

get away, while I remain here?" she whispered, in agitated tones.

"Hush! They come!"

"This way, if you please," said the servants, in a strangely hushed tone, as if conscious of impending trouble.

Lord Langton leaped out, gave his hand to his sister with stately grace and courtesy, that quite made the servants forget the stains and threadbare patches of the violet coat, and followed the lacquers through a corridor lined with soldiers in a hall, up a grand flight of stairs to a saloon, and there met the king, who had around and behind him a throng of courtiers and military officers of rank, in full uniform.

At the first moment of recognition Lord Langton knelt on one knee, then rose, advanced till quite near, and until a signal for pause was given by the Lord Chamberlain. Then he again knelt, and so kneeling spake.

"Sire, I have but now escaped from the Tower to satisfy the devotion of the noblest wife with which man was ever blessed. I have fulfilled my promise to her.

"I am ready to go back at your royal word, but I come before you now to entreat for the life and release from prison of as true and loyal a subject as your majesty possesses throughout these realms. I do humbly assure you sire, that I know more than one worthy adherent of King Ja—of—the Pretender—who hath been won to your majesty's service by the loyalty and loyally used influence of Sir Richard Constable. Sire, I, a true, though doomed servant, do entreat your majesty not to let so honest and good a gentleman be lost to you and to his country."

A dead silence followed the escaped prisoner's earnest and impassioned voice.

The king's round eyes lost a little of their stare of amazement, and drooped their lids with a look of dark and sullen displeasure.

"Come, sir," said he, at last, in a low, guttural tone, that could scarcely be heard by any but himself and his kneeling suppliant, "you fancy you have some right to ask this at our hands. Be so kind as to inform us what that is."

Lord Langton hesitated, his cheek flushed. Would he not, perhaps, gain all by venturing a single hint that none but the king need understand?

"Have I a right, then, sire," he said, in a voice lower than the king's, "to entreat at your hands a life in return for the life your majesty received at mine?"

In an instant he saw his error, for the king's face lighted up with conscious and exultant cunning. It was evidently what he had most wished to wring from him, and with no very tender, purpose, as the unhappy prisoner soon saw.

"So, gentlemen," said His Majesty, "behold the hero of the black mask, who was kind enough to prefer driving us out of the country to murdering us in our coach! No doubt he thinks he can demand the life of every rebel in the country as his just reward. His own life he makes no mention of, doubtless, he thinks that assured already."

"Sire," cried Lord Langton, rising passionately, "I confess I did think once that a king's life might be worth two of his subjects' lives. I confess now my bitter mistake. One life, however, I do in your majesty's presence, and in the presence of these gentlemen, solemnly entreat and demand as the price of my service to you—the life of your loyal servant, Sir Richard Constable."

The king made a sign, and the prisoner was led away to the place from whence he had come.

That day week Sir Richard Constable was released, and the sentence of imprisonment for life was passed on Stephen Lord Langton.

CHAPTER CIV—THE EVE OF SUCCESS.

It is a bitter evening in December, close upon Christmas time, and Humphrey Arkdale, his wife, and practice sit round the cellar fire listening to the waits.

Humphrey keeps time to music by jingling some half pence he has ready in his hand for the singers. He leans back in his oak elbow-chair, his head thrown to one side, his lips repeating softly

the words of the carol, while his eyes look towards Joan with a light in them, and an expression of thankful almost ecstatic hope, such as as might be in the eyes of a belated traveller who, after being beset with terrors all the long dark night, begins at last to see the dawn.

Jenkyns, waving the stick with which he is stirring a new dye over the fire, turns half round towards his master, his pale face beaming with sympathy and exultant pride.

Joan also smiles as she leans over her work, with hands clasped in reverence to the sacred words, but there is neither joy nor peace in her smile; the lips wreathe, and there only is the smile. The eyes, downcast, dry, and bright, seem at times to have no expression in them but one of apathy or heavy stupor.

But now and then, as a drunken man goes reeling home from the "George," and gives a derisive shout or groan in passing Humphrey's door, there flashes something in Joan's eyes like lightning over a leaden sky, and her hands clasp one another more tightly.

Sometimes the shouts or groans are accompanied by words which make Arkdale's cheek flush. Sometimes it is his own name—sometimes the word "inventor," coupled with some not very flattering epithets.

"Shout away, my lads," he says, softly. "By the mass, Joan, they make me feel a most a great man already!"

Joan looked up with a cold, wondering glance.

"Do not jest, I pray you," said she.

"And do not, you, Joan," answered Humphrey, "take these things so much to heart. I shall brave the storm; don't be afraid for me."

Joan's lips moved slightly, as if mutely and half contemptuously, answering—

"For you?"

Then, with an impatient hand, she snatched her work up, and stitched with a vehemence that made the sharp click of her needle audible to her little stepson in his crib, and he smiled at the sound and kissed her cloak that covered him, for he knew it was his garment she was stitching.

Joan, as if the caress had reached her heart, rose and went towards the crib, knelt down, and laid her head against it.

She heard Arkdale go to the door as the waits ceased—heard him give them money, and wish them a merry Christmas, then the door closed, and, glancing sharply round, Joan saw that Humphrey had gone out.

Her face turned a shade more pale, and it was evident that the contempt she had felt a few moments before as to his safety, was replaced by most painful anxiety.

"Jenkyns," said she, rising and pushing back her hair, which Dick's fond little hand had pulled about her face, "surely 'tis scarce safe for your master to go abroad to-night, he's best within doors, when he's made Bolton streets what they are."

Jenkyns was busy preparing bottles for his dye, which he had set on the stones to cool. As he could not answer his mistress reassuringly, being very anxious himself, he judged it best to pretend to be too much occupied to answer at all.

Joan went to the door and drew the bolt.

"Do you know where your master has gone, Jenkyns?"

"Eh?"

Joan repeated her question.

"To get some o' Boodle's men to go along with us to-morrow."

As he spoke he jerked his head in the direction of a large, long-sloped object, covered up near the wall.

Joan, who was passing close by this as Jenkyns spoke, shivered and drew her skirt close to her, that he might not touch it, but stood still and stared at it as if her eyes were charmed to the spot.

Jenkyns looked at her and shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, mistress," said he, coaxingly, as he lit a cork to make it the right size for the bottle, "let it alone. It's like burnt porridge, you know—the more you look at it and smell it,

the more it'll set you agen it. Come, leave it bide—leave it bide."

She came back listlessly to her seat by the fire, but her blue eyes, full of weary yet a restless passion, were drawn incessantly, as by a loathsome fascination, to the same object.

"Tell me, Jenkyns," cried she, suddenly throwing down her work—"tell me, am I asleep and dreaming, or is this all true? Do I hear my husband called such names as I and mine called Hargreaves? Has one of those vile things—those destroyers of the poor—been made under the same roof with me—at this fireside, where I dare sometimes to be happy? Has it been made here, I say, by the hands that give me my daily bread—the hands that put this ring upon my finger? Oh! Jenkyns, am I dreaming, lad—oh, am I dreaming? or is this true, true, true; and does it stand there finished—finished for its work?"

And she rose and stood looking at it, with her palms pressed to her temples.

"Finished, sure enough," muttered Jenkyns, adjusting his funnel in the bottle, "and a good job too, I should say. If it had been about much longer, we should 'a' stood a chance of havin' our very limbs worked into it, as well as the saucepans and brooms."

Joan threw herself in the chair by the table, and laid her head on her arms.

"Jenkyns," said she, in a low, half-stifled voice, "I feel as if to-morrow would never come, or as if I should never live to see it. 'Tis bad enough to have had the thing here, growing and growing into life all this weary time, but oh! to see it dragged out into the light o' day—out before their savage eyes, in reach of their hands. They will tear thy master to pieces, Jenkyns. I know their poor desperate hearts, and oh, lad, they will—they will!"

"Come, come, mistress," said Jenkyns, "you mustn't be afraid if we aint."

"But I am; and, 'twixt that and shame, my heart is a'most broken. I would he were in now—I would he were in!"

"Why, you'd do nought but rail at him if he was," asserted Jenkyns, consolingly.

Joan did not answer, but sat looking into the fire with her hands clasped in her lap.

At last Joan's eyes turned slowly from the fire to the door, but not for a minute afterwards did Jenkyns hear a footstep, and it was yet another minute ere he recognised it as his master's, and rose to open the door.

As soon as Arkdale came in he turned and barred the door again. Without glancing directly towards him, Joan could see that he and Jenkyns looked at each other significantly, and that Arkdale touched his right shoulder and made a wry face. Then he came to the fireside, flashed but smiling.

"Well, I've secured four of Boodle's best men for to-morrow morning," said he. "And now, Jenkyns, be off, lad, for I shall look for thy ugly phiz right early."

"Get your supper first, lad," commanded his mistress, setting a plate of porridge before him.

"Do they seem pretty quietish there now?" asked Jenkyns, in a whisper, indicating with his porridge-spoon the "Royal George."

On the pretence of reaching the ale jug, Humphrey leant across and answered, in a low voice—

"Quiet! Yes; and I saw a score of hands shaking over the bench—some compact had just been made between them."

"Peaceable?"

"Very, my lad, judging by the grips of the hand they gave one another, and the growls."

Joan gave a sharp, short sigh, and turned to the fire.

Arkdale looked at her anxiously, and shook his head sadly at Jenkyns, to warn him into silence. Tossing off his ale hastily, he drew his chair close to Joan's and took her hand.

"Come, lass," he said, tenderly, "times are on the turn for thee now; tho'tt be a carriage lady ere thee know'st well where thee art. And with thy silks and gewgaws to set thee off, shall have a pack of fine gallants casting sheep's eyes at thee, and wondering where the deuce a