

the scale. So it befell with Peter Wildmore. For as he sat in doubt, thinking now on the merry life of the past, now on the face of Biddy Lefroy, his eyes rested on his signet-ring and on the motto thereon engraved—*Vestigia nulla retrorsum*.

With a start he read the words and accepted the omen. What manner of Wildmore were he to turn back from what he had once resolved?

He wheeled his horse and set his face to the house.

"I will ride indeed to the Abbey," he said softly, "but with Biddy Lefroy by my side."

The company were assembled at the gate when they rode up to the house, Juliet and Biddy mounted in their midst. They lost no time in setting out. The moon was already low in the west; if they wished light for their ride they must not delay.

They wheeled out of the gate and galloped over the silent downs. The men were in wild spirits. The good supper and good wine, followed by this mad ride through the clear, cool night, intoxicated them: they played pranks on each other as they rode, and laughed and sang like a pack of schoolboys.

Peter rode in the middle of the rout of men. He watched Biddy's figure swaying in the saddle as she galloped ahead with her brother, and he nodded with satisfaction. At least they would have one taste in common—his bride was a horsewoman.

They rode at full gallop. The shadowy downs flew past them, the wind sang in their ears, the wild rush of hoofs thundered on the grass. Peter's heart beat high with exultation, he laughed aloud. Even thus it seemed to him should every lusty bachelor ride to his wedding, if wedded he must be: one wild rush of freedom and then—the ring.

VII.

Moorstone Abbey lay silent in the moonlight. The household slept the sleep of well-fed, under-worked servitors. Connel, James, and Mrs Wood the housekeeper, having fully