

But she walked on so fast after this gratifying avowal that it was impossible to tell her one word of the details that was rising to his lips.

All that day she took care not to be alone with him another minute. From the orchard she took him to the beach, where the villagers were collecting sea-wood; thence to a field where harvest was already nearly done; home by the cow house, with its attendant milkmaid; and so back to grandfather's parlor, where she poured out his evening draught of cider with her own hands.

Why Nelly should have cried like a naughty child when she laid her head on her pillow; why she should have woken before daybreak, and risen at sunrise to put new ribbons in her dress of a color she had lately heard somebody say he liked, is more than I can take upon me to explain. I can understand, however, why John Garnet lay a bed longer than usual that same morning, and turned on the other side, hoping to go to sleep again, that he might dream another dream like the last about Nelly Carew.

Abner Gale's dreams, if he had any, would seem to have been of no such pleasant nature, for he was stirring with the dawn, breakfasting fiercely before sunrise, on Devonshire mutton and strong ale, cursing, notwithstanding his profession, each of his servants in turn for imputed shortcomings, from his cherry-cheeked parlor-maid to the man who fed the pigs. In and out the house, and through the precincts of the farm-yard, or "barton," as he called it, the master's eye was only less dreaded than his tongue, his tongue than his hand. Yet was he well served too, with the scrupulous obedience of fear.

He would fain have mounted his horse and ridden across the moor in the direction of Porlock again to-day, but even Abner Gale was compelled to pay some respect to the deonities of life, and even such a parish as his exacted a few hours' attention after an absence of weeks.

There were conditions to be written out for a wrestling match between two rival champions; arrangements to be made for supplying the ringers with unlimited cider at their approaching feast; a badger recently drawn to visit; and some terrier-puppies just opening their eyes on this wicked world, to inspect.

Also, there was a child to be baptized, a matter that would keep, and a wench to be married, a matter that would not.

"For to-day," thought the Parson, "I have got my hands full; to-morrow I shall be free again, and it's strange if I fail to find out something more of your goings on, Mistress Nelly, and put a spoke in the wheel of that young spark down by the water-side, who seems to make himself so much at home!"

Though he never saw him before, though he had not the vaguest notion that John Garnet was the man he had sworn to hunt to death, some antagonistic instinct caused him to hate this man with a deadly hatred, scarcely to be accounted for, even by that jealousy which is proverbially cruel as the grave.

In no appropriate frame of mind, the Parson was about to don his frayed and dirty canonicals for administration of that matrimonial rite it would be unwise to delay, when his quick eye caught sight of a man riding on the moor, whose appearance caused him to cast aside his sacred vestments with an oath, and rush to the door, carrying a brimming of cider in his hand.

Mr. Gale swore when he was pleased, and when he was angry, when he rode and when he walked, when he worked and when he rested. Altogether he swore a good deal between morning and night.

"It's the harbinger!" he exclaimed, steady-ing the vessel not to spill a drop; "the harbinger, as I'm a living sinner, Red Rube!" He shouted, while the now arrival drew the rein to the mounting-block, "stop and wet your whistle—you're always welcome, and you're always dry."

Red Rube, whose real name was Reuben

I was down Laphort way yesterday, said he, with a chuckle, and beam by those Asb. I larned reamed. Pa yson, this score year ago and more, afore I took to the deer. There's money to be made by reading, I tell 'e, and money means drink.

"What do you mean?" asked Gale.
"I mean there's hand bills up at both places, offering a hundred guineas reward; that's what I mean," replied the old man, kindling to excitement. "Him as rode the gray stallion has been about again. Galloping Jack they always called 'un to me—and if a man could steal a view of 'un, or get the wind of 'un, or so much as slot 'un where he harbors, 'tis a hundred golden guineas paid down in hand. I've moved many a right stag in my time, Master Gale, but never such a noble head as that."

Then, as fearing his loquacity must have compromised him in the eyes of so good a sportsman, Red Rube departed at a gallop, and was seen no more.

Abner Gale looked after him, with a smile. Lord Bellinger then had taken his advice, and adopted the most likely means of bringing to justice the perpetrator of an outrage that was both highway robbery and high treason. It interested the Parson but little save in so far as the gray horse was concerned. If its rider should come to the gallows he would do all he knew to put that noble beast into his stable. In imagination, he was already galloping it over Exmoor, to go and see Nelly Carew.

Then the Parson signed and swore, and sighed again, and put on his dingy cassock to marry the tardy couple who had waited so long.

He tied them up, however, fast and sure, before the stroke of noon, pocketing his fees with considerable satisfaction, for Mr. Gale took no delight in the gratuitous administrations of the Church, little thinking that, even while he pronounced the blessing, which it did not strike him seemed a mockery from such lips as his, John Garnet was turning out into the sunshine, fresh and fair, like a bridegroom himself, to wait upon Mistress Carew.

The gentleman lay long in bed without dreaming the pleasant dream again, so he thought him at last that it would be more to the purpose to rise and pursue the reality, than lose his time in sighing after the shadow. He was very far gone now. The pony she had given him stood in water at his bedside, every hour of the day seemed wasted that was not spent with his blue-eyed girl, and he never gave Waif a thought for more than a moment at a time.

Bold, blithe, and buoyant, he whistled a merry air as he strode up the village street, thinking of his first, last love, like a cock-bird in full plumage going to look for its mate. He seemed to moult a feather or two though, as he passed the village stocks, on the post of which, for want of more prominent elevation, were posted two conspicuous hand-bills, beginning with a gigantic "Whereas," and continuing through a long and minute description of his own person, to the offer of one hundred guineas for his capture, dead or alive; the whole concluding with a flourish, in capital letters, to the glory of "Our Sovereign Lord the King."

He went on to see Nelly all the same, but resolved that he would put off to a more convenient season something he meant to have told her to-day.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HARBORER.

Nature is always beautiful in her morning, evening, and noon-day dresses, her fits of rage, her languor of repose, her storms, her calms, her shadows, sunshine, tears, and smiles; but never perhaps are we so conscious of her charms, as when, abroad before day-break, in a mountainous country, we see her growing, line by line, out of darkness into day.

orchard, he travels many a league after sun-down, feeding on the best that moorland soil and scanty harvests can afford, nibbling the half-ripened ears on one hill-farm at midnight, flinging the turnips overhead in wasteful profusion on another ten miles off, within an hour; seeking, before dawn, the shelter of some wooded coombe, in which he means to harbor, at an equal distance from both. Restless, wary, vigilant, he is always on the move, and habitually suspicious of an enemy. It is to master, by man's intellect, man's powers of observation, the superior speed, finer instinct, and craftier nature of the brute, that "Red Rube" has been after the deer from boyhood, acquiring in the experience of many seasons so intimate a knowledge of their haunts and habits, that, in spite of age, infirmity, and a confirmed tendency to drink, he has earned an unchallenged right to call himself the most skilful "Harborer" in the West.

The ground must indeed be hard, and the "slot," or print of the animal's feet, many hours old to baffle Red Rube, who, stooping to the line like a blood-hound, reads off, as from a book, the size, sex, weight and age of the passing deer, the pace at which he was travelling, its distance ahead, and the probability of its affording a run. Therefore it was his custom to be abroad long before day-break, guiding his Exmoor pony, only less wise and wary than himself, through broken paths and winding tracks, by log, boulder, and precipice, with an instinct, unerring as that of the wild animal he went to seek. In the first twilight of morning he would hobble the pony at the head of some remote coombe that bordered on the moor; and prowling stealthily down its windings, would begin his quest in the different haunts that he knew were frequented by deer. He seldom made a cast in vain. Ere the light was strong enough to distinguish it, he usually came upon the footprint of his game. Then he stopped, examined it carefully, pondered, and made up his mind. If the slot were three inches wide at the heel, after due allowance for nature of ground and rate of speed, it would be that of a six-year-old hart at least, carrying nine or ten branches on his two antlers, having, in forrester's language, "his rights," and to be described therefore as "a warrantable deer." Such considerations would cause "Rube" to grin—he never laughed—and to take a pull at his flask.

Following up the track to some deep impervious woodland, in which it was again lost, he would make a circuit of many miles round its verge, with or without the pony, in order to make sure that his quarry had not gone on, and here an intimate acquaintance with his habits, and the passes through which it would be likely to emerge, saved him many an hour of fruitless search. Ere the sun was high he had so contracted the circle, by ascertaining where the stag was not, that he could point out the very copse, almost the very thicket, in which it lay ensconced. Again, to use woodman's language, he had fairly "harbored his deer."

Then Rube's responsibility was over, and his day's work done.

Thus, it fell out, that on a cool gray morning, late in harvest, our harbinger, stooping and prying over a level glade of turf by the water-side, in the deep shadows of water Honor Wood, came to a stop; and, kneeling down, began to examine very closely a track that seemed to have crossed the stream and broken into a gallop towards the hill. It was no cloven foot; and, consequently, neither deer nor devil, as Rube observed to himself, with a grim smile; but the hoof-mark of a horse, shod with iron, and going at speed, nor was this in any way remarkable, but that the shoes were forged by no West-country blacksmith, and Rube was far too practiced a woodman to pass such a slot without inquiry or remark.

"A horse," he muttered, and a good one. Here's a stride of nigh six yards, and every foot down at once in a ring I could cover with my hat! And here, again, when the rider's hand turned him from that boggy bit, see how he cut the moss out of the bank,

afforded foot-hold where they grow, he paused for a breathing-space, ere, patting his horse's neck with a word of endearment, he roused him to another effort, that, after a punge or two, placed him in safety, with a bank of sound leather beneath his feet.

The gray trembled all over, his eye rolled, his nostril dilated; but, with a prolonged snort and a shake, he recovered his composure, rubbing his handsome head against his master, as though to congratulate him on their joint escape. "We'll never go there again, my boy," said the rider, whom this treacherous surface had so deceived, adding, as though he did well to be angry, "why it looks like the best bit of gallopin' ground in the whole coombe."

Red Rube grinned. To one born and bred on Exmoor, this was a jest that palled with no amount of repetition. There tempting islands of green sward, smooth and level as a lake, while affording, indeed, but little firmer support, seemed designed by nature to lure a horseman from another country? The harbinger's keen gray eye had taken him in at a glance, just as it would have mastered the points, size, and weight of a warrantable deer to the brief second dicing which the creature bounded across a ride. From the lace on his hat to the spur on his soiled boot, Red Rube had reckoned up John Garnet, as it were, to the very counting of the buttons on his coat. From Katerfelto's taper muzzle, to the last hair in his tail, he had, in the same instant, so impressed the whole animal on his mind, that he could have sworn to its identity under any circumstances, at any future time. It struck him, even while man and horse were struggling in the bog, that they answered the description of that highwayman for whose capture so large a reward was offered in the hand-bills; and it was from no considerations of humanity or fair play that the old man refrained from knocking the stranger on the head, when he had him at disadvantage, unhorsed and knee-deep in a slough.

His reasons were extremely practical. In the first place, he had no weapon with which he could hope to contend successfully against a younger and stronger man; in the second, he could not bring himself to believe that so experienced a West-country rider as Galloping-Jack would have fallen into a trap like this. "A bog," as he said, "so black and ugly, that even Varmer Viall's cows, poor things, do have the sense to keep out!"

"Well, it might have been worse!" replied John Garnet, good-humoredly, while he swung himself in the saddle, and put a crown-piece in Red Rube's hand. "You halloaed in tune, my friend, or I should have missed the rushes, and never got out at all. I am beholden to you, and I won't forget it. This is the best horse in England, and I wouldn't have done him a mischief for more money than you could count."

The old man's fingers closed readily on the silver. "You be making for Porlock!" said he. "You do seem strange herabouts. My day's work is done, and I don't mind if I show you the way."

John Garnet laughed—"I know the way well enough," he answered. "But why should you have done work when most men are just going to begin?"

Red Rube's gray eye twinkled. He laid his horny hand on Katerfelto's name and looked in the rider's face, with a cunning leer. "Every man to his trade," said he. "My business lies betwixt the dark and the daylight. Yours, may-be, takes you out of a warm bed when the moon's up. I've been backwards and forwards on the moor, fifty years or more, and no harm come of it yet. It's safer riding, may-be, than the road."

"Not with such cursed bogs as these about," replied the other, carelessly. "Bogs that would swallow a coach-and-six in this wild outlandish country!"

"You're a stranger, may-be?" asked Rube, sorely perplexed, for how could this horseman so resemble Galloping Jack, yet betray such practical ignorance of the moor and its peculiarities? "A stranger from up the country, no doubt, though you do handle

as I rest.
"My work is over when you come that," said Rube, adding respectfully, "You're a true sportsman, sir. If I do know how to harbor a stag, you do know how to hunt him. I'll warrant. Yet I never saw you out with us on the moor here, as I can call to mind."

"Do you think there is no hunting but in the West?" replied John Garnet. "We have red deer in my country, and hounds that can set them up to bay. Horses, too, and men who dare ride them as straight as a bird of the air can fly. These many a horn wound, and many a pair of spurs going from morning till night, all the season through, in the canny North."

"Like enough!" answered Rube. "But I'll always maintain that the moor is the moor. When your honor has once forded Badgeworthy water, you'll never want to follow hounds in any other country again."

"And that shall be before I am many days older," replied John Garnet, reflecting what an agreeable addition to the amusements of his retirement would be this favorite pursuit; and remembering also, no doubt, that Mistress Carew, on the wonderful white pony that fed in the orchard, was a keen votary of the chase. "Do you find a good stag, and, unless we get into a bog again, my gray horse and I will try to see him killed."

"I'll do my best," said Rube; and with a clumsy obeisance, turned back to the moor, looking after John Garnet's figure as it disappeared amongst the giant stems of Horner Wood, with a puzzled expression on his quaint old face. This frank, well-spoken stranger was a riddle he could not read; "a slot," as he would have expressed it, that left him "at fault." The man might be a robber and an outlaw; but at any rate he rode to administration, was cordial, open-handed, and a sportsman to the back-bone.

CHAPTER XVII.

"LISTEN AND LEARN IT."

And you never told me your life was in danger, never said that a careless word might ruin both of us at a blow. Dear heart, surely you might have trusted me."

It was Nelly Carew's voice, and her brow was pressed to John Garnet's shoulder, while she spoke. The red-cheeked apples hanging overhead in her grandfather's orchard had ripened less quickly under a hot harvest sun, that the love that a few short days brought to maturity in the maiden's heart. She could not believe that a month ago she had never so much as heard of the man whose presence now seemed a condition of existence, like the very air she breathed. Could she be the same Nelly Carew, whose whole being was once engrossed in grandfather's posset and the incubations of the speckled hen? Or was it all a dream? If a dream, she only prayed she might never wake again.

"Why should I have told you?" he asked. "It could but make you anxious and unhappy, dearest; we have surely enough of difficulty and vexation as it is. Besides," he added, in a higher tone, "how was I to know, Nelly, that you liked me well enough to care?"

There came a very kind look in the blue eyes—"Didn't you guess?" she whispered, softly. "Didn't you think it very strange of me, that day, when I gave you the posset out of the hedge?"

There is a pleasant fiction amongst lovers, that the tender passages to which they constantly refer, must have taken place in the remote past. Nelly spoke of that day as if the time since elapsed was to be counted by years, instead of hours.

"I thought you the dearest, and the best, and the loveliest girl on earth!" was the appropriate reply; "and now I could almost find it in my heart to wish we had never met. For your sake, Nelly, not for mine—"