

Never shall I forget the little chuckle behind me as I stopped suddenly on the sill and saw — sitting as if in camp, perfectly at their ease — John Acton, with a huge pewter of ale before him, Robert Curtis — or Philipse, as he should be called — and, sitting at the same table between these two, that sombre old robber Marvin.

Up rose the three as I turned to Deborah and saw in an instant that she knew all — nay, that she had done the planning to bring it all about.

“Aha! Merton, my friend, here you be at last!” cried Acton, shaking us by the hand.

Curtis smiled quietly and gave me his friendly hand-clasp, and I had begun to express my surprise when Acton turned me about and cried:

“Here, man! Here is the Reverend James Marvin to welcome ye!”

“Marvin,” said I, slowly, “you are a thieving scoundrel, and I have a mind to run this blade through your belly!”

“And yet,” said the cool villain, “’t was I married ye to the girl ye would most have!”

“Married me, you scoundrel?” cried I. “Aye, at the point of a pistol!”

“And would ye have me undo it now?”

“That is none of your affair, man! Do you get out of here before I send you to the place where you belong!”

“Tut, tut! Merton,” laughed Acton, “the Reverend Doctor is here by the special invitation of a lady.”