

THE DRAWN BLIND.

BY "Q."

SILVER TRUMPETS sounded a flourish, and the javelin men came pacing down Tregarrick Fore street, with the Sheriff's coach swinging behind them, its panels splendid with fresh blue paint and florid blazonry. Its wheels were picked out with yellow, and this scheme of color extended to the coachman and the two lackeys, who held on at the back by leathern straps. Each wore a coat and breeches of electric blue, with a canary waistcoat, and was toned off with powder and flesh-colored stockings at the extremities. Within the coach and facing the horses sat two judges of the Crown Court and Nisi Prius, both in scarlet, with full wigs and little round patches of black plaster, like ventilators, on top facing their lordships sat Sir Felix Felix-Williams, the sheriff, in a tightish uniform of the yeomanry with a great shako nodding on his knees and a chaplain bolt upright by his side. Behind trooped a rabble of loafers and small boys, who shouted, "Who bleeds bran?" till the lackeys' calves itched with indignation.

I was standing in the archway of the Packhorse Inn, among the maids and stableboys gathered to see the pageant pass on its way to hear the Assize sermon. And standing there, I was witness of a little incident that seemed to escape the rest.

At the moment when the trumpets rang out, a very old woman, in a blue camlet cloak, came hobbling out of a grocer's shop some twenty yards up the pavement, and tottered down ahead of the procession as fast as her decrepit legs would move. There was no occasion for hurrying to avoid the crowd; for the javelin men had barely rounded the corner of the long street, and were taking the goose-step very seriously and deliberately. But she went by the Packhorse doorway as if swift horsemen were after her, clutching the camlet cloak across her bosom, glancing over her shoulder and working her lips inaudibly. I could not help remarking the position of her right arm. She held it bent exactly as though she held an infant in her old breast, and shielded it while she ran.

A few paces beyond the inn door she halted on the edge of the curb, flung another look up the street, and darted across the roadway. There stood a little shop—a watchmaker's—just opposite, and next to the shop a small ope with one dingy window over it. She vanished up the passage, at the entrance of which I was still staring idly, when, half a minute later, a skinny trembling hand

appeared at the window and drew down the blind.

I looked round at the men and maids; but there eyes were all for the pageant, now not a stone's throw away.

"Who is that old woman?" I asked, touching Caleb, the head hostler, on the shoulder.

Caleb, a small, bandy legged man, with a chin full of furrows, and the furrows full of grey stubble, withdrew his gaze grudgingly from the Sheriff's coach.

"What woman?"

"She in the blue cloak, d'ee mean?—an old, ancient, wisht-lookin' body?"

"Yes."

"A timmersome woman, like?"

"That's it."

"Well, her name's Cordely Pinsent."

The procession reclaimed his attention. He received a passing wink from the charioteer, caught it on the volley and returned it with a solemn face; or rather, the wink seemed to rebound as from a blank wall. As the crowd closed in upon the circumstance of Justice, he returned to me again, spat, and went on:

"Cordely Pinsent, widow of old Key Pinsent, that was tailor to all the grandees in the country so far back as I can mind. I can just mind Key Pinsent—a great, red, rorycuntory chap, with a high stock and a wig like King George—'my royal patron,' he called 'em, havin' by some means got leave to hoist the King's arms over his door. Such mighty portly manners, too. Oh, very spacious, I assure 'ee! Simme I can see the old Trojan now, with his white weskit bulgin' out across his doorway like a shop front hung wi' jewels. Gout killed 'em. I went to his buryin'; such a stretch of experience does a young man get by the time he reaches my age. God bless your heart alive, I can mind when they were hung for forgery?"

"Who were hung?"

"People," he answered, vaguely, "and young Willie Pinsent."

"This woman's son?"

"Aye, her son,—her ewe-lamb of a child. 'Tis very seldom brought up agen her now, poor soul! She's so very old that folks forgits about it. Do 'ee see her window yonder, over the ope?"

He was pointing across to the soiled white blind that still looked blankly over the street, its lower edge caught up at one corner by a dusty geranium.

"I saw her pull it down."

"Ah, you would if you was lookin' that way. I've a-seed her do't a score o' times. Well, when the gout reached Key Pinsent's stomach, and he went off like the snuff of a candle at the age of forty-two, she was left unprovided, with a son of thirteen to maintain, or go 'pon the parish. She was a Menhennick, tho',

from t'other side o' the Duchy—a very proud family—and didn't mean to din the knee to nobody, and all the less because she'd demeaned hersel', to start with, by wedding a tailor. But Key Pinsent, by all allowance, was handsome as blazes, and well informed up to a point that he read Shakespeare for the mere pleasure o't.

"Well, she sold up the stock in trade an' hired a couple o' rooms—the self-same rooms you see—and then she ate less 'n a mouse an' took in needle work, plain an' fancy, for a lot o' the gentry's wives round the neighborhood befriended her, though they had to be sly an' hide that they meant it for a favor, or she'd ha' snapped their heads off. An' all the while she was teachin' her boy and tellin' 'em, whatever happened, to remember he was a gentleman, an' lovin' 'em with all the strength of a desolate woman.

"This Willie Pinsent was a comely boy, too; handsome as old Key, an' quick at his books. He'd a bold, masterful way, bein' proud as ever his mother was, an' well knowin' there wasn't his match in Tregarrick for headwork. Such a beautiful hand he wrote! When he was barely turned sixteen they gave 'n a place in Gregory's bank—Wilkins an' Gregory it was in those aged times. He still lived home with his mother, rentin' a room extra out of his earnin's and turnin' one of the bedrooms into a parlor. That's the very room you're lookin' at. And when any father in Tregarrick had a bone to pick with his sons he'd advise 'em to take example by young Pinsent; 'so clever and good, too, there was no tellin' what he mightn't come to in time.'

"Well-a-well, to cut it short, the lad was too clever. It came out, after, that he'd took to bettin' his employers' money agen the rich men up at the Royal Exchange. An' the upshot was that one evenin', while he was drinkin' tea with his mother in his lovin', light-hearted way, in walks a brace o' constables an' says, 'William Pinsent, young chap, I arrest thee upon a charge o' counterfeitin' old Gregory's handwritin', which is a hangin' matter!'

"An' now, sir, comes the cur'ous part o' the tale; for, if you'll believe me, this poor woman wouldn't listen to it—wouldn't hear a word o't. 'What! my son Willie,' she flames, hot as Lucifer, 'My son Willie a forger; my boy, that I've nussed, an' reared up, an' studied, markin' all his pretty, takin' ways since he learned to crawl! Gentlemen,' she says, standin' up an' facin' 'em down, 'what mother knows her son, if not I? I give you my word it's all a mistake.'

"Ay, an' she would have it no other. While her son was waitin' his trial in jail, she walked the streets with her head