

... I am here to—Jerusalem!" declared the Parson, who had not an idea where it was, "if I thought I could take the weight of a father off the burden you have to bear!"

She only waved him away with one hand, keeping her tear-stained face buried in the other. He had already reached the door, when a bright thought suggested itself, and he turned back.

"Mistress Nelly!" he exclaimed, "if there's a doctor in England can cure good Master Carow, I know where he is to be found. I'll wager a gallon I bring him to this house within four hours of the present time." The familiar expression denoted that Parson Gale was thoroughly in earnest.

Nelly looked up through her tears. "God bless you for your kindness, at any rate," she sobbed. "What is he? Who is he? Send for him at once!"

He turned, with his hand on the door. "The man is in hiding," he answered, "and may be afraid to come, for there is a price on his head. But this is a case of life and death, and if he refuses, I'll tie him hand and foot, by George, bundle him on to a horse, and carry him with me at a gallop across the moor."

With this valorous promise, Abner Gale swung himself into the saddle, and in a few seconds was clattering up the stony lane from Porlock at his utmost speed. Regardless of his new clothes and the lustre of his boots, he pursued his way at the same headlong pace, through deep coombes and shallow streams, many swamps, and tufted banks of heather, till he gained the open moor, and only drew rein when he reached that lone and sequestered valley in which the gypsies had pitched their camp. Through it he rode like a madman, scattering the swarthy little half-naked children to right and left beneath his horse's feet. At the door of a brown weather-stained tent, sat Fin Cooper mending a kettle, and here the Parson halted with a jerk.

"Where's the priest?" said he. "I want him this instant. 'Tis to save a man's life."

"What priest?" asked Fin, looking up lazily from his work.

"Katerfelto," explained Gale. "Katerfelto!" repeated the gypsy. "He would not thank you for calling him by his name!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SELF-DEFENCE.

He did not thank him. The Charlatan, who had closely shaven his venerable beard, and adopted, with their reserved demeanor, the precise and sombre habit of the Jesuits, was sitting down to an excellent stew, whereof the savor, notwithstanding his preoccupation, rose gratefully to the Parson's nostrils. But his business admitted of no delay, even for such temptation as a mess of game and venison cooked gypsy-fashion; and laying his heavy hand on the other's shoulder, he addressed him by name, bidding him shortly rise and get to the saddle, since a patient was dying for want of him. And even to those who knew it best, 'twas a sorry pastime riding the moor in the dark!

Katerfelto started, looking about uneasily for Dick Boss and his satellites. "Hush! Good Master Gale," said he, "a man may have more names than one, and I am known as Father Constant here. The person you speak of fled the country a week ago. You owe him some gratitude, or I am mistaken. 'Tis would be a scurvy trick to lay the blood-hounds on his track."

"Never, fear, man!" answered the Parson, heartily. "Safe and undisturbed as a November stag, half thou remain so long as thou barrest with us!" 'Tis but a cast of thy trade I am asking thee, as though I bade Fin Cooper do me a bit of tinkering on a worn-out kettle. We must have thee down at Porlock to stop a hole in a man's life. Fin is putting a saddle on the sure-footed roan

shuffled back into his seat, "also I warn you, Master Gale, you will bring the dead to heel the living when we arrive at our patient's door!"

"Where there's life, there's hope," answered the Parson, who, in his abstraction, regarded his companion's distress no more than the difficulties in their way. "We are close at hand now. I can hear the tide whispering in the bay. Oh! Master Katerfelto, rescue me this one man from the grasp of death, and ask, Abner Gale, what you will in return. I am not so bad as you think, and—and bad as I am, I never went back from my word!"

"I'll do my best," promised the other, observing, with exceeding gratification, that their horses' hoofs now rang on a sound, hard road, and that the scanty lights which marked the village of Porlock were within a quarter of a mile.

Dismounting at old Carew's door, the Parson ushered Katerfelto into Nelly's presence, and while he felt reassured to learn that her grandfather was still alive, could not but mark with deep concern the ravages a few hours of distress and vexation had made on the sweet face of his promised wife. He seemed, however, to recognise one conclusion in the midst of all his troubles and anxieties—John Garnett must be far enough off by this time, and there was nothing more to fear from the rival, whose absence he had purchased at the price of his own revenge. In his self-satisfaction, the Parson almost fancied himself a benevolent and forgiving man, with virtues only now coming to maturity, who deserved to be happy because he was good.

Establishing the Doctor in Carew's house, under his granddaughter's care, Abner Gale had the grace to take his own departure without delay, and rode home through the dark, elated at the successful issue of his enterprise, and the matrimonial prospects opening before him, but unmoved by Nelly's wan looks and obvious misery, as by the north wind that blew so keen at his back in angry gusts, powdering the sleeves of his riding-coat with something whiter than sleet, something, that a month later in the year he would have called snow.

"She never could never live a week in that old house," muttered the Parson, turning his collar up to his ears, "unprotected and alone. She would come home to Abner Gale's roof, for sure, as kind and willing as a bird to the nest. It won't be long first, my beauty, for, if this is to be winter in earnest, the cold will bring the old man down like an apple off a tree!"

And the Parson was right. Carew's life was indeed ebbing swiftly and surely away; yet much had to come and go, even at this quiet village of Porlock, before his shattered storm-worn bark could reach her peaceful moorings in that Fair Haven—"where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest."

Katerfelto did his duty, and Nelly scarcely left the patient's bedside for a minute at a time. If skill and attention could have saved him, old Carew might have been kept alive for many a week to come; but the last few grains in the hour-glass seem to dribble away the fastest, and it was no more obvious to the Doctor who watched, than to the girl who prayed, that with sinking strength and failing vitality, the question was no longer of days, but of hours.

In this her sore distress, how could John Garnett find it in his heart to leave the neighborhood of the woman he loved? How could he bear to think of the loneliness, protected only by the hateful attentions of Parson Gale? He lingered on imprudently enough, visiting the house at frequent intervals for news of the dying man, and pressing many a crown-piece on the sorrowful servant who was the only person visible to answer his inquiries.

Yet his pale and anxious looks had been marked by loving eyes, swimming in tears because of his constancy, his danger, and the promise that forbade further warning or expostulation. Herself unseen, Nelly caught a glimpse of her lover more than once—and so did Katerfelto.

shoe and I defy you to walk across the room. You love this girl, Master Gale, and I know it. Do you want to lose her?"

The Parson must have been very much in earnest, for he neither stormed nor swore, but only turned a shade paler, and said, in a low, thick voice, "Lose her!—I had rather lose my own soul!"

"Then look a little closer after her," was the reply. "There's another man within a stone's throw who loves blue eyes, may be as well as you do. He comes to the house daily. Ay, half-a-dozen times a day!"

"What manner of man?" asked the Parson, still in the same low, concentrated voice.

"A straight, handsome young spark," answered Katerfelto, "with bright eyes and dark clustering hair. Tush, Master Gale, you know him well enough—'tis none other than my former patient, 'plain' John Garnett!"

"When was he here?"

"To day—not an hour ago—a few minutes before you arrived. Stay, Master Gale—you seem to be in a prodigious hurry to be gone. See! you have forgotten your riding-glove."

"Give it to Master Garnett when he comes," said the Parson, in no louder tones than before, but with a look in his eyes that made even Katerfelto's blood run cold, "and tell him from me the harbinger shall not claim his right next time I set my stag up to bay. He will know what I mean. Oh! Nelly, Nelly!" he murmured, with a sob, while he unhitched his bridle from the garden palings, "I would have kept to my bargain if you had kept to yours!"

The Charlatan, returning to his medical duties perfectly satisfied that his object was in course of accomplishment, observed that Nelly was not as usual in attendance on her grandfather. She entered the room, however, within a minute or two, so pale and calm, that he had not the least suspicion she could have overheard any part of his conversation.

Nevertheless, that evening, John Garnett found on his supper-table a letter, the first he had ever received from her, bearing no signature, and consisting only of the following lines:

"They have resolved on your destruction. Fly at once. Perhaps hereafter I shall see you again. Think no more of what I said. I will never marry him. I had rather die first."

That was all, but it set John Garnett acting as well as thinking. His preparations were soon made, a small valise was packed, his arms were carefully examined and fresh primed, finally he visited his horse in the stable, saw to his corn, his shoes, his saddle and bridle, all the requirements indispensable for the morrow, when, with the first appearance of day, he would have to ride for his life.

Lastly, he passed once more under Nelly's windows, any watched, with a strange, sad longing, the point of light that denoted her vigil by the dying man's bed. Then he turned back to his lodging for a few hours' rest, more depressed and sick at heart than he had ever felt before. The north wind howled angrily, stripping their autumn leaves in scores from the bending boughs of the orchard, while every now and then, an ungathered apple came to the ground with a thud. It was a dreary night, pain and sorrow within, cold and desolation without. A hopeless mourner above, a weary below, for something told John Garnett that old Carew's life was ebbing away with every passing minute, and that death was busy upon ponder, while here the snow fell thick and fast.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REMORSE.

In the gypsies' camp a night of snow and storm was accepted without a murmur, and provided against in a spirit of ingenuity and forethought peculiar to such wayfarers, as

Thyra always seemed unlike other girls, thought Fin, and this preoccupation, no doubt, was but the shyness of love.

He took her hand, while the old bold dame was busy refilling her pipe, and raised the slender, shapely fingers to her lips, with a comely grace, that a gypsy wears no less naturally than a prince of the blood.

"To-morrow, Thyra," said he, "you will make Fin Cooper the happiest man alive. To-morrow we shall be one in the sight of all our people, never to part again. The parson of the Gorgios joins a couple by the hand, like a brace of thieves chained together in the dock, but the Rompen of the Romany, a true gypsy marriage, solders them heart to heart, as I would weld tin and copper into brass! To-morrow, my lass, you will be mine. To-night I am altogether yours. Ask me what you will, beautiful Thyra, I can deny you nothing at such a time as this."

Her hand remained in his while he spoke; he dropped it, she shivered from head to foot, "I am cold," she murmured, "so cold. There will be snow to-morrow, Fin, deep snow, amongst these hills. The Gorgio bride wears white on her marriage day. A Romany lass might do worse than follow the example."

Her fixed gaze, that seemed fixed looking on some object miles and miles away, her sorrowful tone, so quiet and so very weary, disturbed. He caught her hand once more, and would have drawn her into his arms, but for the shake and snort of a horse at the tent-door, and Parson Gale's well-known voice, bidding him rouse and show himself, with a tuss of brandy in his hand.

A man who has little to offer is usually very hospitable. Fin sprang forward to welcome the intruder with cordial alacrity, and summoned a bare-legged urchin from half-a-score within call, to lead the Parson's horse into a sheltered nook behind the adjoining copse, where two or three monkeys were pulling at a truss of hay. Abner Gale was then hurried into the tent and supplied with brandy, the inolemeny of the weather rendering that liquor unusually grateful to his burly frame.

"All friends here?" asked the Parson, holding the untasted cup in his hand.

"All friends," replied Fin Cooper. "The old woman is stone deaf, and this time to-morrow Thyra will be my wife!"

Gale was equal to the occasion. Er. Waif could turn her head, he imprinted a kiss on her cheek, and tossed off the brandy to her health.

"I claim my priest's dues," said he gallantly, "the first right to salute a bride. And now to business. Fin. Not a moment is to be lost. I want to borrow the sure-footed roan again to-night. I'll pay you handsome this time."

With the lofty politeness of men who deal in horses, honestly or otherwise, Fin ignored the question of money altogether.

"Oh! that's nothing between me and you," said the gypsy; "but the last journey you went our roan might as well have been stag-hunting. You must have galloped him a dozen miles on end without drawing bridle. 'Tis a good little beast as was ever bred on the moor, but I needn't tell you, Parson, that horseflesh is not iron. What do you want with him, now?"

"To mount Dick Boss," was the answer. Fin made made a wry face, and Waif held her breath. A sheriff's officer seemed the last person to whom it was natural for a gypsy to lend his horse.

Parson Gale put his head out at the tent-door, looked about into the dark night through which snow-flakes were falling thick; and, having satisfied himself he could not be overheard, proceeded to unfold his plans, the more frankly that he had every reason to count on the assistance of both his listeners.

"There's money to be got by the job," said he, with an evil scowl on his heavy brows. "Blood money, but what of that? We will share and share alike. This pretty lass of yours, Fin, she found out where the deer harbored. You and Dick Boss, and another handy chap or two, shall help me take him, and when King George comes down with the reward, God bless him—there

he'll never have the chance, Fin; he'll never have the chance!"

"Suppose he shows fight, Parson," suggested the gypsy, who was a bold fellow enough on occasion, but regarded such matters with a keen eye to business. "Tis none of your danglehill fowls this, but a cock of the game, with never a morsel of white in his wing, put him down where you will. Suppose he lugs out on Dick Boss, and whistles a brace of balls into you and me?"

"I'm not afraid of him," answered Gale; "it makes no difference in the reward, Fin, whether we take him dead or alive."

"Come back, Thyra!" exclaimed the gypsy, with more of a husband's authority than was yet permissible in his tone. "Where are you going, lass? Come back, I tell you!"

She was already through the tent-door, but returned at his bidding. It's stifling hot in here, Fin," she said, "I should have choked but for that mouthful of fresh air."

"And you were so cold a while ago," he replied, watching her narrowly. "Parson Gale, he added, turning to his visitor, "take the roan and welcome. The lad will show you where to find him. 'I'll meet you at the head of the coombe an hour before daybreak. It's a job that won't work well in the dark; but the less time we put off the better when once the sun's up. Will you take another cup of brandy, Parson? you've a cold ride before you, and we've not done with the snow yet."

But Gale declined, and Waif, who suffered nothing to escape her notice, argued from this unusual abstinence an intense longing to work out the project of his revenge.

So John Garnett was to be in the power of his enemies, bound hand and foot, delivered over to a shameful death, with to-morrow's dawn, and it wanted but three hours of daylight now. John Garnett, with his merry eyes, his winning smile, and frank, kindly face. Was this to be the end of all? The nightcap and the nosegay, and the hangman's cart rumbling over the stones on Tyburn-hill. John Garnett, the man she loved so dearly she would have followed him bare-footed through the world. And it was her doing—her revenge. Yes! If she had driven a knife into his throat she could not more surely have slain him, than when she betrayed the secret of his hiding-place, and denounced him to Parson Gale. The man she used to love, the man she loved so fondly, so madly still. Now that it was too late, the whole tide of her feelings seemed to turn, and she would have given her whole life freely, then and there, to save him, ay, even for the blue-eyed girl, whom from the moment she saw them whispering together in the orchard she hated, with the fierce, pitiless hatred of her race.

She gasped for breath, the tent and its occupants swam before her eyes; a deadly faintness seemed to hang fetters of ice about her limbs, and she turned with a maddening fear, lest the strength and hardihood she had so prized might fail her, in this, the extremity of her need.

Fin Cooper watched her with shrewd suspicious glances. The gypsy, a man of few words, but keen in perception, and ready of resource, drew his own conclusions from the restlessness he could not fail to notice in his promised wife, and resolved not to let her out of his sight till he started on horseback to join Parson Gale and his satellites. Once in the saddle, he had no fear that Waif should out-strip them, or give John Garnett warning of his danger, till he was safe in their hands.

So he sat and smoked in silence, stretching his legs across his tent-door, while Waif bit her lip in an agony of remorse within, and the snow fell fast through the darkness without. But towards dawn the air turned colder and the sky began to clear. Fin Cooper rose, shook himself, drank a mouthful of brandy, and bestowing a sarcastic nod on its inmates, left the tent to saddle his horse and depart.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]