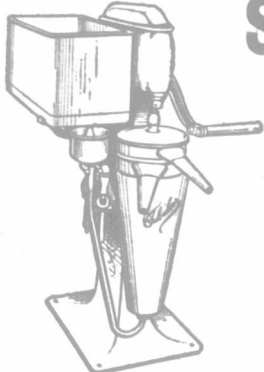


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her chair; she could look steadily into the face of danger; she believed in the right of the cause for which her family had sacrificed so much, and in the power of God. She smiled with steady lips more than once at Lord Ferguson, to whom the moments were very bitter. Ah, if he should bring trouble and punishment on his brave hostess! He longed for his own clothes; he would not be afraid if he might stand, sword in hand, and meet them so. Then he shuddered to think how terrible were the penalties for those who resisted! He felt like an animal caught in a trap. Very distinctly through the house came the sound of voices.

"See, then, man, 'tis clear writ. An order to search this place, aye, from cellar to garret. We shall go, friends wherever there may be room to hide a goodly, personable man, for such is my Lord Ferguson, of whom His Majesty King George has some urgent need. Well, who is this? Come, a fine young man like you can have no liking for the thought of prisons! Well, art ready to act as guide?"

Andrew's youthful and indignant voice answered quickly.

"Bow Street runners! And the secret-room known! Why, there is not another, and we hide no one here. Master Jermyn, is it your will that they go up the stairs? 'Twill disturb her ladyship, and—"

Two or three voices joined in laughter.

"Come! Master Jermyn, as you call him, has nought to say to this. Here be the warrant, with the seal upon it. Up the stairs we go. Her ladyship cannot withstand us."

Lady Dacre listened with a tightening of her lips; the hands moving about the tea-tray were perfectly steady; she looked across, searchingly, at the figure seated in the shadow of the curtains. The steps were ascending the stairs, were almost at the door, when she realized one thing. She had made a mistake! Alas, she had been so proud of the disguise, so delighted with gown, shawl, and the cap, resting on a white wig, that she had completely forgotten that Lord Ferguson wore the shoes with a large buckle with which Jermyn had provided him on his arrival.

Those shoes might betray all. The feet were distinctly visible beneath the dress, and she dared not whisper a warning. She would not turn her proud head to see if the men were actually at the door, but she knew quite well, in her tender, sympathetic heart, how many and disturbing were the feelings rushing through the brain of the fugitive. At this critical moment even a hint whispering greater caution might end disastrously, through his chivalrous desire not to bring evil on a woman, and that woman his mother's friend.

There was only one thing to do: she must trust to nimble wits and to the help of One mightier than the mightiest.

The door opened further, rough-shod feet stepped into the room carefully, and Lady Dacre blessed the polished floor. What matter, provided Lord Ferguson escaped, if it took days of rubbing to restore its glory!

She moved slowly, and faced the three men at the door with haughtily-raised eyebrows and a mocking smile.

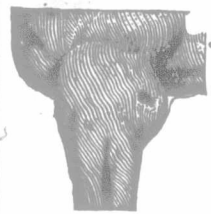
"What, the runners again! Truly my poor house is honored! Since the day that you bribed a poor servant to blab my secrets there is surely nought to fear, now, from me? Truly, I see the warrant; the red seal thereof is great enough even for old eyes! My poor house, then, shall be searched from cellar to garret. I would pray you speed about the task. I have yet to know that e'en such a warrant as you hold there permits the disturbing of myself and Lady Cowper who has dined with me, and, as you see, would fain rest. Methinks, and you disturb her ladyship, her husband as great in the king's favor as Sir Robert Walpole, you may bring a hornet's nest about your ears."

"Lady Cowper!" repeated the foremost of the runners slowly.

"Aye, as I have said. Prithee see that my chairs and tables, the great settee yonder, conceal no Jacobite, and then get you gone; but hark to me! Destroy any of my furnishings, and the matter shall be straightly reported."

One of the men moved cautiously forward, his eyes fixed on the figure seated in the great chair close to the curtains. Lady Dacre saw the gleam

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in his eager eyes, saw too that for the moment he was thinking only of the strangeness of an old lady slumbering unmoved, though such important people as the Bow Street runners were in the room. She watched him as carefully as he watched the so-called Lady Cowper. Then there was a sudden swift movement, a crash, and the tray, with its burden of dainty china, fell to the ground. Lady Dacre burst into angry speech, and the man, who thought himself the cause of all the mischief, rubbed his head slowly, as if he would find words to express his feelings. The china, was as he knew, well worth many pounds, and Sir Robert was hard on those he termed clumsy folk. Then the warrant had been issued with a caution: Lady Dacre was not to be distressed and annoyed unnecessarily.

"Idiot! Think you I shall let this pass? All my china lying on the floor broken. Ah, Jermyn, is that you? Look, look!"

The men in the doorway gazed stupidly from one to the other, and at the sleeping figure, for Lady Cowper awoke with a start, and let the news letter fall from her hand; then she nodded once or twice as if overcome with sleep.

The men muttered and murmured, while Lady Dacre lamented her loss shrilly, volubly, and presently, very sheepishly, they withdrew. An order was called down to a man they had left below not to stir from his post or allow anyone to pass him. Then the search of the house began.

When the tramp of feet sounded from the floor above, Lady Dacre sprang up and walked the room rapidly once or twice. What could she do—what must be the next move? If the runner returned and found Lady Cowper still asleep! They were already suspicious and she knew it would be fatal.

She looked from the open window, on to her garden and the road beyond, noticed the brightness of the spring sunshine, and grew more determined to spare no effort to save the boy from the terrors of prison.

He whispered a few words. "Let me run for it!"

Lady Dacre shook her head, listening intently. The men were moving from room to room above. She set her hand upon one of the casements, and then found that Deborah had stolen to her side.

"My lady, yonder is my Lady Cowper's own coach, she hath but now stepped out at the house of my Lady Winchelsea. Oh, my lady, what if they see her?"

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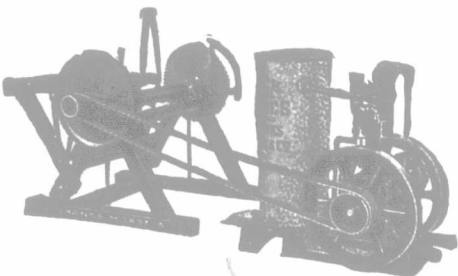
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