain nodded.

"Then by your leave I will take them all at once."

Now some said that this was not fair, but in the end Dick won his point, and those archers whom he had beaten, and with them Jack Green, were placed against him, standing five yards apart, and blunted arrows served to all. Dick set one of them on the string and laid the two others in front of him. Then a knight rode to half way between them, but a little to one side, and shouted, "Loose!"

As the word struck his ear Dick shot with wonderful swiftness and almost before the arrow had left the bow flung himself down, grasping another as he fell. Next instant three shafts whistled over where he had stood, but his found its mark on the body of him at whom he had aimed, causing the man to stagger backward and throw down his bow, as he was bound to do if hit.

Next instant Dick was up again and his second arrow flew, striking full and fair before even he at whom it was aimed had drawn.

Now there remained Jack Green alone, and as Dick set the third arrow but before he could draw, Jack Green shot.

"Beat," said Dick, and stood quite still.

At him rushed the swift shaft and passed over his shoulder within a hairbreadth of his ear. Then came Dick's turn. On Jack Green's helm was an archer's plume.

"Mark the feathers, lords," he said, and lo! the feathers leapt from that helm.

Now there was silence. No one spoke but Dick drew out three more arrows.

"Tell me, Captain," he said, "is your ground marked out in scores, and what is the furthest that any of you has sent a fighting shot."

"Aye," answered the officer, "and twenty score and one yard is the furthest, nor has that been done for many a day."

Dick steadied himself and seemed to fill his lungs with air. Then, stretching his long arms to the full, he drew the great bow till the horns looked as though they came quite together and loosed. High and far flew that shaft; men's eyes could scarcely follow it and all must wait long before a man came running to say where it had fallen.

"Twenty score and two yards," he cried.

"Not much to win by," grunted Dick, "though enough. I have done twenty and one score once, but then it was down hill."

Then while the silence still reigned he set the second arrow on the string and waited as though he knew not what to do. Presently about fifty paces from him a wood dove flew out of a tree and, as such birds do at the first breath of spring, for the day was mild and sunny, hovered a moment in the air ere it dipped toward a great fir where doubtless it had built for years. Never, poor fowl, was it destined to build again, for as it turned its beak downward Dick's shaft pierced it through and through and bore it onward to the earth.

Still in the midst of a great silence Dick took up his quiver and emptied it on the ground, then gave it to the captain of the archers, saying:

"An you will, step sixty, nay, seventy paces and set this mouth upward in the grass where a man may see it well."

The captain did so, propping the quiver straight with stones and a bit of wood. Then having studied all things with his eye, Dick shot upward but softly, and making a gentle curve, the arrow turned in the air as it drew near the quiver and fell into its mouth, striking it flat.

"Ill done," grumbled Dick, "had I shot well it should have been pinned to earth. Well, yon shadow balked me and it might have been worse." Then he unstrung his bow and slipped it into its case.

Now at length the silence was broken and in good earnest. Men, especially those of Dunwich, screamed and shouted, hurling up their caps. Jack Green, for all jealousy was forgotten at this wonderful skill, ran to Dick, clasped him in his arms, and, dragging the badge from off his breast, tried to pin it to his rough doublet. The young prince came and clapped him on the shoulder, saying:

"Be my man! Be my man!"

But Dick only growled, "Paws off! What have I done that I have not done a score of times before with no fine folk to watch me? I shot to please my master and for the honor of Suffolk, not for you, and because some dogs keep their tails too tightly curled."

"A sulky fellow," said the Prince, "but, by heaven, I like him."

Then the king pushed his horse through the throng and all fell back before His Grace.

"Richard Archer," he said, "never has such marksmanship as yours been seen in England since we sat upon the throne, nor shall it go unrewarded. The twenty angels you said you would stake last night shall be paid to you by the treasurer of our household. Moreover, here is a gift from Edward of England, the friend of archers, that you may be pleased to wear," and, taking his velvet cap from off his head, the King unpinned from it a golden arrow of which the barbed head was cut from a ruby, and gave it to him.

"I thank you, Sire," said Dick, his pale skin flushing with pride and pleasure. "I'll wear it while I live, and may the sight of it mean death to many of your enemies."

"Without doubt it will, and that ere long, Richard, for know you that soon we sail again for France, whence the tempest held us back, and it is my pleasure that you sail with us. Therefore I name you one of our fletchers, with place about our person in our bodyguard of archers. Jack Green will show you your quarters and instruct you in your duties, and soon you shall match your skill against his again, but next time with Frenchmen for your targets."

"Sire," said Dick, very slowly, "take back your arrow, for I cannot do as you will."

"Why, man? Are you a Frenchman? asked the King angrily, for he was not wont to have his favors thus refused.

"My mother never told me so, Sire, although I don't know for certain who my father may have been. Still I think not, since I hate the sight of that breed as a farmer's dog hates rats. But, Sire, I already have a good master and do not wish to change for one who, saving your presence, may prove a worse, since king's favor on Monday has ere now been known to mean halter on Tuesday. Did you not promise to whip me round your walls last night unless I shot as well as I thought I could, and now do you not change your face and give me golden arrows?"

At these bold words a roar of laughter went up from all who heard them, in which the King himself joined heartily enough.

"Silence!" he cried presently. "This yeoman's tongue is as sharp as his shafts. I am pierced. Let us hear whom he will hit next."

"You again, Sire, I think," went on Dick, "because, after the fashion of kings, you are unjust. You praise me for my shooting, whereas you should praise God, seeing that it is no merit of mine, but a gift He gave me at my birth in place of much which He withheld. Moreover, my master there," and he pointed to Hugh, "who has just done you better service than hitting a clout in the red and a dove beneath the wing, you forgot altogether, though I tell you he can shoot almost as well as I, for I taught him."

"Dick, Dick," broke in Hugh in an agony of shame. Taking no heed, Dick went on imperturbably, "and is the best man with a sword in Suffolk, as the ghost of John Clavering knows today. Lastly, Sire, you send this master of mine upon a certain business where straight arrows may be wanted as well as sharp swords, and yet you'd keep me here whittling them out of ashwood, who, if I could have had my will, would have been on the road these two hours gone. Is that a king's wisdom?"

"By St. George!" exclaimed Edward, "I think that I should make you councillor as well as fletcher, since without doubt, man, you have a bitter wit, and, what is more rare, do not fear to speak the truth as you see it. Moreover, in this matter you see it well. Go with Hugh de Cressi on the business which I have given him to do, and when it is finished, should both or either of you live, neglect not our command to rejoin us here, or if we have crossed the sea—in France, since Edward of England needs the service of such a sword and such a bow."

"You shall have them both, Sire," broke in Hugh, "for what they are worth. Moreover, I pray Your Grace be not angry with Gray Dick's words, for if God gave him a quick eye He also gave him a rough tongue."

"Not I, Hugh de Cressi, for know, we love what is rough if it be also honest. It is smooth, false words of treachery that we hate, such words as are ever on the lips of one whom we send you forth to bring to his account. And now to your duty. Farewell till we meet again, whether it be here or where all men, true or traitors, must foot their bill at last."

CHAPTER VI.

The Snare.

About noon of the day on which Hugh and his company had ridden for London another company entered Dunwich—namely, Sir John Clavering and many of his folk, though with him were neither Sir Edmund Acour nor any of his French train. Sir John's temper had never been of the best, for he was a man who, whatever his prosperity, found life hard and made it harder for all those about him. But seldom had he been angrier than he was this day, when his rage was mingled with real sorrow for the loss of his only son, slain in a fight brought about by the daughter of one of them and the sister of the other and urged for honor's sake by himself, the father of them both. Moreover, the marriage on which he had set his heart between Eve and the glittering French lord whose future seemed so great, had been brought to naught, and this turbulent, hot hearted Eve had fled into sanctuary. Her lover, too, the youngest son of a merchant, it was reported had ridden away to London, doubtless upon some mission which boded no good to him or his, leaving a feud behind him between the wealthy de Cressis and all the Clavering kin.

There was but one drop of comfort in his cup. By now, as he hoped, Hugh and that death's head, Gray Dick, a spawn of Satan, whom all the country feared, and whom men said was a de Cressi bastard by a witch, were surely slain or taken by those who followed upon their heels.

Sir John rode to the Preceptory and hammered fiercely on its oaken door, which presently was opened by Sir Andrew Arnold himself, who stood in the entrance, gray and grim, a long sword girt about his loins and armor gleaming beneath his monkish robe.

"What would you, Sir John Clavering, that you knock at this holy house thus rudely?"

"My daughter, priest, who, they say, has sheltered here."

"They say well, knight; she has sheltered here beneath the wings of St. Mary and St. John. Begone and leave her in peace."

"I make no more of such wings than if they were those of farmyard geese," roared the furious man. "Bring her or I will pluck her forth."

"Do so," replied Sir Andrew, "if you live to pass this consecrated sword," and he laid his hand upon its hilt, "and take with her the curse of the Mother of God, and his beloved Apostle, and that of the whole Church of Christ, by me declared upon your head in this world and upon your soul in the world to come. Man, this is sanctuary, and if you dare to set foot within it in violence, may your body perish and your soul scorch everlastingly in the fires of hell. And you," he added, raising his voice till it rang like a trumpet, addressing the followers of St. John, "on you also let the curse of excommunication fall. Now slay me and enter if you will, but every drop of blood in these veins shall take a separate tongue and cry out for vengeance on you before the judgment seat of God, where presently I summon you to meet me."

Then he crossed himself, drew the great sword, and, holding it in his left hand, stretched out his right toward them in malediction.

The Clavering men heard and saw. They looked at each other, and, as though by common consent, turned and rode away, crossing themselves also. In truth, they had no stomach for the curse of the Church when it was thundered forth from the lips of such a monk as Sir Andrew Arnold, who, they knew well, had been one of the greatest and holiest warriors of his generation, and, so said rumor, was a white wizard to boot that had all the magic of the East at his command.

"Your men have gone, Sir John," said the old priest; "will you follow them or will you enter?"

Now fear drove out the knight's rage and he spoke in another voice:

"Sir Andrew, why do you bring all these wrongs upon me? My boy is dead at the hands of Hugh de Cressi, your godson, and he has robbed me of my daughter, whom I have affianced to a better and a nobler man. Now you give her sanctuary and threaten me with the curse of the Church because I would claim her, my own flesh and blood; aye, and my heiress too today. Tell me, as one man to another, why do you these things?"

"And tell me, Sir John Clavering, why for the sake of pelf and of honors that you will never harvest, do you seek to part those who love each other and whom God has willed to bring together? Why would you sell your child to a gilded knave whom she hates? Nay, stop me not. I'd call him that and more to his face and none have ever known me to lie. Why did you suffer this Frenchman or your dead son, or both of them, to try to burn out Hugh de Cressi and Red Eve as though they were rats in rubbish?"

"Would you know, Father? Then I'll tell you. Because I wish to see my daughter set high among lords and princes and not the wife of a merchant's lad, who by law may wear cloth only and rabbit fur. Because, also, I hate him and all his kin, and if this is true of yesterday, how much more true it is now that he has killed my son and by the arrows of that wolf-man who dogs his heels slain my guests and my grieve. Think not I'll rest till I have vengeance of him and all his cursed house. I'll appeal to the King, and if he will not give me justice I'll take it for myself. Aye, though you are old, I tell you you shall live to see the de Cressi vault crowded with the de Cressi dead."

Sir Andrew hid his eyes for a moment with his hand, then let it fall and spoke in a changed voice.

"It comes upon me that you speak truth, Sir John, for since I met a certain great Master in the East at times I have a gift of foresight. I think that much sorrow draws near this land; aye, and others. I think that many vaults and many churchyards too, will, ere long be filled with dead; also that a certain tomb of the Claverings at Blythburg will soon be opened. Mayhap the end of the world draws near to all men, as certainly it draws near to you and me. I know not, yet truth was in your lips just now and in mine as well, I think. Oh, man, man!" he went on after a pause, "appeal not unto this world's Caesar lest Caesar render different judgment to that which you desire. Get you home and on your knees appeal unto God to forgive you your proud, vengeance-seeking heart. Sickness draws near to you; death draws near to you, and after death hell or—heaven. I have finished."

As he heard these words Sir John's swarthy face grew pale and for a little while his rage died down. Then it flared up again.

"Don't dream to frighten me with your spells, old wizard," he said. "I'm a hale man yet, though I do lose my breath at times when my mind is vexed with wrongs, and I'll square my own account with God without your help or counsel. So you'll not give me my daughter?"

"Nay," here she hides in sanctuary for so long as it shall please her."

"Does she in truth? Perhaps you married her to this merchant fellow ere he rode this morning?"

"Nay, Sir John, they betrothed themselves before the altar and in presence of his kin, no more. Moreover, if you would know, because of your son's blood which runs between them I, after thought and prayer, speaking in the name of the Church, swore them to this penance—that for a year from yesterday they should not wed nor play the part of lovers, each to each."

"I thank you, priest, for this small grace," answered Sir John with a bitter laugh, "and now in my turn I swear this, that after the year they shall not wed, since one of them will be clay and the other the wife of the man whom I have chosen. Now, play no tricks on me lest I burn this sanctuary of yours about your head and throw your old carcass to roast among the flames."

Sir Andrew made no reply, only, resting his long sword on the threshold, he leant upon its hilt and fixed his clear gray eyes upon Clavering's face. What Sir John saw in those eyes he never told, but it was something which scared him. At least that shortening of the breath of which he had spoken seemed to take hold of him, for he swayed upon his horse as though he were about to fall, then, recovering, turned and rode straight for Blythburgh.

It was the second night after that day when Sir Andrew had looked John Clavering in the eyes.

Secretly and in darkness those three whom Gray Dick had killed were borne into the nave of Blythburgh Church and there laid in the grave which had been made ready for them. Till now their corpses had been kept above ground in the hope that the body of John Clavering the younger might be added to their number. But search as they would upon seashore and riverbank nothing of him was ever seen again. The funeral was celebrated in the darkness, since neither Sir John nor Acour desired that all men should see three bodies, that had been slain by one archer, aided by a merchant lad, standing alone against a score, and know, to say naught of the wounded, that there was yet another to be added to the tale. Therefore they interred them by night with no notice of the ceremony.

It was a meancholy scene. The nave of the great church, lighted only with the torches borne by the six monks of the black Augustines from the neighboring priory of St. Osyth; the candles, little stars of light burning far away upon the altar; the bearers of the household of the Claverings and the uncoffined corpses lying on their biers by the edge of the yawning graves; the mourners in their mail, the low voice of the celebrating priest, the Frenchman, Father Nicholas, chaplain to Acour, who hurried through the Latin service as though he wished to be done with it; the deep shadows of the groined roof whereon the rain pattered—such were the features of this interment. It was done at last, and the poor dead, but a few days before so full of vigor and of passion, were left to their last sleep in the unremembered grave. Then the mourners marched back to the manor across the Middle Marsh and sought their beds in a sad silence.

Shortly after day break they were called from them again by the news that those who had followed Hugh de Cressi had returned. Quickly they rose, thinking that these came back with tidings of accomplished vengeance, to find themselves face to face with seven starved miserable men who, all their horses being dead, had walked hither from Dunwich.

The wretched story was learned at length, and then followed that violent scene which has been told already when Acour cursed his followers as cowards and Clavering, sobered perhaps by the sadness of the midnight burial or by the memory of Arnold's words, reproved him. Lastly, stung by the taunts that were heaped upon them, the knight gave Hugh's message—that if they lifted a hand against his love or his house he would kill them like ravening wolves, "which I think he certainly will do, for none can conquer him and his henchman," he added shortly.

Then Sir John's rage flared up again like fire when fresh fuel is thrown on ashes. He cursed Hugh and Gray Dick; he cursed his daughter; he even cursed Acour and asked for the second time how