LORNA DOONE

R. D. BLACKMORE.

CHAPTER X

A BRAVE RESCUE AND A ROUGH RIDE

It happened upon a November evening (when I was about fifteen years old, and outgrowing my strength very rapidly, my sister Annie being turned thirteen, and a deal of rain having fallen, and all the troughs in the yard being flooded, and the bark from the wood-ricks washed down the gutters, and even our water-shoot going brown) that the ducks in the court made a terrible quacking instead of marching off to their pen, one behind another. Thereupon Annie and I ran out to see what might be the sense of it. There were thirteen ducks, and ten lily-white (as the fashion then of ducks was), not I mean twenty-three in all, but ten white and three brown-striped ones; and without being nice about their color, they all quacked very movingly. They pushed their gold-colored bills here and there (yet dirty, as gold is apt to be), and they jumped on the triangles of their feet, and sounded out of their nostrils; and some of the overexcited ones ran along low on the ground, quacking grievously, with their bills snapping and bending, and the roof of their mouths exhibited.

Annie began to cry "dilly, dilly, ciny, ciny, ducksey," according to the burden of a tune they seem to have accepted as the national duck's anthem; but instead of being soothed by it, they only quacked three times as hard, and ran round till we were giddy. And then they shook their tails all together, and looked grave, and went round and round again. Now I am uncommonly fond of ducks, whether roystering, roosting or roasted; and it is a fine sight to behold them walk, poddling one after other, with their toes out, like soldiers drilling, and their little eyes cocked all ways at once, and the way that they dib with their bills, and dabble, and throw up their heads and enjoy something, and then tell the others about it. Therefore I knew at once, by the way they were carrying on, that there must be something or other gone wholly amiss in the duck-world. Sister Annie perceived it too, but with a greater quickness; for she counted them like a good duck-wife, and could only tell thirteen of them, when she knew there ought to be fourteen.

And so we began to search about, and the ducks ran to lead us aright, having come that far to fetch us; and when we got down to the foot of the court-yard where the two great ash-trees stand by the side of the little water, we found good reason for the urgence and melancholy of the duck-birds. Lo! the old white drake, the father of all, a bird of high manners and chivalry, always the last to help himself from the pan of barley-meal, and the first to show fight to a dog or cock intruding upon his family, this fine fellow, and a pillar of the state, was now in a sad predicament, yet quacking very stoutly. For the brook, wherewith he had been familiar from his callow childhood, and wherein he was wont to quest for water-newts, and tadpoles, and caddice-worms, and other games, this brook, which afforded him very often scanty space to dabble in, and sometimes starved the cresses, was now coming down in a great brown flood, as if the banks never belonged to it. The foaming of it, and the noise, and the cresting of the corners, and the up and down, like a wave of the sea, were enough to frighten any duck, though bred upon stormy waters, which our ducks never had been.

There is always a hurdle six feet long and four and a half in depth, swung by a chain at either end from an oak laid across the channel. And the use of this hurdle is to keep our kine at milking-time from straying away there drinking (for in truth they are very dainty) and to fence strange cattle or Farmer Snowe's horses, from coming along the bed of the brooks unknown, to steal our substance. But now this hurdle, which hung in the summer a foot above the trickle, would have been dipped more than two feet deep but for the power against it. For the torrent came down so vehemently that the chains at full stretch were croaking, and the hurdle buffeted almost flat, and thatched (so to say) with the drift-stuff, was going see-saw with a sulky splash on the dirty red comb of the waters. But saddest to see was between two bars, where a fog was of rushes, and flood-wood, and wild-celery haulm, and dead crow's foot, who but our venerable mallard jammed in by the joint of his shoulder, speaking aloud as he rose and fell, with his top-knot full of water, unable to comprehend it, with his tail washed far away from him, but often compelled to be silent, being ducked very harshly against his will by the choking fall-to of the hurdle.

For a moment I could not help laughing, because, being borne up high and dry by a tumult of the torrent, he gave me a look from his one little eye (having lost one in fight with a turkey-cock), a gaze of appealing sorrow, and then a loud quack to second it. But the quack came out of time, I suppose, for his throat got filled with water, as the hurdle carried him back again. And then there was scarcely the screw of his tail to be seen until he swung up again, and left small doubt, by the way he sputtered, and failed to quack, and hung down his poor crest, but what he must drown in another minute, and frogs triumph over his body.

Annie was crying and wringing her hands, and I was about to rush into the water, although I liked not the look of it, but hoped to hold on by the hurdle, when a man on horseback came suddenly round the corner of the great ash-hedge on the other-side of the stream, and his horse's feet were in the water.

"Ah, there," he cried, "get thee back, boy. The flood will carry thee down like a straw. I will do it for thee, and no trouble."

With that he leaned forward, and spoke to his mare—she was just the tint of a strawberry, a young thing, very beautiful—and she arched up her neck, as mislikin̓ the job; yet, trusting him, would attempt it. She entered the flood, with her dainty fore legs sloped further and further in front of her, and her delicate ears pricked forward, and the size of her great eyes increasing; but he kept her straight in the turbid rush, by the pressure of his knee on her. Then she looked back and wondered at him, as the force of the torrent grew stronger, but he bade her go on; and on she went, and it foamed up over her shoulders; and she tossed up her lip and scorned it, for now her courage was waking. Then, as the rush of it swept her away, and she struck with her fore feet down the stream, he leaned from his saddle in a manner which I never could have thought possible, and caught up old Tom with his left hand, and set him between his holsters, and smiled at his faint quack of gratitude. In a moment all three were carried down stream, and the rider lay flat on his horse, and tossed the hurdle clear from him, and made for the bend of smooth water.

They landed, some thirty or forty yards lower, in the midst of our kitchen-garden, where the winter cabbage was; but though Annie and I crept in through the hedge, and were full of our thanks and admiring him, he would answer us never a word until he had spoken in full to the mare, as if explaining the whole to her.

"Sweetheart, I knew thou couldst have leaped it," he said, as he patted her cheek, being on the ground by this time, and she was nudging up to him, with the water pattering off from her; "but I had good reason, Winnie, dear, for making thee go through it."

She answered him kindly with her soft eyes, and sniffed at him very lovingly, and they understood one another. Then he took from his waistcoat two peppercorns, and made the old drake swallow them, and tried him softly upon his legs, where the leading gap in the hedge was. Old Tom stood up quite bravely, and clapped his wings, and shook off the wet from his tail-feathers, and then away into the court-yard, and his family gathered around him, and they all made a noise in their throats, and stood up, and put their bills together, to thank God for this great deliverance.

Having taken all this trouble, and watched the end of that adventure, the gentleman turned round to us with a pleasant smile on his face, as if he were lightly amused with himself; and we came up and looked at him. He was rather short, about John Fry's height, or may be a little taller, but very strongly built and springy, as his gait at every step showed plainly, although his legs were bowed with much riding, and he looked as if he lived on horseback. To a boy like me he seemed very old, being over twenty, and well-found in beard: but he was not more than four-and-twenty, fresh and ruddy-looking, with a short nose and keen blue eyes, and a merry, waggish jerk about him, as if the world were not in earnest. Yet he had a sharp, stern way, like the crack of a pistol, if anything misliked him; and we knew (for children see such things) that it was safer to tickle than buffet him.

"Well young uns, what be gaping at?" He gave pretty Annie a chuck on the thin and took me all in without winking.

"Your mare," said I, standing stoutly up, being a tall boy now; "I never saw such a beauty, sir. Will you let me have a ride of her?"

"Think thou couldst ride her, lad? She will have no burden but mine. Thou couldst never ride her. Tut! I would be loath to kill thee."

"Ride her!" I cried, with the bravest scorn, for she looked so kind and gentle, "there never was horse upon Exmoor foaled but I could tackle in half an hour. Only I never ride upon saddle. Take them leathers off of her."

He looked at me with a dry little whistle, and thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, and so grinned that I could not stand it. And Annie laid hold of me in such a way that I was almost mad with her. And he laughed, and approved her for doing so. And the worst of all was—he said nothing."

"Get away, Annie, will you? Do you think I'm a fool, good sir? Only trust me with her, and I will not over-ride her."

"For that I will go bail, my son. She is liker to override thee. But the ground is soft to fall upon, after all this rain. Now come out into the yard, young man, for the sake of your mother's cabbages. And the mellow straw bed will be softer for thee, since pride must have its fall. I am thy mother's cousin, boy, and am going up to house. Tom Faggus is my name, as everybody knows, and this is my young mare, Winnie."

What a fool I must have been not to know it at once! Tom Faggus, the great highwayman, and his young blood-mare, the strawberry! Already her fame was noised abroad, nearly as much as her master's, and my longing to ride her grew tenfold, but fear came at the back of it. Not that I had the smallest fear of what the mare could do to me, by fair play and horse-trickery, but that the glory of sitting upon her seemed to be too great for me; especially as there were rumors abroad that she was not a mare, after all, but a witch. However, she looked like a filly all over, and wonderfully beautiful with her supple stride, and soft slope of shoulder, and glossy coat beaded with water, and prominent eyes full of docile fire. Whether this came from her Eastern blood of the Arabs newly imported, and whether the cream-color, mixed with our bay, led to that bright strawberry tint, is certainly more than I can decide, being chiefly acquaint with farm horses. And these come of any color and form; you never can count what they will be, and are lucky to get four legs to them."

Mr. Faggus gave his mare a wink, and she walked demurely after him, a bright young thing, flowing over with life, yet dropping her soul to a higher one, and led by love to any thing, as the manner is of females when they know what is the best for them. Then Winnie trod lightly upon the straw, because it had soft muck under it, and her delicate feet came back again.

"Up for it still, boy, be ye?" Tom Faggus stopped, and the mare stopped there; and they looked at me provokingly.

"Is she able to leap, sir? There is good take off on this side of the brook."

Mr. Faggus laughed very quietly, turning round to Winnie so that she might enter into it. And she, for her part, seemed to know exactly where the fun lay.

"Good tumble off, you mean, my boy. Well there can be small harm to thee. I am akin to my family, and know the substance of their skulls."

"Let me get up," said I, waxing wroth, for reasons I cannot tell you, because they are too manifold; "take off your saddle-bag things. I will try not to squeeze her ribs in, unless she plays nonsense with me."

Then Mr. Faggus was up on his mettle, at this proud speech of mine; and John Fry was running up all the while and Bill Dadds and half a dozen. Tom Faggus gave one glance around, and then dropped all regard for me. The high repute of his mare was at stake, and what was my life compared to it? Through my defiance, and stupid ways, here was I in a duello, and my legs not come to their strength yet, and my arms as limp as a herring.

Something of this occurred to him, even in his wrath with me, for he spoke very softly to the filly, who now could scarce subdue herself; but she drew in her nostrils, and breathed to his breath, and did all she could to answer him.

"Not too hard, my dear," he said; "let him gently down on the mixen. That will be quite enough." Then he turned the saddle off and I was up in a moment. She began at first so easily, and pricked her ears so lovingly, and minced about as if pleased to find so light a weight upon her, that I thought she knew I could ride a little, and feared to show any capers. "Gee wugg, Polly!" cried I, for all the men were now looking on, being then at the leaving-off time; "gee wugg, Polly, and show what thou be'est made of." With that I plugged my heels into her, and Billy Dadds flung his hat up.

Nevertheless, she outraged not, though her eyes were frightening Annie, and John Fry took a pick to keep him safe; but she curbed to and fro with her strong forearms rising like springs ingathered, waiting and quivering grievously, and beginning to sweat about it. Then her master gave a shrill, clear whistle, when her ears were bent toward him, and I felt her form beneath me gathering up like whalebone, and her hind legs coming under her, and I knew that I was in for it.

First she reared upright in the air, and struck me full on the nose with her comb, till I bled worse than Robin Snell made me; and then down with her fore feet deep in the straw, and her hind feet going to heaven. Finding me stick to her still like wax, for my mettle was up as hers was, away she flew with me swifter than ever I went before, or since, I trow. She drove full-head at the cob-wall—"Oh, Jack, slip off!" screamed Annie—then she turned like light, when I thought to crush her, and ground my left knee against it. "Mux me!" I cried, for my breeches were broken, and short words went the furtherest—"if you kill me, you shall die with me." Then she took the court-yard gate at a leap, knocking my words between my teeth, and then right over a quickset hedge, as if the sky were a breath to her; and away for the water-meadows, while I lay on her neck like a child at the breast, and wished I had never been born. Straight away in the front of the wind, and scattering clouds around her, all I knew of the speed we made was the frightful flash of her shoulders, and her mane like trees in a tempest. I felt the earth under us rushing away, and the air left far behind us, and my breath came and went, and I prayed to God, and was sorry to be so late of it.

All the long swift while, without power of thought, I clung to her crest and shoulders, and dug my nails into her creases, and my toes into her flank part, and was proud of holding on so long, though sure of being beaten. Then in her fury at feeling me still, she rushed at another device for it, and leaped the wide water-trough sideways across, to and fro, till no breath was left in me. The hazel-boughs took me, too, hard in the face, and the tall dog-briers got hold of me, and the ache of my back was like crimping a fish; till I longed to give it up, thoroughly beaten, and lie there and die in the cresses. But there came a shrill whistle from up the home hill, where the people had hurried to watch us; and the mare stopped as if with a bullet; then set off for home with the speed of a swallow, and going as smoothly and silently. I never had dreamed of such delicate motion, fluent, and graceful and ambient, soft as the breeze flitting over the flowers, but swift as the summer lightning. I sat up again, but my strength was all spent, and no time left to recover it; and though she rose at our gate like a bird, I tumbled off into the mixen.

CHAPTER XI

TOM DESERVES HIS SUPPER

"Well done, lad," Mr. Faggus said, good-naturedly; for all were now gathered round me as I rose from the ground, somewhat tottering, and miry, and crest-fallen, but otherwise none the worse (having fallen upon my head, which is of uncommon substance); nevertheless John Fry was laughing, so that I longed to clout his ears for him: "not at all bad work, my boy, we may teach you to ride by and-by, I see; I thought not to see you stick on so long—"

"I should have stuck on much longer, sir, if her sides had not been wet. She was so slippery—"

"Boy, thou art right. She hath given many the slip. Ha, ha! Vex not, Jack, that I laugh at thee. She is like a sweetheart to me, and better than any of them be. It would have gone to my heart if thou hadst conquered. None but I can ride my Winnie mare."

"Foul shame to thee then, Tom Faggus," cried mother, coming up suddenly, and speaking so that all were amazed, having never seen her wrathful, "to put my boy, my boy, across her, as if his life were no more than thine! The only son of his father, an honest man, and a quiet man; not a roystering, drunken robber! A man would have taken thy mad horse and thee, and flung them both into horse-pond—ay, what's more, I'll have it done now, if a hair of his head is injured. Oh, my boy, my boy! What could I do without thee? Put up the other arm, Johnny." All the time mother was scolding so, she was feeling me and wiping me; while Faggus tried to look greatly ashamed, having sense of the ways of women.

"Only look at his jacket, mother!" cried Annie; "and a shilling's worth gone from his small-clothes!"

"What care I for his clothes, thou goose? Take that, and heed thine own a bit." And mother gave Annie a slap which sent her swinging up against Mr. Faggus, and he caught her, and kissed and protected her; and she looked at him very nicely, with great tears in her soft blue eyes. "Oh, fie upon thee, fie upon thee!" cried mother (being yet more vexed with him, because she had beaten Annie); "after all we have done for thee, and saved thy worthless neck—and to try to kill my son for me! Never more shall horse of thine enter stable here, since these be thy returns to me. Small thanks to you, John Fry, I say, and you Dadds, and you Jam Slocomb, and all the rest of your coward lot; much you care for your master's son! Afraid of that ugly beast yourselves, and you put a boy just breeched upon him!"

"Wull, missus, what could us do?" began John; "Jan wudd goo, now wudd't her, Jem? And how was us—"

"Jan, indeed! Master John, if you please, to a lad of his years and stature. And now, Tom Faggus, be off, if you please, and think yourself lucky to go so; and if ever that horse comes into our yard, I'll hamstring him myself, if none of my cowards dare do it."

Everybody looked at mother, to hear her talk like that, knowing how quiet she was day by day, and how pleasant to be cheated. And the men began to shoulder their shovels, both so as to be away from her, and to go and tell their wives of it. Winnie, too, was looking at her being pointed at so much, and wondering if she had done amiss. And then she came to me, and trembled, and stooped her head, and asked my pardon, if she had been too proud with me.

"Winnie shall stop here to-night," said I, for Tom Faggus still said never a word all the while, but began to buckle his things on; for he knew that women are to be met with wool, as the cannon-balls were at the siege of Tiverton Castle; "mother, I tell you Winnie shall stop, else I will go away with her. I never knew what it was, till now, to ride a horse worth riding."

"Young man," said Tom Faggus, still preparing sternly to depart, "you know more about a horse than any man on Exmoor. Your mother may well be proud of you, but she need have had no fear. As if I, Tom Faggus, your father's cousin—and the only thing I am proud of—would ever have let you mount my mare, which dukes and princes have vainly sought, except for the courage in your eyes, and the look of your father about you. I knew you could ride when I saw you, and rarely you have conquered. But women don't understand us. Good-by, John; I am proud of you, and I hoped to have done your pleasure. And indeed I came full of some courtly tales, that would have made your hair stand up. But though not a crust I have tasted since this time yesterday, having given my meat to a widow, I will go and starve on the moor, far sooner than eat the best supper that ever was cooked in a place that has forgotten me." With that he fetched a heavy sigh, as if it had been for my father; and feebly got upon Winnie's back, and she came to say farewell to me. He lifted his hat to my mother with a glance of sorrow, but never a word; and to me he said, "Open the gate, Cousin John, if you please. You have beaten her so, that she cannot leap it, poor thing."

But before he was truly gone out of our yard, my mother came softly after him, with her afternoon apron across her eyes, and one hand ready to offer him. Nevertheless, he made as if he had not seen her, though he let his horse go slowly.

"Stop, Cousin Tom," my mother said, "a word with you before you go."

"Why, bless my heart!" Tom Faggus cried, with the form of his countenance so changed, that I verily thought another man must have leaped into his clothes—"do I see my cousin Sarah? I thought every one was ashamed of me, and afraid to offer me shelter, since I lost my best cousin, John Ridd. 'Come here,' he used to say, 'Tom, come here, when you are worried, and my wife shall take good care of you.' 'Yes, dear John,' I used to answer, 'I know she promised my mother so; but people have taken to think against me, and so might Cousin Sarah.' Ah, he was a man, a man! If you only heard how he answered me. But let that go, I am nothing now since the day I lost Cousin Ridd." And with that he began to push on again; but mother would not have it so.

"Oh, Tom, that was a loss, indeed. And I am nothing either. And you should try to allow for me; though I never found any one that did." And mother began to cry, though father had been dead so long; and I looked on with a stupid surprise, having stopped from crying long ago.

"I can tell you one that will," cried Tom, jumping off Winnie in a thrice, and looking kindly at mother; "I can allow for you, Cousin Sarah, in everything but one. I am in some ways a bad man myself; but I know the value of a good one; and if you gave me orders, by God—" And he shook his fists towards Bagworthy Wood, just heaving up black in the sundown.

"Hush, Tom, hush, for God's sake!" And mother meant me, without pointing at me; at least I thought she did. For she ever had weaned me from thoughts of revenge, and even from longings for judgment. "God knows best, boy," she used to say, "let us wait His time, without wishing it." And so, to tell the truth, I did; partly through her teaching, and partly through my own mild temper, and my knowledge that father, after all, was killed because he had thrashed them.

"Good-night, Cousin Sarah; good-night, Cousin Jack," cried Tom, taking to the mare again; "many a mile I have to ride, and not a bit inside of me. No food or shelter this side of Exeford, and the night will be black as pitch, I trow. But it serves me right for indulging the lad, being taken with his looks so."

"Cousin Tom," said mother, and trying to get so that Annie and I could hear her; "it would be a sad and unkinlike thing for you to despise our dwelling-house. We cannot entertain you as the lordly inns on the road do, and we have small change of victuals. But the men will go home, being Saturday; and so you will have the fireside all to yourself and the children. There are some few collops of red deer's flesh, and a ham just down from the chimney, and some dried salmon from Lynmouth weir, and cold roast pig and some oysters. And if none of those be to your liking, we could roast two woodcocks in half an hour, and Annie would make the toast for them. And the good folk made some mistake last week, going up the country, and left a keg of old Holland cordial in the coving of the wood-rick, having borrowed our Smiler, without asking leave. I fear there is something unrighteous about it. But what can a poor widow do? John Fry would have taken it, but for our Jack. Our Jack was a little too sharp for him."

"Ay, that I was; John Fry had got it, like a billet under his apron, going away in the gray of the morning, as if to kindle his fire-place. 'Why, John,' I said, 'what a heavy log! Let me have one end of it.' 'Thank'e, Jan, no need of thicey,' he answered, turning his back to me; 'waife wanted a log as will last all day, to kape the crock a zimmerin.' And he banged his gate upon my heels to make me stop and rub them. 'Why, John, said I, 'you'm got a log with round holes in the end of it. Who has been cutting gun-wads? Just lift your apron, or I will.'"

But to return to Tom Faggus—he stopped to sup that night with us, and took a little of everything; a few oysters first, and then dried salmon, and then ham and eggs, done in small curled rashers, and then a few collops of venison toasted, and next to that a little cold roast pig, and a woodcock on toast to finish with, before the Scheidam and hot water. And having changed his wet things first, he seemed to be in fair appetite, and praised Annie's cooking mightily, with a kind of noise like a smack of his lips, and a rubbing of his hands together, whenever he could spare them.

He had gotten John Fry's best small clothes on, for he said he was not good enough to go into my father's (which mother kept to look at), nor man enough to fill them. And in truth my mother was very glad that he refused when I offered them. But John was overproud to have it in his power to say that such a famous man had ever dwelt in any clothes of his; and afterward he made a show of them. For Mr. Faggus' glory, then, though not so great as now it is, was spreading very fast indeed all about our neighborhood, and even as far as Bridgewater.

Tom Faggus was a jovial soul, if ever there has been one, not making bones of little things, nor caring to seek evil. There was about him such a love of genuine human nature, that if a traveler said a good thing, he would give him back his purse again. It is true that he took people's money more by force than fraud; and the law (being used to the inverse method) was bitterly moved against him, although he could quote precedent. These things I do not understand; having seen so much of robbery (some legal, some illegal), that I scarcely know, as here we say, one crow's-foot from the other. It is beyond me, and above me, to discuss these subjects; and in truth I love the law right well, when it doth support me, and when I can lay it down to my liking, with prejudice to nobody. Loyal, too, to the King am I, as behooves a church-warden; and ready to make the best of him, as he generally requires. But after all, I could not see (until I grew much older and came to have some property) why Tom Faggus, working hard, was called a robber, and felon of great; while the King, doing nothing at all (as became his dignity), was liege lord, and paramount owner; with everybody to thank him kindly for accepting tribute.

For the present, however, I learned nothing more as to what our cousin's profession was, only that mother seemed frightened, and whispered to him now and then not to talk of something, because of the children being there; whereupon he always nodded with a sage expression, and applied himself to hollands.

"Now let us go and see Winnie, Jack," he said to me after supper; "for the most part I feed her before myself; but she was so hot from the way you drove her. Now she must be grieving for me, and I never let her grieve long."

I was too glad to go with him, and Annie came slyly after us. The filly was walking to and fro on the naked floor of the stable (for he would not let her have any straw, until he should make a bed for her), and without so much as a head-stall on, for he would not have her fastened. "Do you take my mare for a dog?" he had said, when John Fry brought him a halter. And now she ran to him like a child, and her great eyes shone at the lantern.

"Hit me, Jack, and see what she will do. I will not let her hurt thee." He was rubbing her ears all the time he spoke, and she was leaning against him. Then I made believe to strike him, and in a moment she caught me by the waistband, and lifted me clean from the ground, and was casting me down to trample upon me, when he stopped her suddenly.

"What think you of that, boy? Have you horse or dog that would do that for you? Ay, and more than that she will do. If I were to whistle by-and-by in the tone that tells my danger, she would break this stable door down, and rush into the room to me. Nothing will keep her from me then, stone wall or church-tower. Ah, Winnie, Winnie, you little witch, we shall die together."

Then he turned away with a joke, and began to feed her nicely, for she was very dainty. Not a husk of oat would she touch that had been under the breath of another horse, however hungry she might be. And with her oats he mixed some powder, fetching it from his saddle-bags. What this was I could not guess, neither would he tell me, but laughed and called it "star-shavings." He watched her eat every morsel of it, with two or three drinks of pure water, ministered between whiles; and then he made her bed in a form I had never seen before, and so we said "good-night" to her.

Afterward by the fireside he kept us very merry, sitting in the great chimney-corner, and making us play games with him. And all the while he was smoking tobacco in a manner I never had seen before, not using any pipe for it, but having it rolled in little sticks about as long as my finger, blunt at one and sharp at the other. The sharp end he would put in his mouth, and lay a brand of wood to the other, and then draw a white cloud of curling smoke and we never tired of watching him. I wanted him to let me do it, but he said, "No, my son; it is not meant for boys." Then Annie put up her lips and asked, with both hands on his knees (for she had taken to him wonderfully), "Is it meant for girls, then, Cousin Tom?" But she had better not have asked, for he gave it her to try, and she shut both eyes and sucked at it. One breath, however, was quite enough, for it made her cough so violently that Lizzie and I must thump her back until she was almost crying. To atone for that, Cousin Tom set to, and told us whole pages of stories not about his own doings at all; but strangely enough they seemed to concern almost every one else we had ever heard of. Without halting once for a word or deed, his tales flowed onward as freely and brightly as the flames of the wood up the chimney, and with no smaller variety. For he spoke with the voices of twenty people, giving each person the proper manner, and the proper place to speak from: so that Annie and Lizzie ran all about, and searched the clock and the linen-press. And he changed his face every moment so, and with such power of mimicry that, without so much as a smile of his own, he made even mother laugh so that she broke her new tenpenny waistband; and as for us children, we rolled on the floor, and Betty Muxworthy roared in the wash up.

CHAPTER XII

A MAN JUSTLY POPULAR

Now, although Mr. Faggus was so clever, and generous and celebrated, I know not whether, upon the whole, we were rather proud of him as a member of our family, or inclined to be ashamed of him. And indeed I think that the sway of the balance hung upon the company we were in. For instance, with the boys at Brendon—for there is no village at Oare—I was exceeding proud to talk of him, and would freely brag of my cousin Tom. But with the rich parsons of the neighborhood, or the justices (who came round now and then, and were glad to ride up to a warm farm-house), or even the well-to do tradesmen of Porlock—in a word, any settled power, which was afraid of losing things—with all of them we were very shy of claiming our kinship to that great outlaw.

And sure, I should pity as well as condemn him, though our ways in the world were so different, knowing as I do his story; which knowledge, methinks, would often lead us to let alone God's prerogative—judgment, and hold by man's privilege—pity. Not that I would find excuse for Tom's downright dishonesty, which was, beyond doubt, a disgrace to him, and no credit to his kinsfolk; only that it came about without his meaning any harm, or seeing how he took to wrong, yet gradually knowing it. And now, to save any further trouble, and to meet those who disparage him (without allowance for the time, or the crosses laid upon him), I will tell the history of him, just as if he were not my cousin, and hoping to be heeded. And I defy any man to say that a word of this is either false, or in any way colored by family. Much cause he had to be harsh with the world; and yet all acknowledged him very pleasant, when a man gave up his money. And often and often he paid the toll for the carriage coming after him, because he had emptied their pockets, and would not add inconvenience. By trade he had been a blacksmith, in the town of Northmolten, in Devonshire, a rough, rude place at the end of Exmoor; so that many people marveled if such a man was bred there. Not only could he read and write, but he had solid substance; a piece of land worth a hundred sheep, and a score and a half of beasts, lifting up or lying down. And being left an orphan (with all these cares upon him) he began to work right early and made such a fame at shoeing of horses that the farriers of Barum were like to lose their custom. And indeed he won a golden Jacobus for the best-shod nag in the north of Devon, and some say that he never was forgiven.

As to that, I know no more, except that men are jealous. But whether it were that or not, he fell into bitter trouble within a month of his victory; when his trade was growing upon him, and his sweetheart ready to marry him. For he loved a maid of Southmolton (a currier's daughter, I think she was, and her name was Betsy Paramore) and her father had given consent; and Tom Faggus, wishing to look his best, and be clean, of course, had a tailor at work upstairs for him, who had come all the way from Exeter. And Betsy's things were ready too—for which they accused him afterward, as if he could help that—when suddenly, like a thunder-bolt, a lawyer's writ fell upon him.

This was the beginning of a lawsuit with Sir Robert Bampfylde, a gentleman of the neighborhood, who tried to oust him from his common, and drove his cattle and harassed them. And by that suit of law poor Tom was ruined altogether, for Sir Robert could pay for much swearing; and then all his goods and his farm were sold up, and even his smithery taken. But he saddled his horse, before they could catch him, and rode away to Southmolton, looking more like a madman than a good farrier, as the people said who saw him. But when he arrived there, instead of comfort, they showed him the face of the door alone; for the news of his loss was before him, and Master Paramore was a sound, prudent man, and a high member of the town council. It is said that they even gave him notice to pay for Betsy's wedding-clothes, now that he was too poor to marry her. This may be false, and indeed, I doubt it; in the first place, because Southmolten is a busy place for talking; and in the next, that I do not think the action would have lain at law, especially as the maid lost nothing, but used it all for her wedding next month with Dick Vellacott, of Mockham.

All this was very sore upon Tom; and he took it to heart so grievously, that he said, as a better man might have said, being loose of mind and property, "The world hath preyed on me like a wolf. God help me now to prey on the world."

And, in sooth, it did seem for a while as if Providence were with him, for he took rare toll on the highway, and his name was soon as good as gold anywhere this side of Bristowe. He studied his business by night and by day, with three horses all in hard work, until he had made a fine reputation; and then it was competent to him to rest, and he had plenty left for charity. And I ought to say for society, too, for he truly loved high society, treating squires and noblemen (who much affected his company) to the very best fare of the hostel. And they say that once the King's Justiciaries, being upon circuit, accepted his invitation, declaring merrily that if never true bill had been found against him, mine host should now be qualified to draw one. And so the landlords did; and he always paid them handsomely, so that all of them were kind to him, and contented for his visits. Let it be known in any township that Mr. Faggus was taking his leisure at the inn, and straightway all the men flocked thither to drink his health without outlay, and all the women to admire him; while the children were set at the cross-roads to give warning of any officers.

One of his earliest meetings was with Sir Robert Bamfylde himself, who was riding along the Barum road with only one serving-man after him. Tom Faggus put a pistol to his head, being then obliged to be violent, through want of reputation; while the serving-man pretended to be a long way round the corner. Then the baronet pulled out his purse, quite trembling in the hurry of his politeness. Tom took the purse, and his ring, and time-piece, and then handed them back with a very low bow, saying that it was against all usage for him to rob a robber. Then he turned to the unfaithful knave, and trounced him right well for his cowardice, and stripped him of all his property.

But now Mr. Faggus kept only one horse, lest the Government should steal them; and that one was the young mare Winnie. How he came by her he never would tell, but I think that she was presented to him by a certain colonel, a lover of sport, and very clever horse-flesh, whose life Tom had saved from some gamblers. When I have added that Faggus as yet had never been guilty of blood-shed (for his eyes and the click of his pistol at first, and now his high reputation, made all his wishes respected), and that he never robbed a poor man, neither insulted a woman, but was very good to the church, and of hot patriotic opinions, and full of jest and jollity, I have said as much as is fair for him, and shown why he was so popular. Every body cursed the Doones, who lived apart disdainfully. But all good people liked Mr. Faggus—when he had not robbed them—and many a poor sick man or woman blessed him for other people's money; and all the hostlers, stable-boys, and tapesters entirely worshipped him.

I have been rather long, and perhaps tedious, in my account of him, lest at any time hereafter his character should be misunderstood, and his good name disparaged, whereas he was my second cousin, and the lover of my—but let that bide. 'Tis a melancholy story.

He came again about three months afterward, in the beginning of the spring time, and brought me a beautiful new carbine, having learned my love of such things, and my great desire to shoot straight. But mother would not let me have the gun, until he averred upon his honor that he had bought it honestly. And so he had, no doubt, so far as it is honest to buy with money acquired rampantly. Scarce could I stop to make my bullets in the mold which came along with it, but must be off to the Quarry hill, and new target I had made there. And he taught me then how to ride bright Winnie, who was grown since I had seen her, but remembered me most kindly. After making much of Annie, who had a wondrous liking for him—and he said he was her godfather, but God knows how he could have been, unless they confirmed him precociously—away he went, and young Winnie's side shone like a cherry by candle-light.

Now I feel that of those boyish days I have little more to tell, because everything went quietly, as the world for the most part does with us. I began to work at the farm in earnest, and tried to help my mother, and when I remembered Lorna Doone, it seemed no more than the thought of a dream which I could hardly call to mind. Now who cares to know how many bushels of wheat we grew to the acre, or how the cattle milched till we ate them, or what the turn of the seasons was? But my stupid self seemed like to be the biggest of all the cattle, for having much to look after the sheep, and being always in kind appetite, I grew four inches longer in every year of my farming, and a matter of two inches wider, until there was no man of my size to be seen elsewhere upon Ex-

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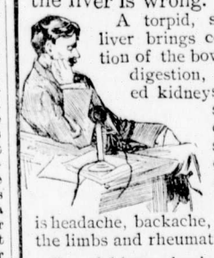

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