

My lord travel in his own coach, you say," he observed, thoughtfully. "How many servants does he take, and are they well armed?"

"Four or four at most," replied Katerfelto, "without counting her ladyship's waiting-maid, and one of these rides on ahead to prepare for his reception, stage by stage, during the journey. They carry a blunderbuss and two brace of pistols among them, no more."

"How far will he proceed in a day?" asked the other. "The roads are at their best just now and the night at their shortest."

"From twenty to thirty miles," answered Katerfelto. "His lordship travels in a light coach with six good horses. You had better not overtake him till to-morrow night. But these details I confide to your own wisdom and discernment. In this purse are a hundred guineas. In that cupboard a saddle, bridle, and brace of pistols. Spend the money, founder the horse, use the weapons at your discretion, but the warrants must be in the fire before his lordship crosses the borders of Somerset, and the gentleman named in them must be warned, at all risks of life and death."

"I understand," said John Garnet, "though I do not yet see how to set about the job."

"It can be done in three ways," observed Katerfelto. "The warrants will be carefully looked after. To put them in your own pocket, you must corrupt the servants, make love to my lady, or rob my lord."

John Garnet considered a moment before he answered. "I think the best plan will be to rob my lord."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A HEAVY STAKE.

The travellers spent their first night agreeably enough. The weather was fine, the inn at Hounslow roomy and luxurious. My lady seemed pleased with the fresh eggs, the country cream. My lord found amusement in the airs and graces of his hostess, who was more than flattered by the notice of so fine a gentleman. Even the servants were good enough to express approval of the ale, and lodging, and the change. Our whole party started next morning in good humor, and the very waiting-maid, who had been in tears for the first six miles out of London, protested that under certain conditions the country might be almost tolerable.

My lord's first footman, a stout high-colored paragon in charge of the blunderbuss, was unobtrusive in his attentions, and Mistress Rachel, as she was called, in the absence of higher game, condescended to receive his homage with the favor five-and-forty shows to five-and-twenty. At a subsequent period indeed she declared "he hadn't the heart of a hen!" but for the present seemed satisfied to accept him as he was.

Such a favorable state of things could not be expected to last four-and-twenty hours. At noon of the second day it began to rain, a trace broke, a horse cast a shoe, the man with the blunderbuss proved useless in a difficulty, Mistress Rachel grew dependent, my lady sulked, my lord swore, the unwieldy vehicle creaked, groaned, swung, and finally stopped in the middle of a hill.

"Let me out!" screamed Lady Bellinger, whose nervous system was of the weakest, and on whose temper fear had an exasperating effect. "I'd rather walk. I will get out, I'll go back,—Richard!—Robin! open the door."

"Don't be a fool!" exclaimed my lord, as the carriage got into motion once more. "How can you go back, Ellen? You're forty miles from London if you're a yard!"

My lady's head-dress vibrated with anger. "I am a fool indeed," she replied, "or I shouldn't be here! And this is the reward of my devotion as a wife. This is your return for my accompanying you into exile. Lord Bellinger, I will speak. Indifference I

know what his lordship was driving at. "Fetch a pack of cards," continued my lord, "and I will teach you."

The landlord excused himself in considerable alarm. "It was too much honor," he said; "he doubted he was too old to learn. Would his lordship like a toast of bread and an olive with his wine?"

"I had rather deal than drink," answered Lord Bellinger, "though I'm in the humor for both. If there's nobody in the house to play a game at whist or ombre, send round to the stable, and tell the ostler I will try my luck with him at all-fours."

The landlord stared; but a bright thought struck him and he observed: "There's a gentleman who wouldn't object to a game of cards, or anything in that way."

"Bravo, Boniface," was the answer. "Carry him my respects—Lord Bellinger's respects—with a bottle of your best, and say, if he is at leisure I shall be happy to wait on him at once."

The landlord delivered his message with alacrity, in less than five minutes John Garnet answered it in person at his lordship's door. He had come to his hostelry for the very purpose of obtaining the introduction he now found so easy; and rather regretted the amount of truth he had wasted after supper in considering how he should make Lord Bellinger's acquaintance, and gain his confidence sufficiently to betray it. With his best bow and pleasant smile, "plain John Garnet" stood on the threshold, and assured the other that no consideration would have induced him to permit his lordship to ascend to the Sunflower till he had himself come down to conduct him upstairs, if he would so far honor his humble apartment, where he would at once direct preparations to be made for the reception of his noble visitor.

"Zounds, man!" answered the other, who at this period of the evening was seldom disposed to stand on ceremony, "we want nothing but a bottle Burgundy and a pack of cards. They are both on the table. Let us sit down at once and make the most of our time."

"Agreed," replied his guest; "and your lordship shall choose the game and the stake."

"What say you to piquet?" asked the nobleman, opening the Burgundy, "Ten guineas a game. Twenty—fifty, if you like?"

John Garnet, reflecting that he knew nothing of his adversary's force, and was himself no great performer, modestly chose the lowest stake, and proceeded to play his hand with as much care as his own preoccupation and the strange position in which he found himself permitted. Piquet is a game requiring no less than skill and practice, undivided attention. John Garnet could not forbear glancing about the room for some symptoms of the documents he desired to make his own; wondering if they were kept in his lordship's pockets, in her ladyship's baggage, under charge of the servants. It is not surprising that at the end of the first game he found himself the better by two glasses of moderate Burgundy, and the worse by ten golden pieces stamped with the image of King George. He ventured a second game, and with the same result.

To do Lord Bellinger justice, he was not a rapacious gambler. He loved winning well enough, but would rather lose heavily than not play at all. "I am too strong for you," said he; "I ought to have told you piquet is my especial game."

But when did a loser ever admit the superiority of an adversary's skill?

"Your lordship held good cards," answered John Garnet; "my luck is the likelier to turn. I call for a fresh pack."

So the water was summoned, and more cards, with another bottle of wine, were brought in. Lord Bellinger began to feel the old wild impulses rising in his heart; and John Garnet, a desperate man, bound on a desperate errand, had no disinclination to venture Katerfelto's money in an undertaking that compromised his own head.

After two more games, Lord Bellinger had

Katerfelto?" said he. "I have always believed that man must be the devil in person!"

"I got the horse with that name," answered John Garnet, "and his new owner can alter it at pleasure; but as I must be a-foot, early to-morrow morn'g, I will now take my leave, and wish your lordship good-night."

So, with many profound bows, the pair separated, and the loser, to his extreme disgust, heard Lord Bellinger's door carefully locked on the inside.

## CHAPTER IX.

### STRONG AS DEATH.

To have lost a hundred guineas after supper was bad enough, but to yield possession of the best horse he ever owned, and pursue Lord Bellinger into the West on foot, or by the tardy progress of a stage-wagon, was not to be thought of.

He never intended permanently to part with either, or John Garnet would have been more loth to risk his horse and to pay up his gold. The money must be recovered, and Katerfelto, as he now determined to call the animal, must be retained at all hazards. Pondering these matters deeply, the unlucky card-player only waited till the lights were out and the hotel became quiet, to put his plans in execution. An hour after midnight he had drawn off his boots, and satisfied himself that his lordship's door was securely fastened. He must find another opportunity of taking by violence that which he now despaired of gaining by artifice; and he stole out to the stable, there to saddle his horse and effect his escape. Though by no means satisfied with his night's work, he did not consider he had entirely wasted time or money. In the course of conversation, he had made himself acquainted with Lord Bellinger's intended movements, and could prepare for a bold stroke. "If I had been more fortunate with the cards," he thought, "I might have improved my acquaintance sufficiently to join them as a travelling-companion, perhaps accompanying my lord and my lady in their coach. It would have been easier then to effect my purpose, though I do not think I could have found it in me to make love to her ladyship any more than to her waiting-maid. But I never held a card! That hundred guineas I paid down on the table I must have back again, as surely as I do not mean to part with my good gray horse. There is only one way. I must seize the warrants, and recover my money with the strong hand. Some unknown highwayman may be at the blame, and if I can get off, I will lose no time in gaining the West Country, and warning the honest squires of Devon and Somerset that they are in danger. Nothing venture, nothing have! I'm in it now, over shoes, over boots! Let me think. Highway robbery. It's an ugly word, and a hanging matter, but so is high treason; and if every neck that risks the noose must be stretched, why, as I heard those player fellows sing last winter—

"I wonder there ain't better companies Under Tyburn tree!"

Thus meditating, John Garnet, who had made himself acquainted with the geography of the hotel and its surroundings, proceeded noiselessly to the stable, not without anxious glances toward the East, where that fore-runner of morning, the false dawn, was already visible.

A true horseman, he had identified himself so completely with his steed, and busied himself so earnestly about its wants, that Katerfelto nei hed with pleasure to acknowledge the friendly presence as he approached its stall thus stealthily and in the dark. While he hurried to the horse's head, that he might thus untoward greeting, a slim figure rose from below the manger and glided like a phantom to the door. John Garnet was no less prompt than resolute. In an instant he had seized this shadowy intruder

while his heart smote him to think of the distance travelled by that slender form, those shapely delicate limbs.

"I could not bear you to go away," replied the girl, laying her hand to her heart and pressing her cheek against Katerfelto's warm shoulder. "I could not live without you; and for the matter of that, you could not live without me. If I had let you go by yourself, every mile you rode was a mile towards your grave."

They were pacing on together, Waif walking at his stirrup with a free untiring step, that the good horse must have fairly broken into a trot to leave behind. John Garnet looked at her with an astonishment in which there was no little interest and admiration.

"What mean you?" said he, and how came the Doctor to let you go?"

"I never asked the Patron's leave," was her answer, "because, if he had forbidden me, I should have lain down to die. No; when you rode out of London, I was scarcely half an hour behind. The Patron must have been very angry when he found me gone. What do I care? I care for nobody but you. I knew where to get these clothes well enough. Do you like me in them? I might have had a horse from our people before I had done a day's journey, but I thought I could be nearer you on foot, and I've walked all the way. I'm not tired. I'd walk as far again only to hear your voice."

John Garnet was in utter perplexity. Such a phase in his affairs he had never contemplated, yet there seemed something so ridiculous in his position, bound on a political adventure thus attended, that he could not forbear a laugh.

"Nonsense, my lass!" said he kindly enough. "You must go back; indeed you must. I won't have you come a step farther. You ought never to have followed me at all."

The tears were in Waif's dark eyes, and she raised them to his face with the pleading, reproachful look of a dog that you chide when he knows he is doing right.

"Not follow you!" she repeated. "How can I not to follow you, when you are going into danger? I can share it even if I cannot keep it off; and you tell me I must go back to London! You cannot mean it. I don't think you quite understand."

"That's the truest word you have said yet," was his answer; "but I do understand that, for your own sake, you ought not to be here now. Still, if you persist in accompanying 'a beggar on horseback,' you ought to have your share of the saddle, till you get down."

With these words, he took her by the hand, and braced his foot in the stirrup to afford a purchase for her ascent. In one bound she stood on his instep, light and buoyant as a bird; in another she was seated before him with her arm round his neck, and her comely smiling face very near his own. It might have been the exertion, or the novelty of the position, or something he whispered, with his lips close to hers, that turned Waif crimson, and then deadly pale. She seemed more out of breath now, clinging to the rider, than she had been awhile ago walking beside his horse. Katerfelto, in obedience to his master's hand, broke into a canter; before she spoke another word, they were nearing a hamlet, of which the smoke was visible above the trees, when she made shift to ask in a trembling voice if she might not be set down, and taken up again when they had passed through? For answer John Garnet laughed, and increasing his pace, dashed along the street at a gallop. When he relapsed once more into a walk, the startled villagers had been left two miles behind.

Waif's nerves were of the firmest, and she had now recovered some of her self-possession, no easy matter for a woman who finds herself seated on the same horse with the man she loves. Her heart beat fast indeed, and the color came and went in her cheek; but she could review the situation calmly,

to sustain, no honor to defend, but she has the instincts and the memory of a dog for friend or foe! Parson Gale had better have bitten his tongue through and kept his silver in his pocket. I know his home, his habits, his haunts, his vices, as I know my own ten fingers. I listened because I hated him. But when I heard more, I listened on, because—because—I loved you!"

It was wrong, no doubt, scandalous, shocking, if not entirely without excuse; but something in the proximity of those two young faces again made the girl blush deeper than before.

"There are no secrets too close for the Patron," continued Waif, "and as you have seen, people come from far and near to consult his art. This man's errand was to discover your hiding-place and hunt you down to death. He gave the Patron money—golden guineas—I heard them jingle. He was in earnest—bitter earnest, and so am I!"

"But what said the Patron?" asked her listener. "I thought he was my friend."

"The Patron is every man's friend," answered Waif, "who is willing to do him service, or to pay him gold. He promised to betray you when the moon was full, but that very night he sent you out of London on his own affairs, and I followed close, lest evil should befall, for I knew you were journeying to the West."

Laughing lightly, he asked if that was a dangerous quarter, and whether the Wise Men, who came there from the East, were ancestors of her own?

But Waif scorned to enter on the subject of genealogy with one who could neither believe nor understand her claims to a descent coeval with the earliest history of man. Her tone was grave and almost stern, while she looked him steadfastly in the face and proceeded with her warning.

"When a stag goes down to the water, where an enemy waits to take away his life, the voice of a child, or the wave of a woman's hand, is enough to turn him back into the moor. Abner Gale lives in the very country to which you are bound. I know the man, John Garnet, and I will save you from his vengeance, though I swing for it—there! Now will you let me come with you and help you as best I can?"

John Garnet did not hesitate long. True, he was unable to stifle certain scruples, while he reflected on the dangers into which this wilful girl was running of her own accord, on her loss of character, if indeed she had any character to lose, and the inconvenience he would himself experience in accounting for such a travelling companion, however well disguised; above all, on the advantage he was taking of a professed devotion, that exchanged, as he could not but admit, the pure gold of sincere affection for a baser metal, compounded of gratitude, vanity and self-indulgence. But men have seldom far to seek for an excuse when they would do that which is pleasant and convenient rather than right; so John Garnet persuaded himself that to make this beautiful girl an assistant of his schemes, and comrade in his dangers, was an act of self-denial and loyalty vouching for his fealty to the exile whom he called his lawful king.

"Agreed!" said he; "and, now, Waif, if you are really to help me, I must tell you my plans."

He never forgot this ride through the summer's afternoon. The yellow light that glimmered in copse and dingle. The glare on the white road they travelled. The distant lake that gleamed like a sheet of silver—the brook at his feet, that brawled and gurgled and broke into bubbles of gold. The bloom of wild flowers, the song of birds, the murmur of the breeze, the lowing of kine, the deep rich meadows, the stretching uplands, and, over all, that sunny haze which veiled without hiding the distance, and added its crowning grace to the beauties of a landscape that became fairer and fairer, the further he journeyed towards the West.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]