

LORNA DOONE

By R. D. BLACKMORE
CHAPTER LXVII
LORNA STILL IN LORNA

Although a man may be as simple as the flowers of the field, knowing what but scarcely why, he closes to the bitter wind; and feeling why, but scarcely when, he opens to the genial sun; yet without his questing much into the soul of himself—to which his misery may have a general notion how he happens to be getting on.

I felt myself to be getting on better than at any time since the last wheated harvest; as I took the lane to Kensington upon the Monday evening. For although no time was given in my Lorna's letter, I was not inclined to wait more than decency required. And when I went and watched the house, decency would not allow me to knock on the Sunday evening, especially when I found at the corner that his lordship was at home.

The lanes and fields between Charing Cross and the village of Kensington, or were at the time, more than reasonably infested with footpads and with highwaymen. However, my stature and doing more than casting sheep's eyes at me. For it was still broad daylight, and the view of the distant villages, Chelsea, Battersea, Tyburn, and others, as well as a few large houses, among the haws and toward the river, made it seem less lonely. Therefore I sang a song in the broadest Essex dialect, which caused a little amazement in the minds of all who met me.

When I came to Earl Brandri's house, my natural modesty forbade me to appear at the door for guests; therefore I went to the entrance for servants and retainers. Here, to my great surprise, who should come and let me in but little Gwenny Carfax, whose very existence had almost escaped my memory. Her mistress, no doubt, had seen me coming, and sent her to save trouble. But when I offered to kiss Gwenny in my joy and comfort to see a farm-house face again, she said she was ashamed, and turned away, and would hardly speak to me.

I followed her to a little room, furnished very daintily, and there she ordered me to wait. "Well," thought I, "if the mistress and the maid are alike in temper, better it had been for me to abide at Master Ramsack's." But almost ere my thought was done, I heard the light quick step which I knew as well as "Watch," my dog, knew mine; and my breast began to tremble, like the trembling of an archer ere the key-stone is put in.

Almost ere I hoped—for fear and hope were so entangled that they hindered one another—the velvet hangings of the door-way parted with a little doubt, and there stood my Lorna, in her perfect beauty, stood before the crimson folds, and her dress was all pure white, and her cheeks were rosy pink, and her lips were scarlet.

Like a maiden of such skill and sense checking violent impulse, she stayed there for a moment only, just to be admired; and then like a woman, she came to me, seeing how alarmed I was by the hand she offered me. I took, and raised it to my lips with fear, as a thing too good for me. "Is that all?" she whispered; and then her eyes gleamed up at me, and in another instant she was weeping on my neck.

"Darling Lorna, Lady Lorna," I cried, in astonishment, yet unable to keep her closer to me, and closer; "surely, though I love you, this is not as it should be."

serious distance. And before I had ceased wondering—for if such things go on, we might ring the church bells while sitting in our back kitchen—the little Gwenny Carfax came, with a grave and sullen face.

"Gwenny," began my Lorna, in a tone of high rank and dignity, "go and fetch the letters which I gave you at various times for dispatch to Mistress Ridd."

"How can I fetch them when they are gone? It is no use for him to tell me lies."

"Now, Gwenny, can you look at me?" I asked, very sternly; for the matter was no joke to me, after a year's unhappiness.

"I don't want to look at 'ee. What should I look at a young man for, although he did offer to kiss me?"

I saw the spite and impudence of this last remark; and so did Lorna, although she could not quite refrain from smiling, so kind to you. Your father shall know, said Lorna, very demurely, "if you thought it honest to keep the letters, was it honest to keep the money?"

At this the Cornish maiden broke for 'ee. "He shall have every farthing of it." And so she flung out of the room.

"And, Gwenny," said Lorna very softly following under the door hangings, "if it is not honest to keep the money, it is not honest to keep the letters, which would have been worth more than any gold or silver to me, as well as to you. Your father shall know the whole, Gwenny, unless you tell the truth."

"Now, a will tell all the truth," this strange maiden answered, talking to herself at least as much as to her mistress, while she went out of sight and hearing. And then I was so glad at having my own Lorna again, that I could not be content to let her go, and true to my word, I went through all of it, that I would have forgiven Gwenny for treason, or even for murder.

overprone, when rebt by my slowness to steady her. "I will tell him, John; I must tell him, John. It is mean of me to conceal it."

I thought that she meant all about my love, which we had endeavored thrice to drill into his fine old ears, but could not make him comprehend a syllable of bringing the house down; and so I said, "By all means, darling; have another try at it."

Lorna, however, looked at me—for her eyes told more than tongue—such as she spoke very kindly.

"I meant about his poor son, dearest—the son of his old age almost—whose loss threw him into that dreadful cold, which ended in his losing the use of his dear old ears. I believe if we could only get him to Plovers Barrows for a month he would be able to hear again. And look you, John, you know; and I hope that you will be able to hear me long after you are seventy, John."

"Well," said I, "God settles that, or any rate I have no time to this day to ask you questions when are over fifty. Now let me know what you want, Lorna. The idea of my being seventy! But you would still be beautiful."

"To the one who loves me," she answered, trying to make wrinkles in her pure bright forehead. "But if you will have common sense—as you always will, John, whether I will it or otherwise—I want to know whether I am bound, in honor and a conscience, to tell my dear and good old uncle what I know about his son?"

"First, let me understand quite clearly," said I, never being in a hurry, except when passion moves me, "what his lordship thinks at present, and how far his mind is urged with sorrow and anxiety. This was not the first time we had spoken of this matter."

"Why you know, John, well enough," she answered, wondering at my coolness, "that my poor uncle still believes that his one beloved son will come to light and search for himself, and that his property is settled on that supposition. He knows that young Alan always was what he calls a 'freeless ne'er-do-weel'; he cannot believe that he will die without his son coming back to him, and he always has a bedroom ready, and a bottle of Alan's favorite wine cool from the ice-chest, and he has made me work him a pair of slippers from the size of a moldy boot; and if he hears of a new tobacco, such as he hates the smell of, he will go to the other end of London to get it; but if any one says 'Alan,' even in the place outside the door, he will make his courteous bow to the very highest visitor, and will bid him to sit down, and get no one to leave."

"It is a piteous thing," I said, for Lorna's eyes were full of tears. "I will tell you, John, that he is the pet scheme of his life. I am to grow more beautiful, and more highly taught, and graceful, until it pleases Alan to come back and demand me. Can he break it open; and at this the guilty maid or woman ran away. These three rogues—for rogues they were, and no charity may deny it—burst into the Earl Brandri's room with a light, and a crowbar, and fire-arms. I thought to myself that this was hard upon an honest workman, and if further mischief could be saved, I would try to save it."

justice of the peace. And now my wonderful luck appeared; for the merit of having defeated and caught them would never raise me one step in the State, or in public consideration, if they had never been common robbers, or even notorious murderers. But when these fellows were recognized by some one in the court as Protestant witnesses out of employment, companions and understrappers to Dates, and Dates, and Carstairs, and hand in glove with Dangleford, Tuberville and Dugdale—in a word, the very men against whom His Majesty the King bore the bitterest animosity, but whom the law had failed to catch—when this was laid before the public (with emphasis and admiration) at least a dozen men came up whom I had never seen before, and prayed me to accept their congratulations, and to be sure to remember them; for all were of neglected merit, and required no more than a piece of luck, I answered them very modestly, and each according to his worth, as stated by himself, who of course could judge the best. The magistrate made me many compliments, ten times more than I deserved, that His Majesty might see them. And ere the case was thoroughly heard, and those poor fellows were committed, more than a score of generous men stepped forward with a hundred pounds, wherewith to buy a new court suit when called before His Majesty.

Now this may seem very strange to us who live in a better and purer age, or say at least that we do so—and yet who are to condemn our fathers for teaching us better manners, and at their own expense? With these points any citizen would be loath to lend a hand, and there I stood, and expressed my doubt, and not being too sure of myself, and to tell the truth, although I had seen so little of the world as yet, that I could not be certain of my own mind, as not so much that they paid me, as that they found out so soon the expediency of doing it.

In the course of that same afternoon I was asked by His Majesty, he had summoned first the good Earl Brandri, and received the tale from him, not without exaggeration, although my lord was a Scotchman. But the chief thing His Majesty cared to know was, what beyond all possible doubt, these were the precious fellows from perjury turned to robbery.

Being fully assured at last of this, His Majesty rebuked his hands, and ordered the boots of a stricter pattern (which he himself had invented to be brought at once, that he might have them in the best possible order. And he ordered them to be made, because his fear that there was no man in London quite competent to work them. Nevertheless he would try one or two, rather than wait for him to please till the tools came from Edinburgh.

The next thing he did was to send for me; and in great alarm and hurry I put on my best clothes, and hired a fashionable hair-dresser, and drank a half glass of ale, because both my hands were shaking. Then forth I set, with my holy staff, wishing myself well out of it. I was shown at the door, and before I desired it, I entered His Majesty's presence, and there I stood most humbly, and made the best bow I could think of.

As I could not advance any further—for I saw that the Queen was present, which frightened me—His Majesty, in the most gracious manner, came down the room to encourage me. And as I remained with my head bent down, he told me to stand up and look at him, he said to stand up, young man, he said; "thy form is not one to be forgotten. Where was it? Thou art bad men trying vainly to break open the pewter box, and the third with a pistol-muzzle laid to the right of his lordship. With foul face and yet foul words, this man was demanding the key of the box, which the other men could by no means open, neither drag it from the chain."

"I tell you," said this aged Earl, beginning to understand at last what these rogues were up to, "I will give you, I tell you, it all belongs to my boy, Alan. No one else shall count your moments, lord. The key is in your old crumpled hand. One, two; and at three I shoot you."

I saw that the old man was abroad; not with fear, but with great wonder; and the regrets of deathness. And I saw that rather would he be shot than let these men rob his son, buried now, or laid to bleach in the tangles of the wood, three, or it might be four years ago, but still alive to his father. Heretofore my heart was moved, and I resolved to interfere. The thief with the pistol began to count, as I crossed the floor very quietly, while the Earl fearfully gazed at the muzzle, but clenched still tighter his wrinkled hand. The villain, with hair all over his eyes, and the great horse-pistol levelled, cried "three," and pulled the trigger; but luckily, at that very moment, I struck up the barrel with my staff, so that the shot pierced the tester, and then with a spin and a thwack I brought the good holly bow upon the rascal's head in a manner which stretched him upon the floor.

Meanwhile the other two robbers had taken the alarm, and rushed at me, one with a pistol and one with a hanger, which forced me to be very lively. Fearing the pistol most, I flung the heavy velvet curtain of the bed across that he might not see where to aim at me, and then stooping very quickly, I caught up the senseless robber, and set him up for a shield and target; whereupon he was shot immediately, without having the pain of knowing it; and a happy thing it was for him. Now the other two were at my mercy, being men below the average strength; and no chance to a powerful man armed with a stout cudgel, and thoroughly practical in single-stick.

SERPENTS' TONGUE

After the humiliating

the school board, which had resigned, Ellis Rhineland locked the heavy doors, and walked off dejectedly down the street.

She prayed that no one should see her ignominious retreat, not reckoned with Dominic, but by the roadside stemmed violets.

"Say, you goin' home?" she asked, scrambling up, and locking the door behind her. "You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here. You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here. You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here."

The child hopped along shaking with wicked laughter, and thought caused her to curl up from her mischief, and again break into sentences.

"Say, Miss Rhineland, mad with you 'cause you're shakin' for throwin' paper wads at me? You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here. You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here. You ain't got nothin' to do but get out of here."

"Oh, darling, what a cry! Ellis really shied, she had not boarded for weeks with the meekness of a lamb, and she had added, 'stopping for a hug. I'll get it with my trunk,' she thought with relief. She had never seen any more of the school, and she had never seen Mrs. Weeder again. It was a relief to her, and she felt her face and neck crowded close to the ditch.

"Ugh!" she thought, "terror!" She had never seen Mrs. Weeder again. It was a relief to her, and she felt her face and neck crowded close to the ditch.

She knew that no one thoroughly bespatter her fore and back with such a profusion of the roads, how she had expected, now, in her brief exposure, to see Mrs. Weeder again. It was a relief to her, and she felt her face and neck crowded close to the ditch.