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CHAPTER V.

IN DURANCE VILE.

"Yes," said the gentleman, who was in immaculate evening dress. "Yes, I know you did; and this fellow is one of them, eh? What's he doing on horse-back?" He sauntered up to Reuben, and patted the horse. "What have you been up to, my friend?" he asked, looking up into Reuben's pale face and fierce eyes.

"Nothing!" Reuben replied curtly. "I have done no harm."

"You are on private ground," said Mr. Normanby, calmly and gravely, "and Mr. Verner says you have been poaching."

"It's a lie," retorted Reuben hotly. "I have no gun. Besides, who dares to say he saw me poaching?"

"I do," said Morgan, promptly. "Come, come, my fine fellow, it won't do! Don't waste time on him, Normanby. Here's the hare; we've sent for the police, and we'll have him locked up in a trice."

Reuben ground his teeth.

"Shot the hare, did he?" asked Mr. Normanby languidly.

"No, snared it," said Morgan, boldly.

"That's a lie!" cried Reuben. "I have no snare."

"Search him!" cried a dozen voices.

Reuben started, and clapped his hand to his coat pocket in involuntary alarm.

"There you are! In his coat!" said Morgan, with a contemptuous laugh. "I told you so, my dear Normanby. I saw him hiding the hare just before. Ah! here come the police. I suppose I must give him in charge, though I am unwilling to do so under the circumstances."

"Who is he, then?" asked Normanby.

"A servant or groom, I think, of Sir Edwin Seymour's, at Bingleigh Hall. Sir Edwin wouldn't like it, if I were to let him off; so I suppose I had better give him up——"

"He doesn't look like a poacher," Normanby said, as he turned back to Reuben. "Who are you?" he asked, abruptly, "and what's your business?"

"Reuben Wynter's my name—and my business is my own," was the curt response.

"Where have you come from, then?" asked Normanby, unheeding the impatient murmurs of the crowd, or Reuben's anger.

"From Woolney," Reuben replied. "Now let me go!"

"Show me what you're concealing in your pocket," asked Normanby.

"Never! I'll die first," was the angry answer.

Normanby turned away.

"It looks crooked," he said to Morgan, who had been fretting impatiently at this delay. Morgan laughed triumphantly, as he gave some directions to the constable.

At that moment there was another outburst; for Reuben's spirit was at fever heat, and he determined to show fight. With a crash, he brought down his heavy whip on his captors; then, as they fell back with a yell of astonishment, Reuben gathered up the reins, and, with one touch of his spurs, took his horse right over the heads of the throng, as though they had been so many bars in the circus ring.

An indescribable tumult followed, but neither noise nor pursuit were of avail; with a laugh of furious scorn, their prey had eluded their grasp, and was flying down the lane like an arrow sped from a bow. On, on he rode, as if for life itself, and the horse, half maddened by the din, while at the same time all the fresher for the rest, flew along like the wind. Every now and then a twig or branch would catch against Wynter's face, leaving a scratch; while a numbing sensation in his arm told him that some of the blows which had been aimed at him had not been without effect. But to pain, hunger, and thirst, he seemed oblivious; he knew that if the pursuers obtained horses he could be easily overtaken, and then all hope of delivering his parcel into Topsy's hands at half past eight would be gone.

Even as the thought passed through his mind, he heard in the distance the dull sound of horses' hoofs pounding down the lane; and he turned in his saddle with an imprecation on the man who thus pursued him.

"It is fate," he muttered, "that he should spring up in my path again! I seem to hate the sight of him, instinctively, as if I had met him before—but that's impossible. Yes, there they come!"

He looked hastily all around him. In front of him lay two roads, one leading straight on to Bingleigh, the other taking him some dstance round. His enemies would naturally think that he had followed the nearest road; and this would be the case for a while. He swept round the bend of the road—now darkened by the shades of night—for a short distance; then, clearing the hedge, he turned back over the springy turf, which deadened the sound of his horse's feet. Suddenly, he pulled up, and, leaping off his horse, dragged the animal's head close down by the hedge and crouched beside him, so that both were quite invisible.

With a harsh clatter, the horses came pelting along, and swept by his hiding place. Then—after they had disappeared—he sprang once more upon his own steed and followed quietly in their wake, knowing that he was safe from pursuit—at least for a time.

It was striking eight as he saw the lights shining from the high windows of Bingleigh Hall, and his eyes gleamed as he wondered whether his enemies had given up the chase or were awaiting him.

"If I can only reach the stable yard," he thought, as he listened intently, "I can send the ribbon up to her—after that, the deluge!"

Nearer and nearer he came, till—with something like a smile—he rode into the stable yard, and, a minute later he sent up an urgent message to Topsy.

In a few minutes the maid came running down.

"Oh, Mr. Reuben," she cried, eagerly. "Have you got it?"

"Yes," he said, grimly. "I have it here—if I am not too late?"

As he spoke, the stable clock struck the half hour.

"Not you," said Topsy, with a laugh. "You came to the very minute." She took the parcel as she spoke, and opened it under the light; then she looked up, and as her eyes rested on Reuben's face, she gave a little scream.

"What is it?" he cried, hoarsely. "Isn't it right?"

"Look at your face!" she cried. "Whatever have you been doing?"

"Oh, that is nothing; the twigs of the trees scratched me—the ribbon, is it all right?"

"Yes, indeed," said Topsy, reassured, "and it's real good of you, Mr. Robert, to ride all the way like that; and I don't believe you've had anything to eat, either."

"Never mind me; I am all right," said Reuben; "I'll see to the horse."

"No, no!" demurred Topsy.

Reuben turned to the door. "Mind!" he said, as he opened it, "not a word as to how you got it—promise me that!"

"Yes," said Topsy, "I promise; but do go and get some food and see to your face, or I shall never forgive myself—that I shan't."

With a smile, Reuben nodded and closed the door behind him. Making his way to the stall where he had left the horse, he first proceeded to rub down the tired, breathless animal, so that it should be comfortable for the night; then—and not till then—did he wash and tend his own hurts. When he had done so, too tired and hungry to even seek for food, he sank down upon the clean, sweet-smelling straw beside the horse, and dropped asleep.

The noise of wheels outside awoke him, and he saw a carriage being taken around to the front of the house. He followed cautiously, hiding himself behind the thick shrubs which hedged the drive. Almost directly, he saw Sir Edwin and Olive come down the broad steps. Olive looked more beautiful than ever, but she was so covered with a cloak that he was unable to see if his ribbon had been used or not. The seeming omission, however, did not trouble him—he had placed it within her power to gratify her fancy, and that was enough for him.

Suddenly, Topsy appeared, and just before her mistress stepped into the carriage, reopened Olive's cloak to arrange something. Reuben, with a thrill of joy, saw that his knot of ribbon was upon her bosom. Had Topsy planned this manoeuver for his benefit? He knew not; but he thanked her from the bottom of his heart, as he saw the figure of her young mistress whirled away in the carriage. Reuben waited a minute, then turned away—and at that instant he was seized from behind.

With a grim laugh, he stepped back; offering no resistance to the three men who had made him their prisoner.

"Got you at last!" said one of them, whom Reuben recognized as the village constable. "You'll sleep in prison to-night, my good poacher."

"Where you like," said Reuben, with serenity; and, to the astonishment of his captors, he looked up into the sky and laughed aloud.

What did it matter what happened to him now? His ribbon was on her heart.

* * * * * *

Bingleigh Jail, as the village prison was called, was not a cheerful place at the best of times; but it was seldom used, for the inhabitants of Bingleigh were God-fearing people, who worked hard, and feasted in their own homes or at the distant fair of Woolney. Such isolated cases as did occur were tried at a big, farmlike building, dignified by the name of "the Town Hall," which was also used as a schoolroom. The jail consisted of two stone cells, strongly built, as befitted a prison, and lighted by two small high windows.

To this gloomy abode Reuben's captors triumphantly conducted him—their enthusiasm rather damped by the utter indifference and composure with which their prisoner seemed to regard his position. Indeed, by his gait and bearing, one would have thought that it was he who had arrested the constable, and Jobson was not a little nettled at his coolness.

Arrived at the jail, he pompously unlocked the iron-bound door, and motioned to Reuben to enter; but the prisoner stopped on the threshold.

"With what am I charged?" he asked the astounded constable.

"Poaching and assault, young man," returned Jobson; "and if that don't mean six months' hard labor, my name isn't what it is."

There was an approving murmur from the surrounding crowd of loafers.

"Who signed the warrant?" demanded Reuben quietly.

"Why, the squire, of course—Squire Verner, of the Grange."

"Verner," muttered Reuben, as he entered the cell, "alwdys that name!"

With a malicious grin, the constable clanged the door, and the prisoner was left to his reflections. These, indeed, were far from pleasant; not that Reuben regretted his action, but he was torn with anxiety lest Topsy should break her word and tell her young mistress all. If that happenel then her fair name—which to him was the most sacred thing in the world—would be talked about throughout the county, and might be held in derision, or even worse. No, come what might, the truth must be kept concealed; sooner than that, he would plead guilty and take the punishment inflicted on him for her sake.

(To be continued.)

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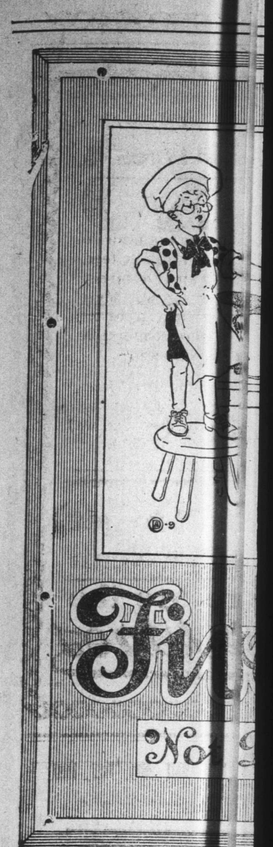

Published by Authority

MILITIA ORDERS.

By Hon. J. R. Bennett, Minister of Militia.

1. Strength:

Second Lieut. H. Maddick is transferred from the Reserve of Officers to the active list for special service, the Pay & Record Office, to date from Nov. 1, 1917.

2. Retirement:

Second Lieut. J. Spooner is transferred to the Reserve of Officers, from this date, owing to illness contracted while on active service.

Second Lieut. N. S. Fraser is transferred to the Reserve of Officers, from this date, owing to illness contracted while on active service.

3. Promotion—Forestry Companies:

To be Captain—Lieut. D. Twist, from December 8th, 1917.

W. F. RENDELL, Major,
Chief Staff Officer,
Dept. of Militia.

Dec. 11th, 1917.

Upon recommendation of the Superintendent of Education, and under the provisions of Section 4, Sub-section (b), of the Education Act, 1916, His Excellency the Administrator in Council has been pleased to direct that the Methodist Educational District of Exploits be sub-divided into two Districts to be known as the District of Exploits and the District of New Bay, the boundaries of which shall be as follows:

(a) The District of Exploits shall extend from Charles' Brook, exclusive, to Fortune Harbour, exclusive, and shall include Swan Island, Sandy Island, Black Island, and Indian Islands. The Board shall meet at Exploits.

(b) The District of New Bay shall extend from Fortune Harbour to Leading Tickles, both inclusive, the Board shall meet at New Bay.

His Excellency the Administrator in Council has been pleased to appoint Mr. Theophilus J. Janes (Alexander Bay), to be Inspector of Weights and Measures for Alexander Bay, Gambo, Hare Bay, and Middle Brook; R. L. Allen, Esq., B.A., to be a member of the Council of Higher Education, in place of J. G. Greenslade, Esq., B. Sc., resigned; Rt. Rev. M. Flower, D.D., Bishop of St. George's, to be a member of the Roman Catholic Board of Education for the District of St. George, in place of Rev. Farroll, C.C., left the District; Capt. James Barry (Petries), Messrs. William Ahearn (Petries), Duffe Joseph (Humbermouth), Denis F. Mooney (Humbermouth), Maurice Breland (Curling), and David Barry (Summerside), to be members of the Roman Catholic Board of Education for the District of Bay of Islands; Rev. J. Healey, to be a member of the Church of England Board of Education for the District of Topsail, in place of Mr. Alexander Squires, who has joined His Majesty's Forces; Rev. Arthur E. Tulk, B.A., to be a member of the Church of England Board of Education for the District of Port de Grave, in place of Rev. Charles Jeffery, left the District; Rev. Eugene Waters (New Bay), Messrs. Adolphus Yates, J.P., (New Bay), Wm. H. Bagley (Point Leamington), George Thompson (South Arm) and Fred Moore