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OR,

THE RISING IN THE NORTH.

AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE OF THE DAYS OF ELIZABETH.

By E. M. Stewart.

CHAPTER VIII.—(CONTINUED).

Sir Philip's question as to the removal of Lucy from his house, had its purpose, and he was not destitute of a hope that he might yet overcome the two courtiers, where he might not venture to defy them. It was easy to afford to Lucy the means of escape; Leicester and Hatton should not boast as if they were disappointed. But they were at least as anxious as himself, and when they dryly informed him that they bore the Queen's command, that he should at once accompany them back to Whitehall, Sir Philip feared for the accomplishment of his designs.

"Meanwhile," said Leicester, "will it please these good Philip, to order for us some slight addition to our morning meal, which we took scantily and in haste, so anxious were we to get ready ere we see a friend as thyself; in truth, thou art a most incomparable wight, or thou wouldst not have required me to make to thee such a request.

"Nay," said Hatton laughing, as Sir Philip was advancing towards the door, "we will spare thee, in our friendship, the trouble of summoning thy servants."

As he spoke thus, he rang a silver hand bell, and Clement, who waiting in the ante-room, made his appearance. To this man the Earl and his confederate issued their commands, with as much confidence as though they had each been the master of the house, while that unfortunate individual sat despondingly apart from his malicious friends, balancing between his irritation against Lucy and that which he bore to Sir Christopher. As for the maiden, if he could not keep her in his own control, he would have contented his malice with the sufferings and disgrace which she would inevitably experience from the power of the profligate courtier; but to suffer the latter openly to triumph over him was a mortification which his vanity could not patiently brook. Still he knew that his fortunes, almost his life, might be at his rival's disposal, and upon a little reflection, he by no means felt prepared to resign either one or the other for the sake of a damsel who had flung terms of discourtesy upon his proposed devotion. Sir Philip was a true philosopher; he resolved, if he found the evil irremediable, to endure it with all appearance of composure, and part with his rose nobles, the fatal wagers, with a grace; nay, he resolved, should matters really arrive at that extremity, in which he must give up the damsel to Sir Christopher, that he would invite his saucy companions to witness her departure from the house, and protest that such a termination to the whole affair had been previously concerted between Hatton and himself. Upon all these prudent expedients was Sir Philip resolved, in case of the worst extremity, but he was equally determined that such an extremity should never arrive, if he could by any measure of fraud or violence prevent it.

In accordance, therefore, with these wise determinations, he assumed suddenly an air of cordiality and complaisance towards his guests; he pressed them to partake of the delicate viands which were served for their refreshment, and with his own hand proffered to them full goblets of the most luscious wines. While the three, in whose hearts reigned nothing but hatred and deceit, were thus seated in all appearance of friendship at the same board, came a messenger from London in haste to the Earl Leicester; he bore a small billet, bound with a skein of scarlet silk, and securely sealed. A flush as of anger or surprise crossed the brow of the nobleman as he perused it, but that flush quickly passed away, and handing the letter to Hatton, he enquired whether it were not well that they should return speedily to London.

"So, indeed, it seemeth, gracious Lord," said Sir Christopher, "as he handed back the billet. An hour's hard riding will scarce suffice to bring you to the appointed trying place. If it please you to depart at once, I will myself stay to accompany our dear Philip to London; for I know," added Hatton, with a malicious sneer, "I know that he liketh not the lonesomeness of this house, or solitary riding; and for the maiden, Lucy Fenton," "it irks me to

make her for a few days a burden on his hospitality, but he will pardon such intrusion, since I do not call upon him to undergo the fatigue of helping the damsel to wile away the weary hours."

"A just reflection," said Leicester, "and one the propriety of which Sir Philip will no doubt admit. No design could be more excellent than that thou shouldst bear our good friend company; I will myself immediately depart. Many thanks to thee, Philip, for thy pleasant entertainment: I applaud thy wisdom which has so justly weighed our friendship against the light smile of the little citizen."

With these words Leicester withdrew from the apartment. He did not however, immediately quit the house, but crossing the hall, and ascending the great staircase, he turned with the air of a person well acquainted with the mansion, down one of the narrow passages which divulged from the great gallery, and entered a small apartment in which sat a solitary female. A frame with tapestry, upon which she had been working, was before her, but the needle had fallen from her hand, and her fast dropping tears were defacing the gay colors of the figures in that frame—the parting of the Saxon Earl Ethelwolf from his treacherous wife Elfrieda, ere he set out upon his fatal hunting expedition with King Edgar.

The attire of this woman upon whom Leicester had so suddenly intruded was humble as might have befitted one of the meanest servants in the house of Sir Philip Wynyard. She wore a garb of dark stuff, made in such a fashion that had her figure possessed any pretensions to beauty it would have been effectually disguised. This unbecoming garment was drawn up even about the throat, and her uncouth hair fell in neglected tresses over her shoulders. Absorbed in her reverie of sorrow, the female did not notice the entrance of Lord Leicester; and he stood for a few minutes with his eyes bent upon her countenance, whose brilliant beauty seemed to have been injured by grief rather than time. Some unwonted and strong emotion it must have been, which made even his firm features, practised forever to the task of deception, tremble with an almost convulsive pang, and raised in his throat that suffocating sensation which forbade him to enter upon speech. It was a sad sight—that which was before him—the loveliest of nature's works withered by the hand of the spoiler. The ghastly paleness of the sunken cheeks, furrowed with the current of many tears, the black eyes glaring like meteors through those tears, the sharp, angular appearance of the once admirable profile, the silken raven tresses untimely grown wiry and grey—these were tokens of anguish and decay, that for a time affected even the heart of the selfish and libertine Leicester.

A slight movement which he made roused the attention of the female, and when she looked upon her features faded, as she beheld him, to a yet more death-like hue, and she sunk, half fainting from her chair. But a whisper of his voice, a touch of his hand, seemed all potent to revive her, and raising herself to her former position she grasped that hand with painful violence, and fixed her eyes full upon his face with an intense and burning agony. There was something of kindness in the tone of the few words which he spoke to her, but that very kindness seemed to bewilder her to whom it was addressed.

"It is long since I heard that you were," she said, in a low, incoherent whisper, as if doubting the evidence of her own senses.

"Nay, not so long," returned the Earl, "it is but one little month since last I visited Sir Philip and did I not speak with you then?"

"Yes, yes, you spoke to me, you did in deed speak to me; but not as you have spoken now," answered the woman; "oh, no, it was not the voice whose brief sweetness even now almost enchanted me to the dear delusions of long departed years; you spoke to me, but it was in that voice which has so fearfully and so often meted to me the reward of my sin."

"These are vain fancies," said Leicester, taking her hand.

"Yes, they are indeed vain fancies," she replied; "it is a vain fancy to drink in, even at this late period, the dear intoxicating draught of hope—to hang with maddening emotion on those whispered accents of your tongue—to feel, after the perjury, the neglect of years, that were a home again to be forsaken, a parent again to be destroyed, a brother's blood to stain your dagger's point, I should dare all that sin and misery as I did before; that I should forget your guilt while you graced me with your love, and that when that transient love had palled, when the fever of passion was no more, and you cast me as worthless from your arms, that when like the stricken hound I should come crouching to your feet, praying in the meanness of my base affection to become the veriest pander to your will, the humblest of your household slaves, so you denied me not the bitter delight of living under the same roof that sheltered you of hearing the sound of your voice, though it gave me naught but words of loathing and contempt. Yes, this is indeed, a vain fancy, to think that these things may be again, which false, hideous, maddening as they were, were yet preferable, ah, how preferable! to the torpor of despair, the torments of a despised yet never-dying passion, the plodding course of crime, without even the reward of crime's momentary delight which has preyed upon my heart for years!"

"I dreamed not," said Leicester, in a yet more soothing tone, "that the time had indeed arrived when you would turn from the profers of my penitent and returning love with a look of incredulity and neglect—that I could plead, and you deny to trust me! Still less did I dream that you would refuse the cup of vengeance whom offered to your lips."

The woman looked up into his face as if she expected to see written there the evidence of his heart's deep treachery; but it was not traceable on his lofty brow, in the dark brilliancy of his eyes, or in the sweet incandescence of that smile which won back the wretched female, to all the guilty delusions of her youth. She pressed her hands for a moment on her brow, as if to still its constant and vehement throbbings. Amid all the wreck of her once firm intellect, the agonies of her withered heart, she yet retained enough of penetration, to feel assured that the seducer was, but practicing his arts. "But, oh! the miserable self-delusion of a woman's heart,

which loves even to be deceived! She felt, that guilty one, that to be so deceived by her betrayer was a joy matched by none other that the world could give. What matter were his motives? He spoke to her gently, he looked on her with the eyes of yore, and with a deep sigh she exclaimed—"Have I not been, am I not forever yours? Some dark design, such as, alas! I know you, are but too prompt and capable to frame, lurks no doubt, beneath this seeming return of your affection; but I reckon not, I ask not your motives—what would you wish me?"

"Meet me, then, to-night," said Leicester, "in the woods about the palace, at the hour of eight, and be prepared to quit this dwelling. I will never drive you from me more. Do not, therefore, misunderstand me. I am prepared to test sharply the amount of that affection, of the continuance of which you so fondly boast; a service of skill and danger I require at your hands, one, perhaps, which may be in some degree painful to perform, but meet me at the hour which I have named, and you shall learn more."

With these words the Earl quitted the apartment and was soon far on his road to London; whether he was speedily followed by Hatton and Sir Philip Wynyard, to whom the precautions of his self-styled friend would not even allow an opportunity of speaking to his servants respecting Lucy.

CHAPTER X.

Now Sir is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat, With short, shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing Or where the beetle winds His small, but sullen horn.

COLLINS.

The hours, meanwhile, lengthened almost interminably by her gloomy thoughts, yet waned too quickly for Lucy Fenton, who well remembered the promise made by Clement, that he would return in the evening, accompanied by the detestable Ralph Adams. Throughout the day, too, she had shuddered from the fear of a visit from her worst persecutor, Sir Philip; and now, as the dying sunbeams streamed red upon the dew-stained walls of her prison, she prayed for that firmness which she feared would fail her, when its assistance was most required. That sunbeam had not melted into the general obscurity of twilight when she was startled by the harsh creaking of a key in her dungeon door, and in another minute the withered countenance of Clement protruded itself into the apartment. The sight of the unhappy girl might have excited the tenderest feelings in any heart but that of him by whom she was now addressed. Her fair hair, loosened from the bands which had confined it, fell in long ringlets over her neck, and was touched with a yet brighter hue by the departing sunbeam, which hovered about her brow like a halo; the pain of the bruises which she had received in her attempt at escape, united with the anxiety of her mind, had thrown her into a slight fever, and the crimson tint of that fever spread upon her cheek gave a sparkling lustre to her deep blue eyes. She was leaning at the moment when Clement entered, in a reclining posture against the wall of her prison; on the appearance of her jailer she clasped her hands and casting her eyes upwards, prayed fervently for support amid the dangers by which she was surrounded.

"Didst think we would not come?" enquired the Puritan, with a malignant laugh; "be patient, be patient, damsel, we will be here anon—I and my friend, Ralph, sore wounded he is, and sick almost unto death; but he will rise from his couch to look upon the punishments of the wicked, and he will come hither, maiden, to gaze with glad eyes on the judgment which is decreed against thy idolatry! Aye, though it be late in the watches of the night, yet doubt not that we will come."

With these words, accompanied by a low chuckle, Clement withdrew, leaving the wretched girl to gather fortitude as she best might. In addition to her mental distress, Lucy was now severely oppressed by bodily indisposition, the sustenance of bread and water with which she had been provided was very insufficient for her support, and her weakness was such that she could with difficulty walk across her narrow prison; her limbs, too, were stiff with the fall of the preceding night. She had no warm cloak, or other outer covering, and as the sun went down, and the sharp winds of an autumn evening began to blow through the prison gratings, her teeth chattered with intense cold.

This night, the second of Lucy's imprisonment, was, it may be remembered, the same on which Lord Dacre had visited the ambassador, Vitell, and was after, ready a witness to the destruction of Willoughton's house at Charing. The moon did not rise till a late hour, and in the almost palpable darkness Lucy could not discern her own upheld hand; while if the wind did but sob somewhat louder, she would start and tremble at the sound, her busy fancy shaping a thousand dreadful forms in the dense obscurity of her prison. It had now been dark for more than an hour; for the days in the middle of October are but short; she had counted the deep strokes of a distant clock, as it tolled the hour of seven, and its solemn sounds had scarcely died upon the passing wind when she was startled by the key of her prison door again grating in the lock. The bolts were withdrawn cautiously and slowly, as if the person seeking admittance were desirous of avoiding noise; then the door opened, but the darkness was so thick that Lucy could not distinguish the form of the intruder.

"Maiden, poor maiden, if thy have not destroyed you with their cruelty, speak," said a voice, not only in a whisper, but one which was evidently disguised. "Maiden," it repeated, with something of impatience, "for the love of heaven speak, if you are here."

"Ah, I am here indeed," murmured the miserable Lucy. "Is that one who would bring me relief, who would restore me to liberty?"

"Aye," answered the voice, "the moment for escape has arrived; lose it not; for it is precious. Where are you? In pity to yourself do not delay."

With these words the speaker entered the prison, feeling amid the darkness for Lucy, who faint and ill as she was, yet rose, insensible to all bodily suffering, at the mention of that blessed word "escape." She grasped the hand of her friend—it was that of a woman.

"Is it Euphrasia?" she enquired.

"What matters it, foolish damsel!" said her deliverer, "who it is that frees thee from the hands of thy oppressors? Be thou contented to be free, and as you value your safety, no delay. Here, wrap this mantle round you; take my arm, quick, quick, as you would escape."

"Alas!" murmured Lucy, "leave me, kind stranger, to my fate; do not involve yourself in its dangers. My limbs are cramped and bruised; I faint even for want of food."

"Poor child!" said her friend, in a compassionate tone; "it was even that which I feared, and therefore provided me with a cordial. Here take this flask—a draught of its contents will restore your failing strength."

Lucy gladly accepted the proffered refreshment, and speedily found that her deliverer had not over-rated its efficacy. Revived and strengthened, she took the hand of her kind friend, who had carefully wrapped her in a warm cloak and hood, and guided by that friend, she speedily crossed the hateful threshold of her prison. More than once in the profound darkness she missed her footing, and slipped down two or three of the narrow stairs at a time—so rapidly did her conductor, who was evidently well acquainted with the house, proceed. On reaching the bottom of the staircase which led to the prison, the deliverer of Lucy did not turn towards the great gallery. This the girl at once discovered by the confined nature of the air around, which convinced her that she was being led along passages made in the thickness of the walls. Once when a cold current of wind passed over her face, she knew that she was crossing one of the principal corridors, and she then caught the momentary twinkle of a distant taper; but her friend, as if fearful of its approach, dragged her forwards with increased velocity, and pushing open a door, they were once more immersed in the labyrinth of a narrow and intricate passage. Again a long flight of stairs, a few steps across the landing place, and her conductor unlocked a door, the heart of Lucy beat high with the sweet intoxication of hope, as she felt the cool breath of heaven fan her burning brow, and found herself without the hated walls of Sir Philip's mansion.

The darkness less dense than within the house, did not prevent her from faintly discerning the outline of her companion's form. It was about the height of Euphrasia; but if it were that strange woman who had freed her from her imprisonment, she evidently did not wish for recognition, and Lucy therefore took in silence her extended hand, and hurried with her down that long avenue of elms which she had trod the preceding night. Her heart sunk, however, at the recollection of that vainly attempted escape, and she could not forbear whispering her fears of approaching the fatal building, from the window of which she had been seen by Ralph.

"Fear not, damsel," replied her conductress, "that building is now untenanted, and the wretched Ralph in no condition to molest you; his hand will shortly be severed from his body to preserve his life.—Besides, we pass not out at the great entrance."

They had now reached the out-building, and in spite of the assurance of her friend, Lucy yet gazed anxiously up at its dim walls, and she felt relieved when she perceived that all was dark and silent within. Her conductress passed the tenement, and the great gates near it, and striking into the devious path amid the thickets, she soon reached a low door in the garden wall, which she unlocked, and the delighted Lucy found herself once more really at liberty. Her conductress now paused to express a regret at the impossibility of accompanying her further.

"But were I to advise you," she said, "it would be to seek shelter for the night in some cottage, rather than dare the dangers which you may encounter by journeying alone to London to-night."

"Fain would I take that kind advice," answered Lucy, "but alas! should my prison be visited, and my escape discovered, may I not expect that the servants of Sir Philip will search the cottages in the neighborhood?"

"Your prison, damsel, will not be visited again this night. The wretch Clement will be too much occupied in attending to his associate Ralph. His declaration that he would visit you again was a mere taunt to excite your fears of which I heard him boast ere I came to liberate you. Besides that, Sir Philip is little loved in the neighborhood. But to ensure your safety keep upon this high road for about half a mile beyond the limits of the gardens, and you will come to a thicket, with a pond at its left corner, overshadowed by an old oak. The night is not so dark but that you may discern the tree, and the still waters beneath it. Plunge fearlessly into that thicket, and you will there find a cottage, the inhabitants of which will, I know, afford you both food and shelter; for they are good and kind people, and not the less cheerfully will they assist you when they learn that you seek to escape from the toils of the licentious Sir Philip. As to discovery, you need not fear it there, that humble dwelling is secured by superstition. Sir Philip has not a retainer who would approach the thicket where it lies concealed. A murder was some years since committed beneath that old oak, and the body of the victim was for a time concealed in the waters of the pond. It is commonly believed that the unquiet spirit of the murdered person haunts the thicket; but if you will venture to enter it you may hold yourself as safe."

"Anywhere," exclaimed Lucy, "to be secure from the infamous Sir Philip!"

"Farewell, then," said the guide, "I may not delay longer; may Heaven protect you, poor damsel, and shield you forever from such misery, such self-reproach as mine!"

With these words, the female grasped the hand of Lucy with passionate earnestness, and walked rapidly away in a direction contrary to that in which she had directed the girl to proceed. It may be believed that the enfranchised Lucy lost no time in following the instructions which she had received, and dismissing all terrors save those of a re-capture, she fled along the road with as much speed as the darkness would permit. Scarcely had she passed the garden boundary when the sound of horse's hoofs met her ears. With instinctive precaution Lucy shrank behind a tree on the roadside, and in that position perceived a cavalier, followed by a person, apparently an attendant, ride past. She did not venture forth immediately, and when the cavalier had passed her by perhaps some hundred yards, the tramp suddenly ceased. She now hesitated whether to advance or recede, when the sound of

the cavalier's horse, apparently returning, met her ears. In a few minutes he again galloped past, but behind him was seated a figure wrapped in a dark mantle, in which, dimly as Lucy could perceive it, she fancied that she recognized her late conductress.

When all was again silent, she stole from her place of concealment, and soon reached the thicket which had been pointed out to her. But when she stood beneath the sapless branches of the old oak, and looked upon the silent pool beneath it, discovered by its shining surface, which seemed doubly black and stagnant in the dead obscurity of the sky, she shuddered at the recollection of the story which she had heard, and almost fancied that she could perceive through the darkness the gliding figure of the murdered person. Faintly could she descry the path into the thickets, whose recesses she yet feared to enter; but fortifying her mind with the recollection of the greater danger which she incurred of pursuit by Sir Philip, she ventured on a winding path, fringed on either side by a copse of hazel and blackberry. Suddenly, when she had reached the heart of the thicket, she came upon a smooth, open spot, where she could feel that the grass, which had been suffered to grow long in the paths, was mown smooth beneath her feet. At the upper end of this lawn stood a low roofed cottage. A light shining through the chinks of the shutters, and the low murmuring of voices, announced that the inhabitants, whoever they might be, had not yet retired to rest. With a quickened step Lucy approached the dwelling, endeavoring, before she applied for admittance, to obtain a glimpse of its inmates through the chinks before mentioned. She then perceived a neat apartment, illumined not only by a lamp that stood upon a small table, spread apparently for supper, but also by the ruddy glow of a large fire that blazed upon the hearth. By this light she perceived, seated near the fire, a pleasant-looking elderly woman, attired in a garment of dark stuff, with a neat linen coat; opposite to her sat a man, whose back was turned to Lucy, who, summoning all her courage and somewhat reassured by the kindly countenance of the female inhabitant of the cottage, now knocked timidly at the door.

The summons was speedily answered by the woman of the house; but her countenance expressed surprise, no less than welcome, when, on Lucy flinging back her hood, she beheld the lovely features of a young girl, a petitioner for hospitality in that lone spot and at that dreary hour.

"Shelter thee, poor child, for the night," she said, "that will I indeed. Woo beside the hour when Cicely Merton shuts her door against the desolate stranger! Come in, come in, damsel, for the night is cold. Here, Walter, good man, a place by the fire for a wayworn wanderer."

The man rose at these words, and, taking Lucy by the hand, placed her in a low oak chair near the fire, while the good woman again made fast the door of their dwelling, and, having done so, came forwards with an inquiry as to the cause of Lucy's lonely and late wandering. The voice of kindness, the sense of security, were, however, too overpowering, and Lucy burst into tears. The honest couple endeavored to soothe her distress, and, when restored to composure, she briefly narrated to them the manner in which she had been torn from her home. Renewing her request for protection until the following morning, when, she said, if the master of the house would take the trouble to accompany her to London, she was well assured that both her father and uncle would liberally reward him for his trouble and for the protection which was now afforded to her.

All offers of remuneration were, however, rejected both by her host and hostess. They declared that they considered themselves happy to be of any assistance to a virtuous damsel escaping from so terrible a snare, and pressed her to partake of a boiled pullet which Cicely had just placed smoking upon the table, and which was flanked in a most seemingly manner by part of a gammon of bacon, a large brown loaf, and a foaming tankard of ale. To this proposal the fatigued and half-famished Lucy gladly acceded; and, when revived by warmth and food, she took a closer survey of her kind entertainers and of their dwelling. Cicely was a tall, good looking woman of about fifty years of age. Her husband might have been somewhat older. His hair, of an iron gray, was scattered thinly over his forehead, but his complexion was still fresh, and his tall, muscular figure unbent by age. There was a general appearance of neatness and comfort about the abode of this honest pair, which, unfortunately, was not common in that age, when the splendor of the nobility, the gentry, and the citizens was sadly contrasted by the poverty and discomfort of the peasant. But in the cottage of Walter Merton, instead of the joint stools, the single rough board, the earthen vessels common to his class, there were neat oaken chairs and tables, polished by the industrious hand of the good wife; a large press on one side of the room, in which Lucy sat, was filled with linen, and the cooking utensils of brass and pewter, which hung upon the walls, shone brightly as the blaze from the hearth danced upon them. A door, which led to an inner apartment—for the cottage contained no upper story—had in it a few diamond-shaped panes of green looking glass, through which Lucy perceived a bedstead, hung with dark curtains. Cicely smiled on perceiving whether her eyes were directed, and observed that that was their best chamber, in which she must stand so much in need. "But you must not suppose, Mistress Fenton," she added good humoredly, "that we have not another sleeping apartment; there, and she pointed to another door, "is the closet in which I and my husband sleep; but it is not so large or pleasant, nor has it any window."

Wearied as she was with the dangers and excitement of the past day and night, Lucy gladly complied with the recommendation of her kind hosts, and was conducted by Cicely to the little inner chamber, which she found in all respects neat and comfortably furnished. The good, Cicely attended her, with the solicitude of a mother; nor would she leave the room till she had seen her in bed. "As is not uncommon when the frame has been exposed to extraordinary fatigue, Lucy was unable at once to obtain repose, lying awake till long after her host and hostess had retired." "At length, however, she fell into a profound sleep, which lasted still about two in the morning, when she was suddenly roused