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Oh! You can
do it—make it
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or as firm as
steel.

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**REKA
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AN HISTORICAL
ROMANCE
OF THE
Times of
Queen
Elizabeth.

The Wonderful Flower of Woxindon,
By Rev. Joseph Spillman, S.J.

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Thereupon my future husband, who had already won my heart by his extreme kindness to my father, attached the cord, after he had made sure it would bear his weight, firmly to one of the mullions of the window. He then barred and bolted the door of the room; and, fastening the other end of the rope under the boy's arms, showed him how he must hold it, to prevent it from hurting his chest. He also enjoined upon him not to utter a sound, whatever might happen. After we had knelt down and said a prayer to his guardian angel, and grandmother had given the boy her blessing, Windsor led him down in the garden below. Then he gave me a few instructions as to the treatment of his patient, climbed out to the window sill, and deftly and noiselessly slid down the rope to where the boy was standing. As soon as they had both got clear off, we pulled in the rope, lest one of the pursuivants should perchance see it, and suspect what was in the wind.

We, waiting anxiously, counted into my mind every moment the minutes as they slowly went by. My father grew restless, and from the symptoms we observed, we feared another attack was coming on, as Windsor had predicted, which might carry him off. Half an hour had passed; grandmother took up her "Garden of the Soul," and began to recite the Litany for a Happy Death, wherein all the saints of both the old and the new dispensation are called upon to stand by the departing soul in her last agony, and conduct her to the regions of light. In a voice broken by sobs I answered the responses, listening meanwhile to my father's labored breathing, and endeavoring to catch the first sound from the garden below that might intimate to us the coming of the priest. I could not help feeling greatly alarmed; I had given my father the largest dose of medicine that Windsor had permitted me to administer, and instead of tranquillizing him, as it was intended to do, it had the effect of increasing his restlessness. As yet there was no sign of the much longed-for visitor; was it possible that Frith had lost his way in the dark, or had some unforeseen accident occurred? Perhaps the whole party had fallen into the hands of one of Topcliffe's patrols? These and many other possible contingencies crowded into my mind and every moment my hopes grew fainter.

Nor was this all; something fresh happened which led me almost to despair of the success of our enterprise. The man whom I had locked into the opposite room, weary of his solitary confinement, or perhaps suspecting that some project was on foot, began knocking at the door, and asking to be let out. At first he knocked gently and spoke in a low tone, but I immediately recognized the voice as Topcliffe's. Acting on impulse, I flung the key out of the window with all my might in the direction of the pond. I heard it fall with a splash into the water, and at the same time a slight sound coming from the stables reached my ear. What it was I could not determine, for just then Topcliffe began to hammer the door with his boots and call lustily on his followers to come to his help.

What was to be done! I almost regretted having locked the man in, and thrown away the key, for the noise he was making was enough to bring all of his men round the door, and then what would be the fate of the priest, should he arrive at this juncture? And even as these thoughts passed through my mind, I heard footsteps on the pebbles beneath the window, and at the same moment the top of the ladder appeared at the casement. Anne, too, aroused from her sleep by the disturbance Topcliffe made, now rushed into the room, startled and confused, inquiring what was the matter? Before I could explain the situation to her, Windsor stepped in through the open window. He had heard Topcliffe's shouts in the garden below, and naturally wanted to ascertain what had passed in his absence, before exposing the priest to the danger of losing his life, and that perhaps uselessly. Just as Windsor entered, I heard voices outside the door; Uncle Remy, Barth, Babington and others were asking Topcliffe what he was thinking of, to make such an infernal noise

to the chamber where a man lay dying. In answer to his rejoinder Uncle Remy was heard to bid him for God's sake be quiet, and search should be made for the missing key. Windsor overheard these words, and whispered to me: "That will give us a few moments' respite, we must lose no time."

Thereupon he returned to the window and gave a signal; a few seconds later Father Weston, with his assistance, stepped in over the window sill. Never shall I forget the serenity of that saintly man's countenance, unruined either by the strange manner whereby he had gained admittance, or by the great peril to which he was exposing himself in the performance of his sacred functions. Only a few yards off Topcliffe, who seemed to know by intuition that a hated priest was near, as a hawk descries from afar an innocent dove, began to rage and bellow anew, while the gentle voice of God's minister pronounced the salutation which the Church places on the lips of the priest on his entrance into the sick-room: "Pax huic domui et omnibus habitantibus in ea." When dropping the brush into the vessel of holy water which grandmother held out to him, he sprinkled the bed and the sufferer. Singular to relate, at that moment my father, who had been lying in a state of unconsciousness, with closed eyes, looked up, and glancing at all the bystanders, beckoned to the priest to come to his side. We withdrew into the adjoining room while he made his confession; it did not take long, for my father had made his Easter only a fortnight before, and we were soon summoned to his bedside, where preparations were being made to anoint him. Kneeling down, we recited the responses to the prayers, said calmly but rapidly by the priest, since the uproar outside the door was increasing every moment, Windsor urged him to be quick, for in vain did he beg the pursuivants, with whom Uncle Remy and Babington were parleying, to make less noise out of consideration for a man at the point of death. Accordingly, as soon as Father Weston had anointed my father, he gave him the last absolutions, omitting the other prayers prescribed by the ritual, held the crucifix to his lips, exhorted him to place his whole trust in the mercy of God, and then in answer to our entreaties that he would no longer thus imperil his life, got out of the window, descended the ladder and disappeared in the darkness.

It was not a moment too soon, for when Uncle Remy and Uncle Barth heard Windsor say that father was dying, they besought him to let them in. So when we had moved the ladder to one side, closed the window, and hidden the rope under the bed, we opened the door. Large as the room was, it was quickly filled; my uncles, the gentlemen staying in the house and the servants, stood or knelt with us around the bed, while the pursuivants looked on stolidly from a disinterested, his countenance expressive of heavenly peace, listening to the prayers his mother recited in a low voice.

Presently he beckoned Anne and myself to his side, laid his hand in benediction upon our heads. Seeing that his eyes wandered in search of little Frith, I whispered to him that the boy was not there, and from his look of intelligence I knew that he understood that he was gone to conduct the priest back to his hiding place. Pressing his good old mother's hand, he thanked her for all the love she had shown him; he also bade his brothers an affectionate farewell, commending us especially to Uncle Remy's care. To each of the servants standing sobbing around he addressed a kind word, then making one last effort, he raised the hand which held the crucifix, and murmured, in accents that were scarcely audible: "Hold fast the ancient faith, the true faith! Hold it fast, every one of you." He tried to add something more, I think about meeting again in heaven, but we could not catch the words. His arm dropped on to the coverlet and his last agony began.

Sounds of lamentation and weeping, words of prayer were heard on all sides; even the pursuivants were touched, and those who were engaged in breaking open Topcliffe's door,

desisted for a while. Even at this distance of time, the remembrance of that scene makes me shed tears. On the 21st of April, at break of day, my dear father breathed his last. As through the tears that blinded me, I glanced upwards from his beloved countenance, I noticed that one of the five buds of the wonderful flower on the ceiling above had opened, and blossomed out into a delicate little red flower.

CHAPTER VI.—We had little leisure in which to indulge our grief. Perhaps, it was well that it was so; in my case at least, anxiety concerning Frith and the good priest certainly did much to assuage my sorrow for the death of my dear father. While grandmother and Anne still knelt weeping at the bedside, I acquainted Uncle Remy, in as few words as possible with what had taken place, and he slipped out and went down into the garden, to remove the ladder and to ascertain whether the entrance to the secret passage leading to the old castle, which was in the garden wall behind the barn, had been properly barred again, and completely concealed by a pile of fagots.

It was not long before the oaken panels of the door of the room where Topcliffe was imprisoned gave way, and he burst in upon us, like a mad bull. In all my life I never saw a man in such a fury; he was quite white, and foaming at the mouth. Even the solemn presence of death, which generally overawes the rudest of mankind, had no effect on him. He rolled his bloodshot eyes round the room, in search of a victim on whom to vent his wrath, finally fixing on my sister Anne. "It was you who locked me in!" he shrieked out at her; "It was you who turned the key and took it out! It is your doing that I could not catch the son of Belial, who this very night sped that stubborn Papist on his way to hell! You and all your accomplices shall pay heavily for this!"

He actually went so far as to seize Anne by the hair of her head and call upon his myrmidons to handcuff her. A terrible uproar ensued. Babington drew his sword, and his friends followed his example. He declared he would not stand by and see a young lady of rank maltreated in the presence of her father's corpse; and if it cost him his life, his good sword should be the means of sending Topcliffe to the judgment seat of God, and he would answer for the deed before the Queen's tribunal. Seeing the young man meant what he said, Topcliffe hastened to leave go of Anne, for the bully is proverbially a coward. Retreating to where his own men stood, he bade them disarm the young gentlemen, and the scene would have been one of bloodshed and violence, had not Uncle Barth, good old soul, interfered between Babington and Topcliffe's followers. He entreated them to keep the peace, saying never would he or his friends use force to prevent Her Majesty's commissioners from fulfilling their duty; let them make inquiry, and if it was found that Anne, or any one else had transgressed the law, the culprit should undergo the penalty of his offence, even though the law was an unjust one, in imitation of the early martyrs who had submitted to the decrees of the heathen Emperors. At the same time he warned the Queen's servant not to make any misuse of his power, for by doing so he would bring odium on the Government. With these pacific words, Uncle Barth induced Babington to sheathe his sword again, and Topcliffe, furious though he was, took himself a little in hand, and spoke in an altered key. And when he told Babington that he should charge him before the Secretary of State, for having dared to draw his sword against an officer of the Crown in the discharge of his duty, and wanted to interrogate him then and there, we prevailed upon him to adjourn to the hall, and institute the proceedings there. Thither therefore we all betook ourselves.

First of all, Topcliffe let fly against Anne, asserting that so had seen her come out of my father's room and from his presence, turn the lock on him. As we were dressed alike, it is most probable that he mistook me for my sister. Of course Anne denied this, and declar-

ed—that was moreover quite true—that during the whole night she had not quitted the chamber for a single instant. It was all no use, since Topcliffe asseverated that through the chink of the door, he had with his own eyes seen her rush, like a fury, at the handle, and for such an insult against the Queen's Commissioner she must go with him as his prisoner to London, there to answer for her conduct before the Privy Council. My poor sister could not make as light of this as she did of most things; indeed, she was more ready to cry than to laugh.

I therefore stepped boldly forward and owned that I had been the one to lock the door, and that when I did so, I was not aware of Topcliffe's presence within the room (This was no departure from the truth, since I did not know, but only suspected that he was there). The man glared at me, burst into a hoarse laugh, saying he did not believe I was capable of playing him such a trick, but he had no doubt I should not hesitate to tell a lie, to get my sister out of a scrape. Where was I going to, he inquired, and what did I want on the stairs? I replied, that I had gone down into the kitchen to fetch something that was required for my father, and that the soldier who was on guard at the foot of the staircase could bear witness that it was I, not my sister, who had passed by him. Topcliffe immediately had the man called in; but whether he had not yet slept off the fumes of liquor, or whether he saw what Topcliffe wished him to say, at any rate, he asserted to be his conviction that the young lady, who nearly stumbled over him last night was not so tall as myself. Thereupon Topcliffe without further questioning arrested my sister in the Queen's name. Anne burst out crying; I appealed to Windsor to give evidence that I, not she, had left the room. All in vain; Topcliffe denounced us all as a lot of lying Papists and said he believed the testimony of his own eyes and his watchman's before that of our tongues. Having delivered my sister over to the charge of two halberdiers, he proceeded to announce that, as it was now broad daylight, he intended to make a thorough search of the house and garden. He was quite certain he said that in the course of the foregoing night, a mass priest had been with the sick man, and could not now be very far off. Seeing a bunch of keys hanging at my waist-band, he ordered me to go with him. Resistance was useless; consequently while the rest of the party remained under surveillance in the hall, I was compelled to accompany the odious creature, with half a dozen of the most cunning of his satellites, upstairs and downstairs, into every corner and cranny of the house; standing by, an unwilling spectator, while every door was unlocked, every wall measured, and every part that appeared suspiciously thick struck with a hammer to ascertain whether it sounded hollow, and might conceal a secret chamber. I was quite afraid that the principal hiding place would be discovered. There was no one in it, it is true, but its disclosure would have brought us into sad trouble. For full five minutes Topcliffe stood on the stone under the back stairs, which concealed a subway into the barn hard by, where Brother — a lay Jesuit, very clever at concealment, had contrived a capital hiding place. However, this time our tormentor did not succeed in rousing anything out; the failure did not improve his temper, and very crossly he made me a sign to accompany him to the garden and outbuildings.

In the barn and woodshed he thrust his sword recklessly in and out of the trusses of hay and straw and between the piles of firewood, bidding his men to toss the fagots from one corner to another. Still nothing was found, and I began to think the work was over, when he caught sight of the ladders, hanging from wooden pegs outside the stables. It happened that the smaller ladder was only suspended from one peg, so that it hung awry one end resting on the ground. As everything else was in the most perfect order, thanks to old John's care, this little piece of carelessness struck Topcliffe, and he went close up to the ladders. Thus he was led to notice some fresh garden mould adhering to the foot of the larger ladder. "Hullo!" he exclaimed, "it is Gospel truth, this ladder has been used, and within a few hours too! Now I know the way that accused mass priest got into the old fool's room. What do you say to that, Miss Bellamy?"

What indeed could I say? In my confusion I could only stammer something about the ladder being in use for all manner of purposes. Topcliffe laughed contemptuously. "Of course," he said in his sneering way, "we understand this ladder nearly 50 feet long, was wanted last night to gather the priest off the dwarf

pear trees yonder, that are now just in blossom! May I have the pleasure, Miss Bellamy, of conducting you to the spot where that ladder was planted two or three hours ago? Let me see, which gable window was it? Ah, I see. Allow me."

He advanced towards me with a smile; I put his proffered arm aside indignantly, whereat he only laughed, and said I was really quite as amiable as my sister; but never fear, he would yet devise the means to cure us of our uppishness.

When we got to the place beneath the window, he triumphantly pointed out the holes in the ground made by the foot of the ladder, asking me if I could still persist in my denial? I answered nothing. Then he looked at a bed of tulips that was trampled down, and in which several flowers were broken off. "What a pity," he said sarcastically. "Do you not think, Miss Bellamy, that people should be rather more careful? The ladder might have been stood on the gravel path, then your flowers would not have been spoiled. Besides the footprints would not have been seen, as they are so very plainly in the soft mould. Just look here—these huge marks must have been made by your worthy uncle's great boots; those there are the traces of the Jesuit, on whose head—mark you—a prize of £100 is set. Let me take the exact measure, one never knows how it may come in useful. Well, the good man does not appear to wear shoes of the latest fashion. Now here are some of a very different style and shape; one of the young gentlemen staying in your house must have been here, or some other abettor of the priest; these ministers of Baal never lack a gallowsbird in their train. But how do these pretty little footprints come here? They are almost too small to be yours, my young lady, nor are they quite like a gentleman's shoe. Oh! I have it, they belong to the dear little lad who whispered in his sister's ear so sweetly last night on the stair: it is all right. True enough, it is all right, I can say that now; for since I have got these threads in my hand, I will not let them slip from my grasp, but out of them we will form a rope, a rope to fit the Jesuit's neck. By my troth, here comes the little man himself, just as we were speaking of him!"

As ill luck would have it, at that moment Uncle Remy appeared round the corner of the house, holding the boy by the hand. I saw the exultant look Topcliffe gave them, and tried to give them a sign to warn them to beat a hasty retreat. But it was already too late. Topcliffe asked them quite civilly to come where we were standing; as soon as they did so, he seized hold of Frith's arm, and asked him whose were the footprints in that flower bed? The child looked at me with a frightened expression in his blue eyes, but he answered sturdily; these were the footprints of a good many people. This reply cost him several hard cuffs from Topcliffe, who then lifted him up and stood him down in the flowerbed; but Frith, guessing his design, defeated it by scraping the earth with his feet, so as to obliterate all traces of his having been there. This made Topcliffe very spiteful, he pulled the poor little fellow's hair unmercifully.

But one might go too far with Frith. He was a good, gentle child as long as he was treated kindly, but if he thought anyone was unjust to him, he could show himself a true Bellamy by his obstinacy, for we are known to come of a stubborn race. Frith set his teeth and looked at his tormentor with angry defiance, but he did not utter a word, even when Topcliffe boxed his ears so hard that the tears started to his eyes, saying: "None of your insolence for me, if you please! You little know me, I have taught many other birds to sing besides fledglings like you!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Master Topcliffe," exclaimed Uncle Remy, "for striking a lad like that. I will not permit it."

"Who asks you for permission?" the scoundrel rejoined. Then calling one of his men, he bade him cut him a stout switch from a willow tree. When this was brought to him, he trimmed it with his dirk, and whirled it round twice or thrice in the air with a whistling sound; then flourishing it over poor Frith's head, he addressed him thus: "Now Master Frith, my name is Topcliffe, and you may perhaps have heard I have been the means of bringing many hundreds to the gallows, or what is worse, to the rack. I am not a man to be trifled with. Now listen to me: Last night that very ladder was brought here, and by it the Jesuit Edmund climbed up to the gable window yonder. I know very well that you, my young master, brought the Jesuit here, and you conducted him home again; so you know now, where he is hidden. Pay heed to what I say: I am going

to count five and twenty, quite slowly; and if by the time I have done, you do not tell me where the Jesuit has put himself, I will lay this switch about you so soundly that you will not know whether you stand on your head or your heels, and will be ready to tell me all I want to know. Lay the young gentleman on the garden seat, and hold him down; that is right. Now I am going to begin: is one—two—"

"Master Topcliffe, what are you thinking of?" interposed Uncle Remy. "Do you imagine that a child like that would be told where a Catholic priest is concealed?"

"Five—six," the man went on.

"Never fear, Uncle Remy, I will not let him know it if he should cut me to pieces."

"There now, the young villain confesses he knows it! Eight—nine."

"Stop that!" cried Uncle Remy, "whatever I have to suffer for it, I will not stand by and see the boy flogged. You are exceeding your powers." So saying he wrested the switch out of Topcliffe's hand, broke it to pieces, and flung it on the ground.

The tyrant shouted to his men to seize and bind Uncle Remy, but he was a powerful man, and easily shook off the two who laid hands on him. Snatching a pike from a third, he swung it about him with such effect, that all his antagonists retreated, their leader among them, and the two that were holding Frith down on the garden seat, let him go free. Quick as thought the child sprang to his feet, slipped between the legs of the men with astounding dexterity, and would have made good his escape, had not sousing Page most inopportunistly appeared on the scene with some armed retainers and thus stopped him in his flight.

This cousin Page was my grandmother's nephew, and like all the rest of our family, a staunch Catholic at heart, although he had conformed to the new form of worship, in order to evade the exorbitant fines that were reducing all our Catholic families in turn to beggary. Alas! it is through weakness such as his, that our beloved island has been bereft of her choicest heirloom, the true Faith; because the greater number of the nobility and gentry for the sake of retaining their property, complied with the will of their ruler, in the conviction that better times must come, when they would again openly profess their ancient creed. Fools indeed were they, and forgetful of our Lord's words: No servant can serve two masters; you cannot serve God and mammon. Thus all who would not forego mammon gradually lost the inestimable treasure of the Faith.

Cousin Page came puffing and red in the face like a turkey cock, for he was a corpulent man, and had been walking quickly. As soon as he saw us he cried out: "Cousin Bellamy, cousin Mary, I have just heard that my cousin Richard died last night. I am sorry, heartily sorry for you both. He was a good man, but headstrong like all the rest of you, and by his culpable obstinacy he has ruined his fine estate. Bot what is up now? By my troth, that is Master Topcliffe! I wish you good morning! Another domiciliary visit to my stubborn popish relations—eh? what are you after, my lad? Stop him, men, stop him."

(To be continued.)

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