

## KATERFELTO,

A STORY OF EXMOOR.

CHAPTER XXVII.

SELF-SACRIFICE.

It was a brisk suitor enough, to do him justice, entertained no very exalted notions of woman's coyness and delicacy, but holding rather certain old-fashioned maxims indicating promptitude and decision, protesting that "faint heart never won fair lady," and always impatient to "strike while the iron was hot." Yet even Parson Gale felt awed to meet that serious, heart-broken gipsy, and he could no more have offered to kiss her cheek than if she had been a queen on the throne.

Coldly, quietly, as though there were nothing more between them than the intercourse of common acquaintance, she informed him of her grandfather's illness, and her own fears for its result, adding that he required constant attendance; and Master Gale must not think her unbecomingly inhospitable if she could spare him only a few minutes of her company in this climacteric and distress.

Perhaps she never thought so well of him as when he released her hand with that respect which real misery commands from the roughest of natures, while he bade her, in a tone of unfeigned sympathy, "Keep her heart up, and never say die; for while there's life there's hope!"

"Not for me, Master Gale!" answered poor Nelly, now breaking down completely. "Oh! grandfather, grandfather! I had but you in the world!" Then she hid her face in her hands, and he saw by the action of her shoulders that she was sobbing as if her heart would break. He dashed a tear from his own rough cheek.

"I'll take my leave now, Mistress Nelly," said he, "only wishing I could be of service to you, or do you good. Is there nothing you can think of? I'd go fasting and barefoot from here to—Jerusalem!" declared the Parson, who had not an idea where it was, "if I thought I could take the weight of a feather 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 Carew, 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, miry 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 gipsies had pitched their camp. Through it he rode like a windmill, scattering the swartly 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 Gal.

"Katerfelto!" repeated the gipsy. "He would not thank you for calling him by his name!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

even now I take no denial, Master Katerfelto. If you come not of good will, I shall carry you thither by force."

"Needs must, when the devil drives," answered the other; "and the proverb seems to hold good with a West-country Parson. But, I pray you, let us ride softly and fairly. Lancots and scalpels are none the better for shaking, and I had as lief be hanged by King George, as break my neck in a Devonshire bog!"

Nervous of temperament, loving his ease, and unaccustomed to the saddle, there yet lurked in Katerfelto that professional instinct which seems to pervade every disciple of the healing science. He left his dinner unfinished for a scamper over the moor, regretful indeed, yet with admirable promptitude in the hope of saving a fellow creature's life. He had practised medicine and surgery before he took to conspiracy and imposition, entertained sufficient confidence in his own skill, believing it greater than it was; and, but for the Parson's reckless speed, and the rough nature of the ground they traversed, would have experienced a doctor's gratification in the excitement of a new case, and the exercise of his art. But that rushing, reckless, headlong ride put to flight all thoughts save those of immediate self-preservation. Fin Cooper's roan, no matter how he came by it, was a swift and sure-footed galloway, with a hard mouth and a determined will of his own. The Parson had no sooner mounted, than he urged his horse to a gallop, and proceeded at that pace up and down the steepest hills, along the most broken paths, over the roughest ground, and through the tallest heather without pause or hesitation; while the galloway, not to be outdone, followed close in its leader's track, now leaping a hidden ditch, now swerving sharply aside to avoid a ravine, anon plunging through a bog up to its girths, with snorts of emulation and defiance. Finally, when the Parson came to an abrupt halt in the gloom of Horner woods it bumped against his horse's quarters with a jerk, that fairly shot Katerfelto out of the saddle on its neck and ears.

"I pray you give me a moment's breathing space, urged the discomfited rider, as he shuffled back into his seat, "else 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 Garnet 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 ever 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. His presence filled the Charlatan with indignation and alarm. They had been concerned together in a conspiracy against the Government, and either of them, so argued Katerfelto, could hang the other. If John Garnet recognized him, it was more than probable that he would endeavor to secure his own safety, or at least a communication of capital punishment, by informing against his confederate.

The gray horse, the arms, the money, all would be traced back to the master-spirit that originated the plot, and there would be no escape for him then! John Garnet must be destroyed at once, without scruple and without delay. The means were close at hand. The Parson made no secret of his attachment to Nelly Carew, and Katerfelto seemed; to know by instinct that in such a character as Gale's, jealousy once aroused could be lulled by nothing short of a deadly and final revenge. After all, he did but an act in self-defence! He owed John Garnet a grudge, perhaps, for the abduction of Waif; but it was no question of petty injuries or reprisals now. Simply a choice of evils. John Garnet or himself had to pay the penalty of high-treason at Tyburn. Of course, it must be John Garnet.

So, when Parson Gale rode down to Porlock on his daily visit of inquiry, the Charlatan motioned him into the little parlor, and closed the door on their conference, with a mysterious face.

"My business here," he began, in his dry, sarcastic tone, "lies with symptoms rather than affections, and concerns the liver more than the heart. Nevertheless, I can understand men's devices, though I cannot sympathize with their follies, and I see well enough, Master Gale, there is no price you would grudge to pay for a pair of blue eyes that are sore with weeping and watching in the chamber overhead."

"What of that?" asked the other abruptly; for Nelly's persistent avoidance of him on the plea of her grandfather's danger vexed him to the heart.

"Not much, in my opinion," answered Katerfelto; "but it may be something in yours. The same cause produces different effects. You carry a pebble in your pocket without inconvenience, but put it in your 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 Garnet!"

"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 Garnet 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 Garnet 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 Garnet acting as well as thinking. His preparations were soon made, a small valise was packed, his

love the shelter of no roof so well as the canopy of heaven. Fin Cooper in his tent, at the door of which crackled a liberal fire of roots and brushwood, filling the interior with warmth, and indeed smoke, declared himself as happy as a king! He had all his comforts about him, and most of his possessions within call, nor wanted a sufficient share of such superfluities as made the luxuries of his hard unsophisticated life. There was a dressed skin for his couch, a good blanket for his coverlet, and a soft shawl doubled over an anker of brandy for his pillow. In the kettle steamed a hare, a brace of partridges, and a haunch from the fore-quarter of a red-deer. With food, rest, and warmth, good liquor in his cup and good tobacco in his pipe, Fin could not but admit that, so long as his tent held waterproof, he was not much to be pitied, even on a Devonshire moor under an early fall of snow. To night, also, he considered himself more fortunate than usual, as he shared these advantages with no less welcome a visitor than Waif, accompanied, for reasons of propriety, by her grandmother, an old Egyptian, reputed to have once been handsome, and of fascinating demeanor, now, to say the least, a remarkable person in appearance, grim, taciturn, given to drink, and seldom condescending to remove a short black pipe from her mouth.

His promised wife, on the contrary, seemed in high spirits, as she was unquestionably in great beauty. Her black hair was flushed and sparkled, her tawny cheeks were flushed with a rich, deep crimson, while her manner betrayed no little self-assurance, a tone something amounting almost to arrogance, when addressed by her future lord. Katerfelto she never had been from childhood, and to-night she was less taciturn than usual, and seemed strangely eager to break such occasional silence as gave scope for her own thoughts.

Fin, looking on her with admiring eyes, did not fail to notice that in figure she had grown thin, to leanness, and that there shone a brilliancy, unnatural even for a gipsy, in the uneasy glances that watched his movements so narrowly, yet never rested for an instant on his face.

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 beldame was busy refilling her pipe, and raised the slender, shapely fingers to her lips, with a comely grace, that a gipsy 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 Romipen of the Romney, a true gipsy marriage, solders thom 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 Romney 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 tass 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 inclemency 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

will be twenty guineas each to spend in drink! If that won't make a blithe wedding, Fin Cooper, I'll engage to remain a bachelor till my dying day!"

The gipsy was a man of business. "And your share, Parson?" he asked, calculating the sum to be divided with great exactitude.

"I don't desire to be paid," replied the Parson. "I do it for the sport!"

Waif leaped from her seat, with flashing eyes, and her hand on the knife she always wore, but sank back laughing wildly, and speaking in short disjointed gasps.

"Good!" she said. "Good! He's the right sort, Fin, this Gorgio. Bid him tell us how he means to set about the job."

Fin Cooper, turning to the Parson, thought he had never seen so wicked a smile as that which gleamed in Gale's eyes, and curled round his mouth while he repeated, "I do it for the sport, lad; he's a right deer, I tell ye; and if I don't set him up to-morrow, I swear I'll never go hunting again."

"That's why you want the roan?" asked Fin, turning the matter over in his mind, as a question of profit and loss.

"Right," answered the Parson; "Dick Boss must be on a good nag, and so must I. If John Garnet should get the wind of us, he'll show a clean pair of heels, you may take your oath. But what of that? Let worst come to worst, four mounted men spreading wide, and knowing every yard of the ground, ought to ride him down, though the gray horse had a wing at each foot instead of an iron shoe. But that's not my plan. Hark ye, Fin; we'll be in the saddle before daybreak, and we'll take him while he's asleep."

Waif stirred uneasily, but only muttered again, "Good! good! Mind what he says, Fin, for surely the Gorgio speaks fair."

"'Tis as easy as drinking out of a glass," continued the Parson, scarce noticing her interruption. "Dick Boss and his roan, his two men riding their own nags, yourself, Fin, on something that can gallop a bit, I never knew you without one—and game old Cassock to bring me along with the best of ye. It would be a rare chase, lad—I could almost wish he might slip through our fingers, and ride for it over the moor, but he'll never have the chance, Fin; he'll never have the chance!"

"Suppose he shows fight, Parson," suggested the gipsy, 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 gipsy, with more of a husband's authority than was yet permissible in his tone. "Where are you going, lass? Come back, I tell ye!"

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 Garnet 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 Garnet, 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 hanganman's cart rumberling over the stones on Tyburn-hill. John Garnet, the man she loved so dearly she would have followed him barefooted 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,

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