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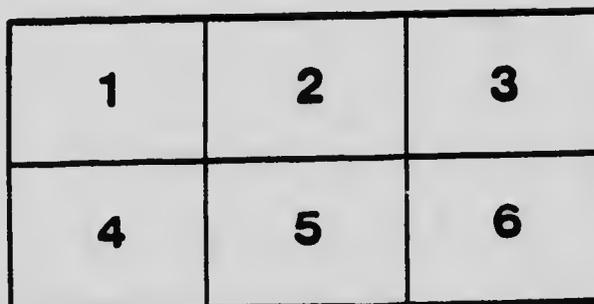
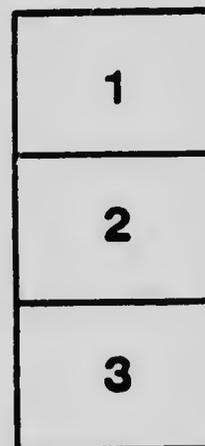
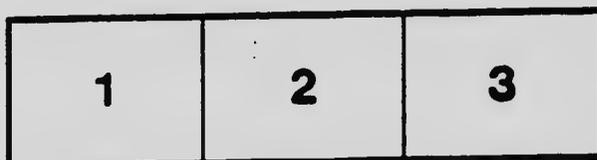
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ANNE FEVERSHAM



ANNE FEVERSHAM

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J. C. SNAITH

THOMAS LANGTON
TORONTO
1914

PP 1237
N3
A25

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Published in England as "The Great Age"

Printed in the United States of America

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CHAPTER I

A DISTINGUISHED member of the Lord Chamberlain's company, Mr. William Shakespeare by name, had entered the shop of a tailor in the town of Nottingham. This popular and respected actor and playwright was about thirty-five years of age. Of middle height, he had the compact figure of one in the prime of a vigorous manhood. His hair was worn rather long, but his beard, inclining to red in color, was trim and close. His dress was plainer than is the rule with those who follow his calling. Indeed at a first glance he had less of the look of an actor than of a steady, cautious man of affairs who has prospered in trade. Close observation might have amended this estimate. There was a vivid pallor about the face, and the somber eyes, slow-burning and deep-set, were like a smoldering fire. Even when the mobile features were in repose, which was seldom the case, the whole effect of the countenance was vital and arresting.

"That is a very choice coffin-cloth you have there, Master Tidey."

The manner of the actor and playwright was simplicity itself. There was not a suspicion of affectation in it. He passed his fingers over the rich pall that lay

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on the tailor's knee. Upon the hem of the cloth an armorial device was being stitched by the hand of a master craftsman.

"Yes, it is Master Shakespeare," said the tailor gravely. "Choice enough, choice enough."

"Who is the happy man?"

"A young gentleman who lies in the Castle yonder. He is to have his head cut off a Tuesday by order of the Queen."

A look of startled interest came into the eyes of the player. "Is that so, Master Tidey? And young, you say, and gentle, too?"

"Aye, young enough. But two or three and twenty—by all accounts a very fair and deliver young man."

"It seems a pity," said the player, "a mortal pity, for a man to die by the ax in the heat of his youth. And yet 'tis better to die by the ax than by the string. It is at least a gentleman's death the Queen is giving him," he added grimly.

"As you say," the tailor agreed, "it is at least a gentleman's death the Queen is giving him, and he'll have the robe of a gentleman in which to wrap his corpse. Happen, Master Shakespeare, that in like case it is a better consideration than would fall to you and me."

A light flashed in the somber eyes of the player. "Speak for yourself Master Tidey," he said, with a slow, deep laugh. "Whenever I get my deliverance, by God's grace I'll have the robe of a gentleman to cover me. Unless"—the light in the somber eyes was so intense that they shone almost black—"unless they let the reason out, and then there's no warrant for any man's exit. But what of this poor young man? How comes he to this?"

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The tailor lowered his voice to a whisper. It was as if he feared to be overheard. "They do say 'a has plotted with the Papishers, who are always contriving against the Queen."

"What's the name of the unlucky youth?"

"His name is Mr. Gervase Heriot."

"Mr. Gervase Heriot! He is a kinsman of my Lord Southampton." A look of keen pity came upon the player's face. "I know the lad well enough. He sat on our stage at The Globe less than two months ago. An open, cheerful youth incapable of plotting against aught save a flask of canaries, if I'm any judge of nature. Poor young man. Master Tidey, this is a very tragic matter."

"Sad enough, Master Shakespeare, sad enough," said the tailor, stitching busily at the coffin-cloth.

The actor passed a delicately shaped hand, the hand of a poet, across his face. "More than once I have marked the lad as he sat in the playhouse," he said. "'A was a proper neat youth. 'A had a subtle tongue and a very flaming eye. 'A was german-cousin to Perseus, him that bestrid the winged horse. And now—with the taste of milk yet on his lips!" The player ceased abruptly, as if overcome by a surge of feeling. For a time he was silent. The tragic end of a youth of bright promise appeared to weigh upon him sorely.

Master Nicholas Tidey, whose skill with the needle and shears had spread far and wide over the midland counties, was, like the player, a Stratford man. In a rather shamefaced way, the tailor was a little inclined to be proud of his fellow-townsmen. To be sure his calling was hardly that of a Christian. On occasion

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his speech was apt to be a little disorderly, it even verged upon the fantastical, but Master Tidey was bound to admit that there must be something in the fellow. For one thing, rumor had it that he had recently bought New Place, the largest house in his native town. Such a fact spoke for itself, even if a wise man was inclined to discount the glowing reports of the play-actor's ever-growing success which reached him continually from London. But, even as far back in the world's history as the age of Elizabeth, "Nothing succeeds like success" was a maxim known to the philosophers.

"They do tell me, Master Shakespeare," said the tailor, "that some of these harlotry pieces of yours have been approved by the Queen."

The playwright could not help smiling a little at a certain uneasiness which was apparent in the tone of his friend, in spite of the fact that that honest man tried very hard to conceal it. "If I said they had not, Master Tidey," he answered, with dry modesty, "I might be speaking less than I know. On the other hand, if I said that they had, a needy writer for the stage might be claiming more than becomes the least of her Majesty's servants."

Master Tidey looked a little incredulous. "They do tell me, Master Shakespeare, that you make them out of your own head entirely. Master Burbage, who was here an hour ago to have new points set in his hose, swore it was so, by the beard of the prophet—face-tiously, as I think. But I can hardly believe it, Master Shakespeare, not out of your own head, and that's the fact. Why, I mind the time you was a little graceless runnion that used to play truant from Stratford Free

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School. Many's the time I've seen you come sliding down Short Hill of a winter's morning in your blue short coat, with your books falling out o' your satchel as you dangled it behind you, and generally twenty minutes late for the muster. You were always a sharp lad, Master Shakespeare, I'm bound to say that although somewhat idly given, but I never thought you'd have had wit enough to make one of these interludes all out of your own head like book-learned men who have been bred at college."

"It seems unlikely enough I grant you," said the player discreetly. "And my pieces, such as they are, don't compare of course with those of some I could mention—there is a young fellow by the name of Ben Jonson, and one of these days you'll be able to contrive a whole garment for the best of us out of his sleeve ruffles. But I sometimes think, Master Tidey, when of an evening I've had a glass o' clear spring water with a carroway-seed in it at the Mermaid Tavern, that if only he had had the singular good fortune to have been bred at Oxford or Cambridge, the world might one day have heard of William Shakespeare—but no matter! It will all be the same a hundred years hence." The player laughed cheerfully. "We shall all be forgotten, and our interludes too, long before then."

"Yes, Master Shakespeare, there can be no doubt about that," said the tailor heartily. "And personally I thank God for it. I don't hold with these masks and gallimaufries and such-like cloaks for wantonness, saving your presence. Still the Queen does, as I understand, and although I am much surprised at *her*, that's a great matter. And that being the case I am bound to

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admit that for one who left the Stratford Free School at the age of thirteen with no more book-knowledge in his numskull than Daddy Jenkins could put there with his ferrule, and if, as I say, the Queen approves your interludes, and they are entirely out of your own head, as Master Burbage swears they are by the beard of the prophet—why, I am bound to admit that you bring little or no discredit upon your native parish.”

“You pay me a high compliment, Master Tidey,” said the actor. “And fain would I deserve it. But you will grieve to learn, I am sure, that the Queen has commanded the Lord Chamberlain’s servants to her palace at Richmond on the tenth of July, and moreover she desires a new piece from the pen of the least of them all. It would seem that, for some reason at present obscure, her Grace in her bounty is pleased to approve the nonsensical comedy of “Love’s Labour’s Lost,” which, between ourselves, is by no means the brightest of the performances from the hand of the rustical clown in question.”

In spite of the strictness of his tenets, Master Tidey could not forbear to be impressed. “You are indeed coming to great honors now,” said the tailor, whose worldly wisdom appeared to be in danger of overriding his high principles. “And it is not for me to deny that you have a talent—of a kind that is, Master Shakespeare. But at least, as you are a Stratford man like myself, I am glad to hear that there are those who think well of it. What will you put into your comedy, Master Shakespeare? Love, I presume, and all manner of wantonness?”

“Well, Master Tidey,” said the author, “since you ask the question, you can no more leave love out of a

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comedy than you can leave an apple out of a dumpling. Besides, it is Gloriana's desire that I should make her a tale of love, that there should be youth in it and girlhood and high poesy—that is, if we can rise to poesy in this barren age! And it is Gloriana's pleasure that it shall be played before her of a summer's afternoon under the greenwood in Richmond Park."

"You will be making your fortune one of these days, Master Shakespeare," said the tailor, upon the verge of awe.

"That is as may be, Master Tidey. At least I would ask nothing better than to quit the stage. A man's dignity and a player's calling don't ride well together. In the meantime must I tease my five wits to devise a play for Gloriana. And it must be made, alas! by the tenth of July."

"I'd rather you had to do it than had I," said the tailor, with a sigh of relief, as he took up the needle and shears.

By now the player was subdued to the process of thought, and was twisting his short beard between his thumb and forefinger. The eyes were veiled almost like those of a man in a trance. "I've a mind to put Robin Hood in it," he said. "The bold outlaw of Sherwood and his merry men. Many's the time they have come from the neighboring greenwood into this famous old town of Nottingham."

Before, however, the actor could pursue this pleasant idea, there arose a sharp clatter of hoofs on the cobblestones outside the tailor's door, and a minute afterwards a personage entered the shop who at once turned his thoughts into a new direction.

CHAPTER II

THE personage was a young woman of some eighteen years, breathing youth and its sorcery in every line. She was tall, well grown, of a beauty that was remarkable. She stepped with a lithe grace, a springing freedom that Atalanta would not have disdained. Her long quilted riding-coat was the last cry of the fashion, and on the left hand she wore a large hawking-gauntlet. But that which at once caught the eye both of the tailor and of the player, and made the charming figure still more memorable, was an audacious pair of leather breeches. These clothed her nether limbs, and below them were a long pair of boots of untanned leather. Now Master Tidey it was who had built this fine pair of hawking-breeches to the explicit order of the wearer, yet even he could hardly forbear to be scandalized when he marked its effect. As for the player—but he had a larger, a more liberal, a more sophisticated mind. For one thing he had seen the fine ladies of the Court ride out hawking in this guise. To be sure he had heard some very salutary criticism of a style of dress that was creeping into vogue among the highest in the land, but he was not of those who condemned it. Mr. William Shakespeare, unlike his friend Nicholas Tidey, betrayed

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not the least surprise at this young woman's appearance. Certainly his curiosity was fully aroused, but perhaps that was less on account of the garment itself than because of the look of its wearer.

In point of fact, Mr. William Shakespeare, whose eye was very sure in such matters, was charmed by the spectacle. Swiftly he moved aside, in order that this young gentlewoman might proceed to the tailor's counter. Moreover, as he performed this polite action he removed his hat with a touch of gallantry, as became an acquaintance with courts.

"Good Master Tailor," said the wearer of the garment, with an air so fine as to delight Mr. William Shakespeare still more, "I make you my compliments upon these hawking-breeches you have been so good as to devise for me. They are a little tight around the left knee, otherwise they do excellently well. I make you my compliments upon them, Master Tailor, and have the goodness to devise me a second pair in every particular as the first."

Master Tidey bowed obsequiously. "I attend your pleasure, madam," he said.

The young woman then drew off a glove, and with some little difficulty was able to produce a purse from the recesses of her attire. "What is your charge, friend, for this excellent garment, which gives me such ease in the saddle that from this day I am minded to wear no other style of habiliment."

"Two angels, if it please you, madam."

"Here be four, my friend."

She opened the purse and counted out in gold pieces twice the sum that was asked.

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"Good Master Tailor," she said, "you have right excellent craft and your garment pleases me. And if I must speak the truth, I had never learned until this day what ease and freedom comes of the wearing of galligaskins."

She used such a grave air, as of one expressing a most serious and private thought, that Mr. William Shakespeare, who all this time had been regarding her covertly, although taking care to appear lost in contemplation of the coffin-cloth the tailor had now discarded, could not forbear from giving forth a dry, stealthy chuckle.

Mistress Anne Feversham half turned for the purpose of visiting such a presumption with an imperious eye. The clear gaze said as plainly as woman could express it: "And who, pray, are you, sir? Whoever you are I'll thank you to be pretty careful."

Howbeit, in the matter of looking down this presumptuous individual, young Mistress Anne Feversham, it seemed, had undertaken a task a little beyond her present powers. There was hardly one among the burghesses of the town who could have sustained that gaze. But with this quiet and mild-looking individual, whose coat and sword were so modest, it was a different matter.

The impact of the proud eyes of Mistress Insolence was met with perfect composure. Moreover, there was just a suspicion of laughter. In the opinion of the lady there was no ground for levity. Yet it was almost as if this person, whose dress was so little pretentious as to be hardly that of a gentleman, was daring to say in his heart, "Madam, think not ill of me if I confess that, far from being abashed by your air, I am rather amused by it."

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That at least was the quick and sensitive feminine interpretation of the subtle face whose owner was hardly entitled to such a look of arch and humorous self-confidence. Mistress Anne Feversham felt a slight wound in her dignity. Who, pray, was this impertinent?

By some means best known to himself, Mr. William Shakespeare appeared to read the thoughts of the lady. At least the sly smile that had crept into those somber but wonderful eyes had deepened to a look of roguery. Mistress Anne grew crimson; the disdainful head went up; she bit her lip; and then realizing that such a display of embarrassment was wholly unworthy of the daughter of the Constable of Nottingham Castle, the pride of youth chastened her so sorely that she turned her back abruptly on the cause of her defeat.

Soon, however, the ever-abiding sense of place and power came to her aid and she was able to command herself sufficiently to address the tailor.

"I see the town is full of play-acting rogues," she said. "Whence do they come?"

"From London, madam, I believe," said Master Tidey, without venturing to look in the direction of his friend.

"I am afraid they are a saucy-looking crew. My groom"—perhaps it was well that the voice of Mistress Anne did not reach the ears of the haughty young falconer who was taking charge of her horse at the tailor's door—"my groom pointed them out to me as I passed the Moot Hall. As soon as I return to the Castle I will inform my father the Constable, and I will see if they cannot be put in the stocks, which to my mind is where they belong."

As became the shrewd man he was, Master Nicholas

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Tidey made no reply. He was content to nod his head gravely, as if he tacitly approved, while at the same time he contrived to keep a tail of an eye upon his distinguished friend. There might or there might not have been a ghost of a smile upon that prim and cautious mouth.

Indeed, very wisely, Master Tidey left it to the play-actor himself to try a fall with such a formidable adversary. And this that daring individual proceeded to do in a manner quite cool and leisurely, and yet with a vastly considered air. In his eye, it was true, there was a suspicion of something far other than gravity. That of course was regrettable; but it was undoubtedly there.

Mr. William Shakespeare's first act was to remove his hat with its single short cock's feather, and then he bowed very low indeed, in the manner of one quite well aware of addressing a social superior.

"Cry you mercy, mistress," he said, "but as one who is himself a poor actor may he ask wherein his guild has had the unhappiness to offend you?"

Mistress Anne Feversham met this effrontery with a disdain that was wonderful. Her chief concern at the moment was to show her great contempt without a descent into downright ill-breeding. But as soon as she met the somber eyes of this individual, in which a something that was rare and strange was overlaid by a subtle mockery, this natural instinct took wings and fled. In those eyes was something that hardly left her mistress of herself, in spite of her father the Constable, her young blood-horse and her incomparable pair of galligaskins.

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"My father the Constable would have all play-actors whipped," said Mistress Anne Feversham.

But her voice was not as she had intended it to be. Moreover, her father the Constable had yet to deliver himself of such an illiberal sentiment. And this graceless individual seemed to be fully aware that this was the case.

"Whipped, mistress!" His look of grave consternation did not deceive her. "You would whip a poor actor!"

"All who are actors, sir, my father would."

"Is it conceivable?—the gentlest, the humblest, the most industrious, the most law-abiding of men!"

"My father cares not for that, sir. He says they are masterless rogues."

"Then by my faith, mistress, that is very froward in your father."

"He says they are the scum of taverns and alehouses and they corrupt the public mind."

"Ods my life! how comes so crabbed a sire to have a daughter so fair, so feat, so charming!"

It began to seem hopeless for Mistress Anne to continue in such a strain of severity. For a moment she used her will in order to punish this audacity, but in the next she was trembling upon the verge of open laughter. Still the consciousness that she was no less a person than the only daughter and heiress of Sir John Feversham, the Constable of Nottingham Castle and chief justice of the forest of Sherwood, was just able to save her from that which could only have been regarded in the light of a disaster.

"I would fain inform you, mistress, there are play-actors whom even the Queen approves."

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Alas! Mistress Anne had a full share of the cynical irreverence of youth.

"I am not at all surprised to learn that, sir. I have even been told that the Queen dyes her hair."

The effect of a speech so daring was to startle Master Tidey quite visibly. The world looks to one of his craft to have a conventional mind, and there was no doubt the times were perilous. The shears almost fell from his hand. If this was not treason, might he never sew another doublet!

The play-actor, however, was of a fiber less delicate. It was as much as Mr. William Shakespeare could do to refrain from open laughter.

"May I ask, mistress," he said, "what is your warrant for such a grave charge against the Queen's Majesty?"

"The warrant of my own eyes, sir. Her hair was certainly dyed when she stayed at the Castle a month since."

"But bethink you, mistress, might it not appear less treasonable if Gloriana's true subjects presumed her hair to be a wig?"

"Let them presume nothing, sir, but that which is the truth."

"To so pious a resolve even a poor actor may say amen."

Mistress Anne realized that she was no match for this man. The only hope for her dignity lay in a cool scorn of him. Suddenly the gloriously straight back was turned disdainfully. Let the greatest lady for ten miles beware how she chopped logic with a strolling actor.

"Master Tailor, I would have you devise me a second

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pair of these right excellent breeches, in every particular as the first, and do you have them at the Castle against the first of May."

Master Tidey bowed low.

"Good-day to you, Master Tailor."

Master Tidey bowed still lower with that clear and proud speech in his ears.

With chin held high, and with an arrogant, free-swinging carriage, Mistress Anne Feversham went forth of the tailor's shop. But even then, abrupt as was the manner of her going, she had to submit to the play-actor's leaping to the door before she could reach it herself. He opened it and held it for her with the grace and dignity of a courtier. She passed imperiously, without yielding him a glance or a "Thank you."

A dashing young man in the livery of a falconer was holding the young blood-horse of Mistress Anne outside the tailor's door. He was handsomely mounted on an animal similar to the one he held for his mistress. On his fist was a small falcon, hoodwinked and fessant.

Very agile was the lady in finding her way into the saddle. For all that she was not quite clever enough to defeat this incorrigible play-actor. He sprang to her stirrup while she had one foot still on the ground and hoisted her up with an address that enforced her respect, and with so grave an air of courtesy as tacitly to compel her own.

All the same she was angry. And she had sense enough to know that it was illogical to be so. Yet she swung her horse around sharply in order to give expression to her state of mind. And as the falconer, John Markham by name, confided the merlin to the ac-

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customed wrist of his mistress, he turned back an instant to scowl at the player. It was even as if he would ask him who the devil he was, and what the devil he did there.

The player removed his hat with its single cock's feather in a manner that was almost tenderly ironical. It had hardly been a display of Court manners of which he had been the recipient. But he was too much a man of the world to look for those everywhere. And above all here was youth in its glamor, youth in its sorcery. For the sake of a stuff so precious he would forgive a crudity greater than this.

With a sigh of delight the player stood at the tailor's door to watch this fine pair ride very slowly and haughtily down the street. For all their air of class consciousness and their open contempt of the townspeople, which their youth alone saved from being ridiculous, they made a glorious pair in the eye of the part-proprietor of the Globe Theatre, London.

That was an eye to judge men and things as none other since the world began. Neither Mistress Anne Feversham nor the falconer was aware of that fact, and had they been aware of it they had not cared a button. All that they did know and all that they cared was that the worthy burgesses of Nottingham were stealing glances of awe and admiration at them. In a word, they were causing a sensation, and were very pleasantly alive to the fact.

Yes, undoubtedly a gallant pair. John Markham, in spite of his superior condition and rising renown, rode behind his mistress at a respectful distance of ten yards. They sat their horses with great skill and assurance.

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First one and then the other, as they walked them slowly down the street, would touch them gently with the spur, in order to enjoy the pleasure of showing them off in the sight of the townspeople.

The player, still standing at the tailor's door, could not take his eyes from the spectacle. Almost wistfully, and yet in a kind of entrancement, he watched them until at last there came a turn in the street and they were lost to view. Then he went within to rejoin his scandalized friend, who to compose his mind had had recourse already to the needle and shears.

"I never saw the like o' that," said Master Nicholas Tidey. "It's rare to be the quality. But that's nothing to you, Master Shakespeare. I reckon you see it every day o' the week."

"It's a fine thing, I grant you, when it rides proud in the sight of heaven," said the player abstractedly.

"Aye, Master Shakespeare, and even when it goes afoot!" said the tailor, whose mind was more pedestrian. "It does a man good, I always think, to have a sight of the quality now and again. But as I say, Master Shakespeare, it is nothing to you who go to Court like a gentleman."

But the part-proprietor of the Globe Theatre was not heeding the words of his friend. The light that never was on sea or land had come into those somber eyes. Suddenly his hand struck the tailor's counter a great blow. "That is an adorable miniard," he said. "By my soul, if Gloriana requires a comedy, here is matter for a comedy for Gloriana!"

CHAPTER III

IN the meantime, the unconscious cause of Mr. William Shakespeare's enthusiasm was proceeding somewhat arrogantly through the streets of the town. Mistress Anne Feversham was mightily proud of herself, of her young blood-horse, of her pied merlin, above all of her brand-new hawking-breeches, which she had had the audacity to copy from two particularly dashing ladies of the Court who had accompanied the Queen on her recent visit to Nottingham.

As for John Markham, she was proud of him too. He made a fine squire. But nothing would have induced her to let him know it. None the less surely was he subdued to her purposes. A wise fellow in all things else, he was the true knight, the ready slave of his young mistress. And his young mistress was imperious.

High temper was in every clean-run line of her. It was in the eye, a thing of mist and fire, gloriously placed like that of one of Leonardo's ladies. It was in the nose, curved like the beak of her merlin; in the delicate molding of the chin and mouth, in the slender column of the throat, in the poise of the head, in the supple assurance of the body which ruled a beast of

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mettle and goaded it into setting up its will for the pleasure of subduing it.

John Markham, with a head beyond his years, was passing wise for his station. He was no ordinary servant, but one high in the regard of Sir John Feversham, the Constable of Nottingham Castle, that grim pile half-a-mile off, rising sheer from its rock in the midst of the water-meadows. Learned in hawking, he was esteemed by gentle and simple for many a mile. His skill in the craft of princes had even carried his fame as far as Belvoir, under whose shadow he had been bred. He was a shrewd, a skilful, a bold young fellow, wise in all things except that he worshiped the ground upon which his young mistress trod.

That was the fault of his youth. He had been less than he was, far less, could he have attended her pleasure without dreaming of her in the long watches of the night, or desiring in his hours of madness that she should plunge into his heart the silver-hilted poniard she wore at her waist. This was her eighteenth birthday, and he was rising twenty-five. She was rich, important, beautiful, capricious. For she was the only child and heiress of the greatest man for ten miles round.

And he, who was he? Well, if the truth must be told, he was the byblow of a kitchen-wench and one of great place who had shown him not a spark of kindness. Yes, if the truth must be told—and John Markham thanked no man for telling it—born and bred under the shadow of Belvoir, given the soul and the features of a noble race, but without birth, favor or education, except that he was learned in hawking. Encased in that fine livery was a strong, tormented soul.

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His young mistress never allowed him to forget that he was a servant. In her gentlest moods she would throw her words to him as if he had been a dog. She knew he was her slave, happy only in his chains, one barred by fortune from an equality she could never forgive his not being able to claim. His passive acceptance of the bar seemed to make her cruel. He was so tall, so brave, so handsome; not a man in all the county of Notts could cast a main of hawks like him. Only a month ago the Queen had praised him to his face. Yet was he like a hound that came to heel at her word, or a horse that took sugar out of her hand without hurting it. In the presence of others he could be proud enough, but in hers he was as humble as the meanest of her servants, who asks only to be allowed to wait upon her will.

At this moment, be it said, the will of Mistress Anne was making John Markham decidedly unhappy. It had done so indeed for a fortnight past. In the Queen's train during her recent visit to Sir John, his master, at the Castle, had come the ladies of her household. Among these had been two who, not to put too fine a point upon the matter, had given Mistress Anne ideas. Brazenly enough as it had seemed to chaste minds, yet it was to be feared with the sanction of their august mistress, had they gone a-hawking in the meadows astride their horses, the nether woman arrayed in brown leather gallingaskins! Honest John Markham was not alone in his horror of so sad a spectacle. More than one graybeard had wagged over it in the buttery; more than one prim kirtle had lamented it bitterly in the hall. What were the women of England coming to, if the highest in the land—! The matter was one scarce fit for persons of delicacy. If

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such a practice spread, who should say to what heights ere long the vaunting spirit of woman would aspire?

Alas! the matter had not ended here. Mistress Anne, in the very insolence of daring, had seen the last word in modishness in this most perilous innovation. Nothing would content her but that she should have a pair of leather hawking-breeches for her wear. John Markham, that trusty henchman, was sent at once to Master Nicholas Tidey, the man's tailor of Nottingham, with careful instructions from his mistress.

She was not able herself to visit that worthy, because she had been expressly forbidden by her father to pass through the town gate. Thus had the task been laid upon John Markham of haranguing the accomplished Master Tidey. And in the last resort he summoned that famous craftsman in person to the Castle, since it presently appeared that there are subtleties in the design of a pair of hawking-breeches which cannot be dealt with by third parties. Finally John it was who bore the sinister parcel into the Castle under cover of night, carrying it with his own faithful hands into the presence of the lady on the eve of the eighteenth anniversary of her birth.

Truly a very perilous innovation. Honest John did not go beyond that. Whether that other honest John, his master, from whom she derived her over-riding temper, would be content with such a moderation—well, that was a matter that the future would soon be called upon to decide.

Mistress Anne, riding slowly down the street ten yards ahead of the falconer, checking her blood-horse, Cytherea, with one hand and holding her pied merlin in the

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other, was a picture to haunt the young man's dreams for many a day to come. Already she had much skill in the art he had taught her: she could bring down her bird with the best; she sat her horse like a young goddess; the galligaskins of supple brown leather—alas! that was a subject to which the honest fellow durst not lend his mind.

As they rode through the town, many a sly glance was stolen at the wearer of the brown leather galligaskins. But the expression on the face of the falconer said clearly enough: "Be wary of your gaze, my masters. There is a broken costard for any who are froward of eye."

Nevertheless Mistress Anne made a nine days' wonder in the ancient borough of Nottingham. Presently the town was behind them. Instead of returning straight to the Castle, they made for the open meadows all spread with blue and white and yellow crocuses, which in the spring of the year weave their vivid carpet by the banks of Trent. Soon they had come to the narrow wooden bridge that spanned the broad and deep river. John Markham's horse, young and half-broken, suddenly took exception to the quick-flowing torrent under its feet. It swerved so sharply that it all but threw him.

Hearing the sound of the fierce scuffle, Mistress Anne looked back. She was in time to see John struggling to regain the saddle from which he had so nearly parted company. "Clumsy fellow!" she cried. "You sit your horse like a——"

While she was in the act of finding a figure of speech to meet the case, her own horse realized its opportunity. Nor was it slow to turn it to account. Cytherea made

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a thoroughly competent attempt to pitch her rider into the river. She just failed, it is true, but that was more because her luck was out than for any lack of honest intention.

Cytherea's bold rider was no believer in half measures. She soon had her in hand, duly admonished her with shrewd jabs of her long spurs and came a second time within an ace of being flung into the river. Not brooking cold steel, Cytherea fought for her head like a tigress. She got her forefeet onto the low rail of the bridge. There was a desperate moment of uncertainty, in which the issue hung in the balance, and then Cytherea had to bring her forefeet down again.

"The fault is yours, John Markham," said Cytherea's rider. "You are, I say, a clumsy fellow. You sit your horse like a—" Again she paused to find a simile worthy of the occasion. "You sit your horse like a sack of peas."

John did not reply, but hung his diminished head.

"Here, take the merlin," said his mistress, and by now there was a steady light in her eyes. "And give me that whip of yours."

But the falconer, fully conscious of his daring, summoned all his courage. "Wait till we are across the bridge, I pray you, mistress."

"Give me your whip, sirrah. If this rude beast gets me into the river I'll warrant she comes in herself."

"No, mistress," said the falconer. "I dare not. The rail is too low and the bridge is too narrow."

"Hand it to me at once, I say!" The face of Cytherea's wilful rider was full of menace.

Never before had the falconer dared to oppose her will, but it was almost certain death if now he obeyed it.

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"Do you not hear me, sirrah?"

"You shall have it, mistress, as soon as we are across the bridge."

There was nothing for it but to wait until they had gained the opposite bank. Once among the crocuses, the lady reined in the still mutinous Cytherea with no light hand. She then turned her unruly steed to meet that of the falconer.

"Now, sirrah!"

The gauntleted hand was held out grimly. The eyes were like stars in their dark luster; and in the center of each cheek burned a glowing crimson.

John Markham lifted the merlin from the fist of his mistress. Then he gave her the whip. There was not a drop of blood in his cheeks. His fixed, unfearing gaze had not a shade of defiance; but it was as if the upturned face almost invited that which awaited it.

"You fool!"

The whip descended sharply, but without haste, on the lithe and beautiful flanks of the astonished Cytherea. One, two, three. It was a hazardous proceeding. For more than one long minute the issue lay in doubt. But skill and high courage gained the day. The dignity of a daughter of men was vindicated at the expense of the dignity of the daughter of goddesses.

"I thank you, John Markham."

She returned the whip to the falconer with almost an air of kindness.

CHAPTER IV

THIS was a brave thing, already out to set up its will against the world. And of the little world in which she lived her father was the center of authority. He was an august man, high in the service of the Queen. His explicit word was not lightly to be disobeyed. And it had gone forth with no uncertainty. Upon no pretext must Mistress Anne Feversham enter the town of Nottingham, which nestled close about the Castle rock.

But she was eighteen years old this day, of a headstrong blood, motherless, craving adventure. The fire in her veins was mounting high. It must have an outlet, it must find escape from within the grim precincts of that old fortress which had begun to press upon her life.

Alas! as they returned to the Castle after an hour's larking among the crocuses, John Markham's heart sank. He had been a party to a forbidden thing. And he knew not what pains, what penalties might overtake the charming culprit if her naughtiness came to his master's ear. Moreover, a share of the consequences was like to fall upon himself. But the falconer was not the man to care very much about that. He would have

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asked nothing better than to be allowed to pay the whole of that reckoning which he knew very well was bound sooner or later to confront his young mistress.

That young woman fully realized her guilt. Yet she was far from being afraid. Indeed, as they rode back in the glow of the April sunset to the stern house which kept the old town in awe, she was like a strong-winged bird that knew already the power of its pinions. The brief and sharp battle with Cytherea, whose end had been a proper mending of manners for that unruly beast, had put her in great heart. She was keen for a further display of her powers. Never had she used her servant with such a magnanimity, never with such a humorous indulgence.

It was as if she would say to all the world: "See what a will I have. Be it known to all men it is vain for any to oppose it."

Nevertheless John Markham was sad at heart. Out of his high devotion to her she might command him anything, but well he knew there could only be one end to this overweening mood. The galligaskins were a sore matter, although the Constable had not seen them yet. As for the visit to the town, it was neither more nor less than an open flout to his authority. John had a troubled heart as they passed through the Castle gate.

As if to confirm the falconer in his fears, Mistress Anne was informed by the porter of the lodge as they passed through the gate that the Constable desired her immediate presence in his own apartment.

"For what purpose does he seek it?" The question was asked with the impatience of a spoiled child.

"I know not, mistress," said the porter gravely. "I

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do but know that when the Constable returned from his ride in the town he asked for you and left the message I have given."

"When did Sir John return?"

"No. hour ago, mistress."

In the courtyard, with an air of resolute laughter, Mistress Anne yielded her horse to the falconer's care. Unabashed, in her amazing garment, which set off her long-flanked slenderness adorably, she strode into the great house. The fine, free gait was not without a suspicion of a manly swagger, which the Queen's ladies had also affected. Boldly and fearlessly she entered the presence of the august Sir John Feversham.

The Constable was seated alone in his dark-paneled room. It was easy to see whence came his young daughter's handsome looks and strength of will. It was a face that few of that age could have matched for power and masculine beauty. The gray eyes had a very direct and searching quality, the forehead was lofty and ascetic; indeed the man's whole aspect proclaimed that here was one who had learned many high secrets not only of the body, but of the soul.

This was not a man to be trifled with, and none knew that better than his daughter. But this unhappy day she was a young woman overborne by a sense of her own consequence.

"You sent for me, Sir John." The voice was half defiance, half disdain.

"Yes, mistress, I did so."

The tones of the Constable were a deep, slow growl. They were used in a way of such reluctance that it seemed a pain to utter them.

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"Wherefore, Sir John, did you send for me?" The half-humorous tones were all of innocence.

The Constable's reply was a grave stroking of the chin. The stern gaze began very slowly to traverse the culprit as she stood in all her sauciness, in all her defiance. Not a detail of her manners or of her attire escaped those grim eyes. "Why did I send for you? Do venture to ask the question?"

In spite of her reckless courage the tones sent little shivers through Mistress Anne.

"Yes, Sir John, I do." She had summoned all that she had of boldness.

"As you dare to ask the question, I will answer it." It was as if the Constable turned over each word very carefully in his stern heart before it was born upon his grim lips. "First I would say to you, daughter, there is a long and ever-growing accout between you and me which has begun to cry aloud for a settlement. I ask you, is it not so?"

Mistress Anne was silent. Even her strength of will had begun at last to fail before this slow-gathering vehemence. Once before, and once only, had she heard that tone in her father's voice. Many years had passed since then, but on hearing it again the occasion suddenly came back to her, bringing with it a kind of vivid horror.

"Is it not so, I ask you?"

The tone was that of a judge.

"Daily have I marked a growing frowardness, daily have I marked a higher measure of your impudency." The careful words had no unkindness. "It is but a week since these ears heard you mock at the color of

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the hair of the Queen's most gracious majesty. Is it not so?"

Mistress Anne had no wish to deny that.

"And now to-day do I find you tricked out in a manner whose wicked unseemliness passes all belief. Furthermore, in open defiance of my command, you have entered the town. Is it not so?"

The culprit had no word now. The imperious valor was routed utterly.

"I do fear me," said the Constable, "you are in the toils of a disease which admits only of the sharpest remedy. Week by week have I remarked an ever-growing sauciness. It is a malady which in man or woman, horse or hound, can only be met in one way."

The Constable rose slowly from his chair. He was a tall, powerful man, and very formidable and even terrible he looked. He took down a heavy hunting-whip which hung from a nail on the wall. His daughter had not imagination enough to be terrified easily. Moreover for her years she had a particularly resolute will. It was this that an imminent peril restored to her.

"I will not be beaten," she said, with proud defiance. "This day I am eighteen years old. This day I am a woman, and being a woman I will do in all things as it pleases me."

The Constable ran the long whip through his fingers. "Oh and soh, mistress," said he, "this day you claim the estate of womanhood. And having come to that high condition you put forth a modest claim to do in all things as you would. Well, I am bound to say I have heard that a number of the women of the pres-

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ent age have these forward ideas. But it is new to me that there are any so vain as to practice them."

"Wherefore should they not, Sir John?" The clear and brave eyes of his daughter were fixed on his own. "Is it not that in all things a woman is the equal of a man, as the Queen herself has shown, always except in those wherein she is a man's superior?"

Again the Constable caressed the whip as though he loved it. "These be very perilous ideas," he said. "I had not thought this canker had bit so deep. Of all the diseases that afflict our sorry age I believe there is none so vile as that which leads a young gentlewoman of careful and modest nurture to speeches of such an idle vanity. As I am a Christian man I can hardly believe my ears."

"Sir John, it is the truth I speak. And has not the Queen herself approved it?"

"Nay, mistress, I would have you use that name more modestly," said the Constable. But now in his eyes was a light that turned her cold.

Very gently the great thong was being shaken out. The long and cruel length was uncoiling itself like that of a serpent, so that now it lay crouching in wait among the rushes of the floor.

"I will not be beaten," was all that Anne could gasp. "I am this day a woman."

With a sudden chill of despair she knew that she was helpless. And if she had not known, in the very next instant that cruel fact would have been revealed to her. With a surprising dexterous swiftness for which she was not prepared, the slender wrist was twisted in a lock so cunning that to struggle would be to break the arm.

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"As I am a Christian man it is my duty to cut away so damnable a heresy." The sharp, hissing words came through shut teeth.

The defenceless ~~form~~ was held at arm's length. In the implacable eyes of the Constable was the sinister fanaticism which is not afraid to wound itself.

CHAPTER V.

OH, mistress!" A voice that had music in it sounded from the top of the high wall.

Anne had spent a dreadful night of pain and misery in one of the milder of the Castle dungeons. That is to say, it was above the ground. Also it was free of vermin, it was tolerably well lit, and was provided with a small inclosed yard open to the sky, but surrounded by a high wall garnished with spikes. Her first night of womanhood had been of a bitterness she had not thought it possible to know. There had only been a crust of bread, a jug of water and a bare pallet to assuage her tears. She had crept out of her cell in the darkness, and at last, quite exhausted, had fallen asleep under the April stars, with but a slab of icy stone to ease her hurts.

But now the dawn was come, and from far overhead a charming voice saluted her waking ears.

She looked up. A fair head crowned with morning was thrust between the close-set spikes. A young man with the bravest eyes in the world was gazing down compassionately upon her.

"Oh, mistress!"

Almost involuntarily she drew the cloak which had

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been given her the closer about her aches. But it was not possible to conceal her pathetic, her terrible distress.

"Oh, mistress!"

For the third time the charming voice saluted her ears, not mockingly, not unkindly, not even curiously. In it was a gentleness, a subtle power of sympathy that, do as she would, started her tears anew. She drew the cloak closer about her shoulders, as if by so doing she could conceal the fact that she had been used very grievously.

"You have been a-weeping, mistress."

It was idle to deny a fact so plain.

Yesterday she would have met this boldness in a very different way. But that was past. In one long night of intolerable anguish her very nature had suffered a change.

"For why do you weep, mistress?"

'Again was the voice like music. She could not forbear to look up into the dawn, which framed with its golden light her fair head and a pair of brave, honest and gentle eyes.

"Is it for a grievous fault? Nay, but I am sure it is not."

The tone was all kindness, all concern. Besides, there was some strange magic in it that had never sounded in her ears until that hour.

"Never tell me, mistress, that you are to have your head cut off on Tuesday by order of the Queen."

The words were spoken in a manner almost whimsical. But as, startled and perhaps a little terrified, she gazed up to meet those eyes she suddenly saw that unutterable things lay behind their laughter.

The words, the look seemed almost to sicken her. And

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then like a strong wine a thrill of compassion ran in her veins. She rose to her feet unsteadily. Her body was so weak that she had to lean it against the wall. A thousand intolerable aches returned. She opened her lips to speak, but her voice was mute.

Looking down upon her distress, the eyes of the young man were as full of compassion as her own. The face of the girl was stained and swollen with tears; she could hardly check a groan when she moved; the cloak slipping from her shoulders revealed under the torn bodice the cruel marks of the whip.

"Oh, mistress!" The voice was tender as the misse-thrush. "What was your fault that this should have been done to you? But whatever it was, sweet mistress, you have had savage payment."

Even as she hid her own she knew that the gentle eyes were brimming with pity.

But what were these slight aches of hers in the comparison with his own grim pass? On Tuesday he was to have his head cut off by order of the Queen. Suddenly a wild flood of anguish surged at her heart. Could such a thing be under the light of heaven? He so fair, so kind, with the fire of youth in his eyes, must the rich and glad life be torn from him in a manner so unspeakable within a space of four short days?

Again she sought to speak. This time words came; at first few and fitful, but warm from a heart all broken with pity. "They will kill you on Tuesday?" she said.

The horror that ran like ice in her veins thrilled in her voice.

"Yes, mistress. The Queen has signed the warrant. And I have done as little to deserve death as this fair

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'April morning that I cannot bear to lose. But no matter. I have had three-and-twenty years of this golden life, so I have no ground of complaint."

His courage spoke to her like a noble action.

"For why will they kill you?" Her heart was choking her.

"They say I was concerned with Money the Papist in the Woodgate House plot against the Queen's life. Two subtle knaves have sworn it, but as I desire to go to heaven I am an entirely innocent man."

She never doubted him. It was impossible to doubt such eyes, such a voice, such a noble bearing.

"I know not Money nor Woodgate House, and so far from desiring the life of the Queen I am the faithfullest if I am also the least of her Majesty's servants."

"Oh, it must not be!" she cried in a kind of passion.

"There is no means to prevent it," said the young man.

"The judges would not hear my book oath. But I think my peace is made with God. I am already composed for the scaffold, as I hope and believe, although it is bitterly sore to me to leave a world such as this. Yet if I complain I shall be unworthy of my twenty-three years of glorious life. But tell me, mistress, of your own case. What have you done that they should use you so cruelly? It cuts me to the soul to see you like this."

But she could give no heed now to her own pains. Her mind was filled with horror, with a rage of pity. His bearing was so noble, so full of an instant tenderness, and in four brief days he must die by the ax in the pride and splendor of his youth.

"Oh, I cannot bear it," she cried. "I cannot think of you as at the point of death."

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The potent wine of youth in her own veins rendered the thought intolerable. Such a rush of anguish came upon her young heart as made even the long miseries of the night seem of no account.

"No, no, it cannot be. I must speak to my father."

"Pray, who is your father, mistress?"

"My father is Sir John Feversham, the Constable of this Castle."

"Alas! mistress, it is he who read to me the Queen's warrant. He of all men cannot help me, for it is he who is pledged to do the Queen's will."

She who yesterday had ventured to proclaim herself the equal of all men was now shaken with a storm of weeping. "I will go myself to the Queen and swear to her your innocence."

"Alas! mistress, there is no time. Besides, she would not heed you. A subtle enemy has done his work, and I have given up all hope of life. But by God's grace on Tuesday I am determined to die well."

Her sorrow for this brave man was a thing to see. The proud heart was wrung with a distress that her own cruel suffering may have rendered more poignant. Yesterday, in the hour of her shallow arrogance, compassion for his fate might have irked her less. But since then she had known the dark night of the soul. Something seemed to have broken inside her heart. Henceforward in her plastic woman's nature would be a subtle kinship with all great suffering, since she herself had known it.

"Is there naught I may do to save you?"

"There is nothing, mistress. Yet I love you for your pitiful heart, and I'll promise you that on Tuesday I'll walk the firmer for it. But do not consider me, I pray

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you. I do not think I am unhappy. I would that you were not, sweet mistress. Tell me why you have been used so cruelly?"

His voice was grave and beguiling, like one whose soul has deep places in it. In despite of the slow agony of her tears she had no choice but to heed it. There was in his tender speech a quality that melted her resolve as though it had been but a flake of snow.

"Tell me, sweet mistress, I pray you."

How could she tell him of her frowardness? How could she tell him of the setting up of her stubborn will and of the grievous fashion of its breaking? How could she tell him that in a single night she was cured forever of the folly of holding herself other than she was?

But his gentle insistence was beyond her power to put off.

"I have been beaten," she said with utter humility. "And all that has been done to me is no more than my merit."

It was the elemental woman breaking from the soul that yesterday was so vainglorious. The young man looking upon her from his precarious coign felt his heart leap to her in her abasement. In the delicacy of her youth she was the fairest thing upon which ever he had set his eyes. It hurt him keener than his own fate that a beauty so rare should, whatever its faults, have been chastened so cruelly.

All that there was of chivalry in his tender soul went out to her in her desolation. In his three-and-twenty years of life he had never known love, but by God's grace was it given that he would not have to die without tasting the rarest of all mortal experiences.

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"Mistress"—his heart leaped in his throat so that he could hardly breathe—"Give me your name, sweet mistress, and I will promise as God is in His heaven that on Tuesday morning when Gervase Heriot comes to die by the ax he shall pass with your name upon his lips."

Like wells of soft light her eyes shone up to him. "My name is Anne," she said, with a simplicity that yesterday had not been hers.

"Mistress Anne, will you pray for me when I am passing?"

He could not hear her answer, yet he knew what it was.

"God keep you, sweet mistress! God keep you forever! I will bear your name on my lips through all the wide fields of eternity."

These high-vaunting words were his last. No longer could he keep his precarious hold on the top of the wall. The strain on arms and knees was too much. Suddenly the eyes so full of courage and pity were lost to her.

Anne was left to reel against the wall of her prison, shaken with an anguish more terrible than any the long night had known.

CHAPTER VI

GERVASE HERIOT had entered upon the last hours of his life. It was arranged that he should die at eight o'clock of the April morning. He lay in his cell during the watches of the night that was to be his last upon earth, with every sense a-stretch. Try as he would—and God only could know how he had fought during these last weeks for self-mastery—he could not subdue the insurgency of ardent blood, the intense desire to live.

He was too young for death. He loved the sun, the blue sky, the green grass, the birds in the trees, the spring flowers, the abundant, sweet-smelling earth. He loved his fellow-men. They amused and interested him. He adored the beauty of women. His ears were attuned to delicate harmonies of sound, his eyes were ravished by feasts of color.

The world, that wonderful assemblance of things visible, entranced him in its glad, mysterious majesty. There was the soul of a poet in a frame all a-quiver with youth. As he lay in his cell in the darkness, tossing feverishly upon his pallet through the slow hours, he could not bear the thought that all too soon he would see the sun rise for the last time.

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It drove him nearly mad to think that he must leave it all, that his brief sojourn upon the fair and noble earth which he loved so passionately was at an end. He was too strong of blood for such a death. With all the force of his will had he striven to compose himself. Many prayers had he addressed to God that it might be given to him to meet his fate with the high dignity that was the due of his manhood. But as now he lay shuddering in the darkness, do as he would he could not bring his mind to accept the end. Times and again he pressed his wild eyes to his pallet with a half-strangled moan of despair.

The fact that he was an entirely innocent man did nothing to console him. Indeed, had he been guilty, death had been less hard to bear. But coming to him in this arbitrary, unjust guise, its cruel causelessness set his every fiber in revolt.

Faint sounds began to creep through the night. 'All too soon his quivering senses caught them. Subtle as they were, he knew them at once for the noise of hammers upon wood. O God! they were setting up the scaffold in the courtyard. In spite of the strength he had won in these last few weeks he rolled off the pallet onto his knees and began to pray wildly. A fever shook his mind. His new-found strength was leaving him. Death—and such a death!—was a thing he did not know how to meet. 'A grim terror took hold of him.

And then a thing happened to him which shook the central forces of his being.

Suddenly he saw the face of Anne. He saw it all wan and swollen with tears. 'And as he looked he saw the eyes grow starlike and great with their compassion. And then he remembered his vaunt to her that he would walk

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firmly in his last hour, and that her name should be upon his lips. Her image was hardly more than that of a mortal daughter of men; but that which had sprung from her own bruised spirit, which looked out of her eyes as now he saw them in the darkness, was the only evidence he had of the Eternal. Some immortal essence had fused her heart as so humbly and so pitifully she had looked up to him. Through those eyes he had seen God.

Such a thought had the power to offer a measure of ease to his torments. The dreadful tumult began to grow less. Those eyes were as stars in that gross darkness. No longer was he afraid. A strange peace had begun to bear him upon its wings.

No longer had he cause to fear the noise of the hammers. Let the morning break. Let death come when it would. His fainting spirit had now a manifestation to which to cling. He would walk to the scaffold with this noble image in his heart, and it should accompany him forever in his wanderings through the wide fields of eternity.

He crept back to his pallet, and stretched out his fever-racked limbs to their full length. A profound peace was enfolding him. If only death could come now!

Long he lay thus, and as he lay he strained his eyes to catch the first faint light of the dawn. Would it never arrive? All his fear now was lest this new strength should flee as suddenly as it had been given. But no!—the ineffable spirit that had entered into him would continue through all eternity to bear his soul.

At last and quite suddenly a more instant sound began to mingle with the distant noise of the hammers. A key was grating in the lock of the door. Yes, his hour was

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here at last and he had not known it. With a feeling akin to relief he sat up on his pallet.

He heard the door creak gently. It then came open with so little sound as to thrill him with surprise. A faint thread of light gleamed fitfully. But whoever was the visitant, he was accompanied by a silence so profound as to fill Gervase Heriot with wonder. It was not thus that his jailers had been wont to visit him.

"Mr. Heriot."

The name was breathed rather than spoken. There was a curious familiarity in the voice as it stole through the darkness. His heart seemed to stop beating.

He tried to answer, but could not.

"Mr. Heriot."

Beyond the faint rays of a half-shuttered lantern was the outline of a dark form.

"Mr. Heriot."

His name was being breathed in his ears. A hand had touched him.

"Oh, it is you!" were the first words his tongue could find.

"Do not speak," whispered Anne Feversham. "Do not make a sound. But if you would live follow close without a question."

He rose from his pallet unsteadily. He was utterly bewildered and very weak from many vigils. But already the lantern had begun to move away from him, and it was a talisman that had the power to draw him after it.

Almost before he was aware of what he did he realized that he was beyond the door of his cell.

"Please wait while I lock the door again," whispered his deliverer, "so that they may not know too soon."

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Her deliberation, her calmness filled him with wonder.

Step by step they groped their way along a very narrow corridor that smelled close and evil. The damp glistened from the walls in the light of the lantern.

With infinite caution they made their way to the end of the long passage. And as they neared its end there arose the sound of a man snoring heavily. A jailer was fast asleep on a low stool that had been placed just within the outer door of the prison. He was a gross-looking fellow, and his large legs were stretched out to the full, barring completely the narrow way.

They used great caution in striding over these legs lest they should wake their owner. When they had safely cleared this obstacle Anne gave Gervase the lantern, and also a poniard from a belt which she wore round her waist. "I am going to replace the keys in his girdle," she whispered resolutely. "I do not think he will wake; a powder has been shaken into his posset. But should you see him rousing himself, plunge the dagger into his heart. I have not the courage to do it myself."

With a delicate deftness, with a cool precision that was remarkable, Anne reattached the keys to the girdle of the sleeping man. He did not so much as stir in his sleep.

"Now!" she whispered.

In the next moment they had crept noiselessly through the unbarred outer door. The cool morning air rushed upon them. They felt the delicious green turf under their feet.

For all that the shrewd air played about the condemned man's temples, for all that the soft grass was under him, for all that a young moon and a sky of faint

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stars was over his head, he could hardly believe he was alive, or if alive could hardly realize he was broad awake.

Less than a hundred yards away, round an angle of the great building, the hammers were still mutilating the peace of the night. As Gervase and Anne stood to listen, not knowing what to do next and uncertain of the way to go, since peril hemmed them in on every side, they were greatly startled by a scrunch of feet on the gravel quite close to them. There was a sudden drone of voices which told them that two men were quickly approaching the spot on which they stood. Indeed they had barely time to put out the light of the lantern and to crouch close under the shadow of the huge wall of the prison before the men passed them.

They came so near that they almost touched Anne and Gervase as they knelt. They heard the men open the door through which they had just come, and as it swung back, so close were Anne and Gervase to it that it concealed them behind it.

The sudden flash of the light that one of the men carried was very terrifying.

"Wake up, Nick." The rough voice the other side of the door was so loud in the ears of the fugitives that they held their breaths. "Wake up, Nick." They heard the man grunt as he gave a vigorous shake to the turnkey, who was still snoring tremendously. "What a devil you are for sleeping and drinking! Master Norris the headsmen is here and would have a few words with the condemned."

A perfect tornado of shakes accompanied the words, which yielded presently to a series of kicks. Evidently

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the business of arousing the turnkey was to prove no light one.

"Wake, you drunken fool. Here is Master Norris the headsman, don't you hear? 'Are you going to keep us here all day?'"

Hardly daring to draw breath, Anne and Gervase continued to kneel close behind the open door. Their terror and their peril suddenly made Anne desperate. Not daring to speak, she plucked her companion's sleeve; and then putting all to the touch and keeping close under the shadow of the wall, she started to creep away on hands and knees from this position of imminent danger. Even by the time they had made a distance of fifty yards in this painful fashion, and had set a buttress of the Castle between them and the open door, they could still hear the indignant voice of him who had laid upon himself the task of rousing the sleeping jailer.

They could breathe a little now. But their position was still one of very great peril. The whole place seemed to be astir. Men and lights were moving in all directions. Voices of soldiers, workmen and servants of the Castle were all about them. As yet there was not a single fleck of the dawn to be seen, but already the birds had begun their early notes. Daybreak must be very near.

Not for an instant must they stay in the place they were now in. Even as they knelt close by the wall they expected to hear the startled outcry that would announce the escape of the condemned man.

CHAPTER VII

THEY had only one hope of getting free. By some means they must cross the open courtyard, and creep round to the Castle gate before the coming dawn had time to reveal them.

On hands and knees they made for the open. With no longer the shadow of the Castle walls to conceal them, their peril was greatly increased. More than once they stopped and lay full length on the ground, so near they were to discovery. It seemed as if they would never be able to get to the point they had fixed upon, which was the precarious shelter of a few stunted shrubs growing near to the Castle gate.

It was a long while before they could reach that security. Not long perhaps in point of fact but an age in experience. Each time they lay down on the hard cobblestones to avoid some new danger they expected the dread proclamation to ring in their ears. It seemed little short of a miracle, such was their exaggeration of events, that the escape was not known already.

At last they were come to the place they sought, hard by the gate. And here it was that the Providence which thus far had used them so well seemed now to desert them. To their horror they realized that the east was

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already light. The only hope of getting clear had been to slip unseen through the gate at a moment it might chance to be open for the admission of others. But from the first they had known that daylight would make the risk too great to admit of any such expedient.

They must find some other way. Yet Anne well knew there was no other way. The Castle was surrounded by walls it was impossible to scale, except on the south side. Here the parapet was low, and for a sufficient reason. Beyond the south wall the Castle rock ended abruptly. A terrible chasm, hundreds of feet in depth, lurked beneath.

They had soon decided that the gate could not avail them now. Thus they crept away to the left in the direction of the south wall, taking cover as they went beneath a row of laurel-bushes. But no sooner had they reached the wall than they saw, even in the gray twilight, that it was certain death to climb it and hazard a descent of the sheer precipice on the farther side. What could they do? Every moment it was growing lighter.

By now Gervase had shaken off his lethargy. One who has lain weeks in a prison and has composed himself for death can hardly be expected to take occasion by the hand. But the fine and keen air of the morning and the almost miraculous chance of life that had been given him had done much to restore his numbed faculties. A resolve had already been born in his heart to sell his life very dearly. In the last resort he was determined to attempt the almost impassable face of the cliff.

But there was his brave companion. She seemed to read his mind. And reading it she summoned the cour-

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age of despair. "If there is no other way we will crawl down the rock," she said.

"It would be death, mistress."

The clear eyes that were so unafraid shone like stars through the gray light. "I do not fear death," she said in a low voice. "Rather death than the whip or a dungeon underground."

Dismally he realized that there was no answer to this argument. "We will go together, mistress, wherever it be—unless—" a deadly chill corroded the young man's veins—"I walk back to my prison."

"No, no," said his deliverer tensely. "Anything rather than that."

Every minute it was growing lighter. They crouched under the scanty cover of the laurel-bushes, not knowing which way to turn or what to do. All their senses were strung to catch the alarm they were ever expecting to hear. But the miracle still endured; the alarm was not yet given. Yet it was impossible that it could be much longer delayed.

In despair they crept farther along the wall. They must choose a place for the grisly descent, yet even as they looked far down over the parapet of the wall they hardly knew how to face such a hideous alternative.

"It is certain death for us both," said Gervase. "It is better that I returned to my prison if you are sure there is no other way of escape."

"Do you fear the rock?" The firm voice was low and calm.

"For you I fear it, mistress."

The starlike eyes pierced him with their light. "For myself," said Anne, "I fear only to be left alive." Very

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deliberately she took the dagger from her belt. "Wherever you go," she said as she offered it by the hilt, "I would have you plunge this into my heart rather than you left me."

His cold fingers trembled on the hilt of the dagger, but even as they touched it he knew that such a deed was far beyond his present strength. "Better the rock than that," he said.

"Yes, better the rock."

Such a steadfast courage was like wine in his veins. Suddenly he flung his arms about her and folded her to him. One slow kiss was pressed upon the upturned mouth. Certain death awaited them, and they were young to die, but there was now no way of life. And at least by God's mercy they had known one high moment which paid for all.

It was the man's part first to mount the parapet. Shuddering in every vein, he began to climb up to it. He was not a coward, but the desire of life was running desperately high. The girl followed close after him. Her will was firmer than his because her imagination was less.

Gervase had nearly reached the coping of the low stone wall when Anne caught at his heel and drew him down again. "See," she cried. "Is not that a hole in the ground along there by that farthest bush?"

"It may be so," said the young man, fearing for his resolve. "But let us not look back. If this were done let it be done now."

But sudden resolution had come upon Anne. Or was it that resolution was failing her? At least with this new and faint hope she was able to draw Gervase from the wall. His will had been strung to meet the death he

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feared with all his soul, but the passion of life in his pulses heeded her call in spite of himself.

There was a void, it seemed, gaping in the ground behind the bushes but a few yards off. But Gervase could scarce drag his body towards it as they crept close by the wall to see what it might be. For now he felt with a dull sense of terror that the great moment was past. His insurgent nerves told him that not again in cold blood would he climb to the parapet of the wall.

From this new errand he looked for no deliverance. But as soon as they came near they saw that the void, barely visible in the gray light, was a hole in the ground. It seemed to be a kind of cavern or deep passage burrowing far down into the very bowels of the earth. As far as they could discern it was provided with rude steps of stone, and the mouth of the cavern was protected by an iron grating.

They did not wait upon one another's word, but at once and together put forth all their strength to remove this barrier. It was so heavy that it scarcely yielded at first. But sheer desperation armed them, so that at last they were able to move the grating sufficiently to permit first one of their slender bodies and then the other to squeeze through the narrow opening into the total darkness that lay beyond.

By the time they had descended three steps they could see nothing. Absolute night yawned under their feet. The unknown, terrible and immeasurable, began slowly to receive them. Whither they were going they did not know. Where the cavern led, what they would find at the end of it or what they were likely to encounter by the way were matters about which it was vain to speculate.

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All that they knew was that for the time being they were very precariously delivered from a more instant peril.

It might be perhaps that they were going to a doom more terrible, since the unknown is ever more sinister than the known. For aught they knew the stone steps might carry them through that appalling darkness to the verge of a deep well or some abyss that would shatter them in pieces as surely as a fall from the rock itself.

Sheer desperation urging, however, they prepared to descend step by step into the noisome earth. Gripping each other's hand tightly, they started very slowly to go down the steps. And now it was that they had cause to regret bitterly that the lantern which had guided Anne to the prison had been left under the Castle wall as being a thing that had already served its turn. At this moment its help would have been beyond price.

Holding each other by the hand, their hearts violently beating, they yielded themselves to the care of Providence. The descent was sheer, slow and terrifying. Bats, undisturbed for many a long year, began to hover round them. They could not see anything; a foul miasma hardly allowed them to breathe; each step they took was likely to be their last, but not for a moment did they pause in their descent.

They were like a pair of twin souls in the avernus. The sense of nameless fear enfolding them was awful, overmastering.

"Whither does it lead?" said Gervase at last, his whole being now in revolt.

"I know not," said his companion. "But so long as we are like this, hand in hand together, there is surely no need to care what lies ahead."

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Such an answer, spoken with the clear force of a noble resolution, thrilled in his heart. The courage that was his by nature, which the bitterness of his recent pass had overthrown, came back to him. If death must come, let it come to them now as each held the hand of the other. They began to move more quickly, and now with a sort of recklessness, far down into the chasm that yawned darker and darker below them. Minutes passed; step succeeded step, yet still they had not come to the final one.

Would this descent never end? Would they never again see the light? The desire to know what lay ahead grew so intense as to be almost unendurable. This dreadful suspense through which they were passing was neither more nor less than torture.

It began to seem certain that they would find themselves in some pit or oubliette or forgotten dungeon underground. In that case there was some hope of concealment, in which they might lie through the day. And if their pursuers had not the wit to find them, when the darkness came they might again ascend to the courtyard, and carry out their first design of escaping through the Castle gate.

At last, after at least a full hour of this torture by hope, the steep, narrow, winding stone stairs came suddenly to an end. It was impossible to go farther . . . a wall confronted them. It would appear that the descent ended in a cul-de-sac. Before accepting this as a fact, however, Gervase gave the wall a kick in order to attest its nature. To his surprise he found it to be made of wood.

That fact served to tell him that here was not the nat-

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ural end of those strange stone stairs. Something lay beyond. Conceivably this wall was a door. But so heavy was the darkness that it was impossible to tell.

Gervase set to work with the dagger his companion had given him, in order to see if he could not pierce this barrier and gain a clue to these hidden mysteries. But the point of the weapon was delicate and the wood was tough. It was impossible to make any progress. At last, realizing the attempt was vain, in a kind of despair he hurled the whole weight of his strong frame against the door in the faint hope that it might yield.

Sometimes it happens that when a man has grown utterly desperate, an inspired accident shows him the way! Gervase had looked for no result from that reckless, despairing fling of his shoulders against that dark wall, but to his surprise an odd creaking and cracking at once arose. The wood was rotten with age. In the next instant, to the unspeakable joy of Gervase and his companion, a faint worm of light came creeping through a rent in a door.

Daylight lay beyond! So cruelly had their nerves been fretted by the slow descent into cavernous darkness, that they could have cried out for joy at the light. Together they hurled their strong young shoulders against the door. Further rendings and tearings followed. Then came an ominous crack, and there was a breach in the door wide enough for them to pass through.

Their eyes were blinded by a flood of golden light. It was broad day, and once again were they breathing the air of morning. But where were they. They had come, it seemed, into a small paved yard. In front of them was a wall and a line of low buildings. In the middle of the

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yard was a large farmer's wagon containing a number of sacks of corn. To this vehicle a pair of horses was attached.

They crept very cautiously out of the door in the rock, and not then until they had first made sure that the yard was empty.

"This is the yard of the Castle brewhouse," said Anne. "There is a door yonder which opens into a lane that runs down to the river."

They ran swiftly across the yard, found the door unbarred, and at once were free of the Castle precincts. They were now in a long, narrow lane. It needed but a swift glance to tell them there was not a soul in sight. Thereupon they took to their heels and started to run down the lane for dear life.

It was more than a mile in length and it led straight to the river. It was narrow, muddy and uneven, winding through swampy marshland over all manner of rough ground. But in spite of the many difficulties it presented they dashed so fiercely along the lane that it seemed as if their hearts must burst.

Providence was with them still. All the way to the river they did not meet a soul. Great as was their good fortune, it was yet less remarkable than it appeared, since the path they had taken was a rude cart-track rather than a road, with a tall hedge growing on either side.

At last the Trent in all its morning splendor lay before them. With sides heaving and breath sobbing, they flung themselves beside it, burying their faces in the icy grass.

CHAPTER VIII

SHUDDERING with fear and gasping for breath, they lay side by side, their convulsed faces pressed into the grass. Such a nightmare of terrors as they had endured had for a time overthrown them both completely. But in their veins was youth, and very soon the courage it gives began to renew them.

Yet, as thus they lay in the grass by the bank of the river, fighting for the strength to go on, there was a grim sense already in each of their hearts that they were no more than a pair of birds in a snare. Not for an instant dare they consider how long they might hope to elude pursuit. Perhaps it might be given to them to enjoy an hour of freedom—if freedom it could be called with a desperate hue and cry upon their heels—but it was by no means certain that even so much grace as this would be vouchsafed.

They rose presently from the cool grass. Already their strength had returned. It was still early morning, not more than seven o'clock perhaps, but the day promised to be glorious. A trembling sheen, like a curtain of finest gossamer, was falling from the face of the sun; the mists were receding from the fast-flowing river. Cattle were lowing in the fields; larks were singing in the upper air.

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Nature in all her color and music, in all her pomp, variety and gladness, was spread before them. Every brake was alive with the song of birds; from every hedge and tree the tender green was bursting. How was it possible, amid such a pageant of young life, for either of them to think of death?

A little chilled by the grass in which they had lain, they began again to run by the side of the river. Like a pair of colts they shook their limbs free. For a mile or more they ran their hard run in order to get warm, and perhaps in order to outstrip the thought that held their souls in thrall. On and on they ran. The sense of motion, of untrammelled freedom in their pulses, was like a delicious madness now. At last they stopped, feeling very hot and breathless, and bathed their hands and faces in the river. Then they made the discovery that they were desperately hungry.

Alas! there was no means at hand of staying their pangs. And even had food been obtainable they would have been face to face with the fact that they had not so much as a penny between them. The whole of their worldly store consisted of the clothes in which they stood and a dagger whose hilt was curiously wrought in silver. But these were slender means enough to meet even the most pressing of their needs. Alas! that Anne, in the obsession of her high resolve, had forgotten the importance of putting a purse in her pocket.

It was a bitter discovery. Slowly and very surely the pangs of their hunger were mounting, so that all too soon their spirits fell. Then they sat on the grass and rested awhile and dabbled their wrists in the cool water of the fast-flowing river. Thus they gained new strength and

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were put in better heart. 'And as they now continued their strange journey at a drooping pace, they walked hand in hand with a kind of tragic tenderness.

In a little while, however, Providence again declared itself to them.

A sudden turn of the riverside path revealed a woman sitting under a hedge milking a cow. Hand in hand, like a pair of children, they approached her and humbly craved one drink apiece from her pail.

The woman was old and ill-seeming, with a very hard face, and there was nothing about her to suggest that it was her nature to be generous. But the strange request was made very politely. It was preferred in a manner not unworthy of persons of condition, but in the shrewd eyes of Mistress Poll Plackett their appearance had a grave lack of anything of the kind.

The man was without a hat, his long fair hair was lank and undressed, his clothes, though of a good sort, were covered with mud, and his face might have had considerable beauty had it been less wild, less pitifully haggard. As for his companion, good Mistress Plackett was completely at a loss to say who and what she might be. In the first place it was hard to determine her sex, let alone her degree. The shape was all slenderness, all long-flanked delicacy; a profusion of charming curls escaped in clusters from under her velvet cap; the face, full of a rare and vivid beauty, was lit by two eyes that were like twin stars of gray light. Yet she too was covered with mud and she bore a look of wild distress. 'And far worse even than this, to Mistress Plackett's horror the nether limbs were clad in a pair of leather breeches.

Had it not been for this unlucky garment their good

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looks and good manners might have melted the heart of a prudent housewife and fearless Christian. But such a strange style of dress was a sore tax upon her forbearance.

"I don't know what to say, and that's the truth," said Mistress Plackett very doubtfully indeed. "I don't like the looks o' ye. Can ye pay for a little drink apiece?"

"By my faith no," said Gervase, with perfect honesty. "We cannot do that, good dame. But give us even a very little draught of your delicious milk and we will bless the day that you were born."

"I don't doubt ye will," said Mistress Plackett sourly, "if ye get a drink for nix."

Further scrutiny followed hard upon this unblushing confession of absence of wherewithal. Moreover it seemed to confirm Mistress Plackett's unfavorable opinion.

"Do you see any green in this eye, young man?" said she. "And do you suppose that Poll Plackett has passed three-score and five winters in a hard world, and the same amount o' summers to match 'em, not to have better wisdom than to give away milk warm from the cow to a gallus pair o' strolling Egyptians?"

"Don't be hard-hearted, mother, I pray you," said the young man in his beguiling speech. "If only you knew how hungry we are! Let us drink only a very little of your delicious milk, and God will reward you."

"Maybe, young man," said Mistress Plackett, "and maybe He will reward me doubly for the little ye take not. However, here is the pail. Have a little drink, you

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Egyptian, for I am bound to say you have a very good-looking face."

"A thousand thanks," said Gervase, eagerly seizing the milk-pail. "But first may I offer it to—to my friend?"

"No, you may not," said Mistress Plackett roundly.

"But why may I not, good mother? We will take but a very little apiece."

But Mistress Plackett shook her head sternly. "Be your friend a man or a woman?" she said.

"Can you not see that she is a young gentlewoman?"

"Od burn me if I can!" said Mistress Poll. "A young woman she may be, but gentle she is not, to appear out of her sex. I will not have my honest pail go near such a shameless thing. Let her keep off, else you shall go wanting yourself."

"But, good mother——"

"Let the young doxey keep off, I say. She shall not have a drop as I am a virtuous woman. And if I did but know where to find Master Tippet the thirdborough, she should be burned in the hand and whipped out o' the county o' Derby."

So shocked was Mistress Poll Plackett when she discovered the sex of the second Egyptian, that the first, for all his beguiling speech, was like to go hungry. Gervase and Anne were desperately keen-set, and they very well knew that it was within their power to take the milk-pail from the custody of this good lady, and to soften her protests by applying the milking stool to her head. But fierce as their hunger was, they yet hesitated to take such extreme measures. Still it was driving them so hard as sorely to try their forbearance.

"The shameless hussy shall not touch a drop," said Mis-

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tress Poll. "But you seem a proper and decent and fair-spoken youth, and ye shall sup a modest bellyful."

"Not a drop will I touch until my sister has drunk," said Gervase.

"Ye called her friend just now," said Mistress Plackett grimly.

"Sister and friend," said the young man, with a profound air. "He who finds a friend in a sister has a sister for a friend."

Gervase spoke with much gravity, as if this gem of philosophy was worthy of the deepest consideration. He had already grasped the truth that there are occasions in life when it matters little what is said so long as it be well said. And in that age he would have been a poor-witted fellow who having been bred as a scholar could not readily assume the garb of wisdom.

Yet after all it may have been less Gervase Heriot's whimsical readiness that prevailed with the good wife than his charming voice, his tall, fine person and his gracious, manly air. When all was said this was no Egyptian. None of the tribe of lawless wanderers could have shown such a delicacy of manners when hunger drove him hard.

"Ye can both drink your fill," said Mistress Poll Plackett.

They needed no second invitation. Anne drank first of the warm, delicious draught, that might have been ambrosia straight from heaven. Then drank Gervase.

"Good mother," he said as he gave back the pail, "two wayfardingers will remember you in their prayers this night. And our prayers, alas! must be your only guerdon. But from our hearts we thank you."

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Mistress Poll shook her head. "Let it be so," she said gruffly. "Although you can't cut ice with thank you, still I don't begrudge the milk, young man. But my advice to you is this: when you come to a bush give your young doxey a sound beating, that she may learn not to ape her betters in such a shameless livery."

CHAPTER IX

THEY gave good-day to Mistress Poll and passed on their way wonderfully refreshed in body and spirit. Still they kept by the river. The sun was now shining clear out of a pure and limpid heaven. Above and all about the birds were singing. They could almost hear the sap running in the trees; yellow daffodils shone in the grass; the little green buds were bursting from brake and thicket. By now a wild sense of freedom was in their veins and they had a great delight in the company of each other. Yet behind all things—the glamour of the earth, the golden sky, the grave majesty of nature—lay a dark, terrifying cloud.

Not for a moment could they forget that their lives hung by a thread. They were ever looking back to see if their pursuers were yet in sight. They raked each bush they came near to see if it held an enemy. At every bend in the river they made ready to be sprung upon.

And, as they were soon to learn, there was only too much reason for these fears. It happened that they had made another two miles or so when they came to a tall hedgerow running at right angles to the river. And Gervase, looking along it in his constant vigilance, saw to his dismay a small party of mounted men, wearing the

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conspicuous scarlet livery of Sir John Feversham. They were no more than fifty yards away, and were coming slowly down the hedgerow on the other side, beating the bushes as they came and examining them closely.

Providence for the moment was with Gervase and Anne. The height of the hedge and an abrupt bend of the river served to hide them from view. Instantly they took cover by flinging themselves full length in the grass in which they stood. There was nothing else to be done; their pursuers were so near that flight was impossible.

All that remained for them was the hope that they had not been seen as yet, and that their pursuers would not come over to their place of concealment. But as thus they lay close in dire suspense, they were not aware of a more instant danger. Within a few yards of them, on their own side of the hedge, a man with a dog was approaching.

As yet the man had not seen them, but alas! the dog had already discovered them. It ran straight to where they lay concealed in the grass, and to their horror began to fondle Anne and lick her face. In the next moment a man on a horse was bending over them.

Thrusting the dog away from her, Anne looked up and saw the man, and as she did so her heart died within her. It was John Markham the falconer. His eyes were fixed upon the prostrate form of Gervase. In the very fascination of terror she watched his hand stray to the hilt of his dagger.

Both the fugitives lay in the grass staring up helplessly into the grim eyes of the falconer. They could neither move, speak nor act. A chill of horror was upon their souls. But the dog, Anne's old friend and companion, was overjoyed and continued to lick and fondle her.

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Of a sudden John Markham's hand forsook the hilt of his dagger. And in the same instant his face changed from the tawny bloom of health to a hue far otherwise. His rather slow brain had realized who it was that lay by the side of the escaped prisoner.

The falconer grew white as death. He was the devoted servant of a good and honored master. But beyond all things he was the slave of his young mistress. All was mad turmoil at the Castle. As yet none had had thought to spare for Mistress Anne. Her absence had not been noted, perhaps not even by the Constable himself. All that was known was that the condemned man had made his way out of his prison, in a manner bordering upon the miraculous, within some two hours of the time fixed for his execution.

Here was the explanation of the mystery! In a moment of harrowing bitterness of soul John Markham read the terrible truth.

"Oh my mistress!" was wrung from his lips.

John Markham's was a slow brain, but now his high devotion lent it swiftness and subtlety. In that instant he had learned all. She whom he had adored with a passionate fidelity had given everything that was hers to one whom by all the terms of his honorable service he was pledged to retake.

"Oh my mistress!" A tear sparkled upon the falconer's cheek.

The fugitives lying in the grass made no reply. And in his anguish of mind the falconer seemed as helpless as they. In the next moment came a shout from the other side of the hedge.

"Hulloa, Markham, what have you there!"

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The words broke the spell for the man who loved his young mistress devotedly. "The dog seems to have found a rabbit," was his answer.

"Naught better than that!" came in tones of disappointment. "We were hoping he had found something else."

The falconer called off the dog, and then immediately rode away to join his companions.

Gervase and Anne lay in the grass until the Constable's men were out of sight. For the moment the danger was past. But they were possessed by fear they could not overcome. More and more they marveled at the singular Providence that held them in its care. Gervase had no knowledge of the falconer; thus all that had happened was to him a mystery. With Anne it was otherwise. Yet over and above a feeling of gratitude for the man's fidelity was the sting of remorse and a sharp pang of regret for the glad, glorious and free life of yesterday.

Less than a week had gone since she had last ridden in the fields with the falconer, mounted on her blood horse Cytherea, with her pied merlin upon her fist. Since then the whole of life had changed. There had come the terrible breaking of the imperious will, which after all was not more than the will of a woman. And hard upon that, and doubtless because of it, there had come this wild and complete surrender to the impulse of pity which had banished her completely and forever from the world in which she had dwelt.

Long after John Markham and his companions had passed out of sight she lay in the grass sobbing hysterically. Such a wild storm of tears came upon her as seemed to shake the slender form in pieces. And Gervase was powerless to comfort her.

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After a time her pitiful distress abated, and then they found the courage to go on. For some miles they followed the river, yet with a redoubled wariness. Their adventure had shaken them terribly. They did not know which way to go or what to do. They wandered aimlessly, but with every sense a-stretch and with terror gnawing at their hearts. Soon they were hungry again, yet they had not so much as a penny with which to buy food. Their spirits drooped. The April sun was still shining out of a clear sky, the birds were still singing gaily from every bush, the carpet of spring flowers was still spread vividly before them, but the world was now a different place.

At noon they saw a village in the distance away to the right. It was perilous to enter it, but hunger drove them hard. Thus they turned their steps towards it in the hope that by some good chance they might obtain a little food.

The village proved to be a rather large one. And in the middle of the main street was the shop of a baker. They felt they were taking their lives in their hands by showing themselves in a public place, since they had had such clear evidence that the hue and cry was upon their heels, but the pangs of hunger rendered them desperate.

Happily the baker seemed to dwell in complete ignorance of the recent happenings at Nottingham Castle, which to be sure was fifteen miles away. But in another respect the fugitives were less fortunate. The man of flour proved to be a very shrewd and surly fellow.

He would only part with one of his loaves, even a stale one, on the express condition that it was paid for in current coin of the realm. Would he accept a dagger with a hilt wrought curiously in silver in exchange for twenty

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pieces of that precious metal? No, he would not. Would he for ten? No, he would not. He had no use for a dagger, silver-hilted or otherwise. The only thing he had a use for was an honest true penny when it came to a matter of a quartern loaf.

All Gervase's persuasiveness could do nothing with this sturdy Saxon. One of his quartern loaves was worth a penny, as had been those of his father before him; a penny was its price in the open market, and he would defy the devil himself to get one for less. In such circumstances there was nothing for Anne and Gervase to do but to return bitterly hungry to the village street.

They feared to show themselves in it, but alas; the spur of hunger is a most instant thing. Sad indeed and footsore already with their wandering, they walked through the village. Both were tired and thirsty and also faint for lack of food. They kept close under the houses, expecting at any moment to be sprung upon by the men in the scarlet livery.

In the middle of the road, coming slowly towards them, was a ragged nut-brown vagabond playing a flageolet for pence. He was very far from being a skilful performer. Indeed his tunes upon his cracked instrument were as ragged as himself. But apparently they did not lack the approval of the public. For while Gervase and Anne stood looking wistfully at this drabble-tail, a well-dressed man riding a good horse tossed the fellow a coin as he passed.

Adversity is a great thing for the mind. Gervase at once took the idea that he himself could perform quite as villainously if only he could come by an instrument. If only he might barter the silver-hilted dagger for a flageo-

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let, even of the most lamentable kind, it might be possible in the present condition of the public taste to keep body and soul together.

He gave the idea to Anne, who approved it heartily, always assuming that he had some little skill upon the instrument.

"Why, yes," said Gervase. "I learned to play on the flageolet when I was at Paris. 'Tis the only thing I learned there; at least it is the only thing I learned there that is likely to serve us now."

But how were they to come by such a thing? That was a problem indeed. Under the spur of their necessity they went after the ragged fellow and were fain to interrupt him in the midst of his discoursing of the infamous melody of "Jumping Joan."

He did not thank them for their interruption.

"Barter my pipe for a silver-hilted dagger, quotha? I would not barter my pipe for all the pearls in the head o' the Virgin Queen. Stand out o' my light and let me proceed."

He was a rude fellow and a fierce one, and he was like to stride over them in his haste to get clear of the suggestion.

"Barter my pipe!" they could hear him mutter as he passed down the road. It was as though he had been asked to barter his religion. He poured out a string of curses and then returned to his villainous melody.

Feeling almost desperate, they dragged themselves along the street until they came to a door with a bush hanging over it which showed it was the village ale-house. Here on a bench outside the door they flung themselves

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down. The seat was hard and narrow, yet infinitely delicious to their weariness.

Here they sat until the landlord came to them. They marked his appearance with great trepidation as to what manner of a man he was. Like that of the baker, his aspect was large and stubborn but not genial.

"I give you good morrow, Master Innkeeper," said Gervase in his frank and pleasant fashion.

"Good morrow to you, young man," said the innkeeper cautiously.

"Do you care to buy a dagger with a hilt wrought curiously in silver?"

"That I do not," said the innkeeper; "I would not care to buy anything except a halter for my wife."

"What will it profit your wife," asked Gervase, "if you provide her with a halter? You are not going to hang her, I hope."

"Hang her! God bless me, no! It is simply that tomorrow I am going to lead her in her shift with a halter round her neck as far as Derby market-place and sell her to the highest bidder. Happen, young man, you don't want a wife yourself?"

"What is the price you ask for her?"

"A gold angel will buy her, and she's worth double the money."

"But why do you part with her? Has she a fault in her temper, or is it that she is not as virtuously given as she might be?"

"No, her temper is excellent; and as for her virtue, the vicar of the parish will answer for that."

"Then in that case," said Gervase, "a gold angel seems little enough to pay for her."

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"Yes, she's a great bargain," said the innkeeper; "you can make your mind easy, young man, on that score."

"One might take her for a month on trial, I suppose?" said Gervase.

"No," said the landlord decisively; "if you decide to have her you must pay your gold angel and take her off my hands at once. But as I say, you will have a bargain. Her virtue and her temper are excellent, and if you remind her what a rope's end feels like at every new moon I'll warrant that you'll have no trouble with her at all."

"Well, I hope she can cook a meal," said Gervase. "It is an excellent thing in a woman if she is able to cook a meal."

"I'll answer for her cooking, young man. You couldn't find a better hand at that sort of thing if you tried all over the county o' Derby."

"Skilled in making bread?"

"Bless my soul, yes!"

"And in making cheese, I hope?"

"Ask Master Radlett the bailiff what he thinks of her cream cheeses."

"Can she brew ale?"

"Aye, and cider too and also perry."

"Well, she's a paragon, I'm bound to admit."

"Aye, she's a nonesuch, there's not the least doubt about that," said the innkeeper. "Her bread and her cider are things to remember."

"Things to dream upon, in fact?"

"Yes, young man; and if you doubt me you had better try them for yourself."

Now it was here that Gervase affected a lordly indifference, a lofty disdain. "Well, Master Innkeeper, I

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don't mind very much if I do," he said, and his air was almost one of condescension.

"You shall do so young man," said the innkeeper proudly.

And in an exceedingly loud voice he addressed some unseen presence within the precincts of the inn kitchen. "Marian, bring out at once one of your newest and largest loaves for a young gentleman in a tarnished doublet of black velvet."

"You have forgotten the cider," said Gervase, with an air of profound indifference. "A large pot would be the best, I think."

"Also a full pint pot o' your last year's cider, Marian."

"And perhaps a little of the cream cheese would not be amiss in the circumstances. It is wise as a rule to make quite sure in a matter of this kind."

"That's true," said the innkeeper heartily. "There is nothing betwixt here and Derby that can hold a candle to her cream cheese. Bring out a ripe cream cheese, Marian."

Anne began to tremble with excitement at the mere mention of these viands, but Gervase sat as cool and collected as any man could have done in the circumstances.

Presently a crone about seventy years of age brought forth a loaf of bread, a cheese and a jug of cider. She laid them on the bench by the side of Gervase.

With much deliberation the young man broke the bread in half and divided the cheese into two portions with his dagger. He handed one share to his companion solemnly. "I ought to tell you, Master Innkeeper," Gervase explained, "that my sister here is about as good a judge of food as there is to be found in the Midland Counties.

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Tell me what you think of the cheese, my dear Philomela?"

It was as much as ever Anne could do not to appear ravenous. "I think the cheese is splendid," she said.

"Ha! I knew it would be so!" said the landlord. "And what do you think o' the bread and the cider, you pretty young doxey?"

"I have never tasted anything like them," said Anne.

"Ha! I knew it would be so!" said the landlord, with an air of pride that was wonderful.

CHAPTER X

BY reason of this odd adventure Anne and Gervase were in good heart all the afternoon. Providence had surely taken them in its care. Food was not plenty, their feet were getting very sore, their enemies might be upon them at the next turn in the road, they knew not where that night to lay their heads; but trudging ever side by side in the company of each other they had the spirit of youth to bear them on.

Again they took to the winding river-bank. It was kindlier traveling that way. The springing green turf was far easier than the hard stones of the road. Also the dust was less and there were fewer people to avoid.

Towards evening poor Anne began to limp rather sorely. But not a word of complaint passed those resolute lips. Gervase too was in sad case. Full many a weary mile had they made since their wild setting forth in the dawn of the April morning.

Several times in the late afternoon they were obliged to sit by the river and seek some little ease by taking off their shoes and stockings and by bathing their aching feet in the cool water. But their courage was wonderfully high, for youth was with them, and also Providence,

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and also a something rare and strange which each had kindled in the other's heart.

The mists of evening began to steal down the river. As the fugitives sat on a green bank by the side of the water, their faces aglow with the sunset, nature spoke to them with a new, a fuller, an intenser meaning. Bird and beast, herb and tree were thrilling with life. And yet as Gervase and Anne sat close together they felt a sense of their tragic destiny overtaking them. The life of one, perhaps of both, was forfeit. The dark shadow was ever in their minds. All thought of the morrow must be put away.

The sun had left them now. Out of the dark valley, a little sinister with its close-grown gloom of trees, through which the reaches of the river wound, a faint wind came stealing. Very softly it caressed the face of the water, making an effect of music, eerie, solemn, yet enchanting.

Gervase knitted his brave companion to his heart. The flood-tide of youth was surging in his veins. The sudden sense of possession, of high comradeship gave him one of those rare moments to which the mind goes back when it comes to ask whether life has been worth all that has been paid for it in blood and tears. To this slender thing, so true, so resolute, he owed the life which for the moment was raised to this perilous height of ecstasy. In his arms he held this great gift of God to man; but a voice spoke to the chivalrous heart of him that he must hold it reverently.

One kiss on the lips he yielded and no more. He would have pressed a thousand there, but let him not forget the awful tragedy of their present hour. No consummation

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their love could ever know on earth. He fixed an iron control upon his will. And yet . . . Whatever held the earthly morrow, were they not twin souls pledged to roam the starry spaces of eternity together? In the surge of his passion he tore himself suddenly from the warm embrace and rose wildly from the green bank of earth.

The darkness came, and more weary miles they trudged, her cold hand clasped in his still colder one. The night fell very chill and without a single star. Soon they left the river and struck inland, through hedges and over swampy marshland, in the hope of finding a lodging for the night more hospitable than the open country.

Of food there was little prospect. But under Providence, which during the whole of that long and terrible day had been so kind to them, they might hope to find shelter in a cow-hovel, or a shepherd's hut, or at the worst a dry ditch. And at last, when they had grown so faint with hunger and fatigue that they knew not how they could go another mile, Providence was moved again to pity them.

Suddenly they came upon the dark bulk of a line of farm-buildings just ahead of them. A little groping brought them to a gate which led to a stackyard. By now the moon was showing, and with the aid of her fitful light they were able to find a stable. Here was a ladder which led to a hay-loft; and in spite of the darkness they made their way into it, whereupon to their unspeakable joy they found bundles of clean hay upon which they could lie warm and snug until daybreak.

In utter weariness they burrowed under the hay like moles, and very soon their cares were laid aside in as sound a sleep as they had ever known. When they awoke

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daylight was stealing in through the chinks in the roof. It was still very early, to judge by the absence of sounds from below.

The abundance of the hay had kept them wonderfully warm during the night, and now they shook their limbs free of it with a feeling of refreshment and gratitude. But scarcely had they begun to move when they felt a mighty need of food. Whatever befell, at all costs must they seek some.

They came down from the loft and crossed the yard, first making sure, however, that there was no one about. The morning was cold and misty. Not far off was a byre, and a number of cows were in it ready for milking.

Hunger was pressing them too hard to be put off with a scruple. Eagerly they searched all about the farmyard for a pail, and at last were able to find one in the stable out of which they had come. It was not very clean, but the attentions of the farmyard pump soon made it fit for use.

However, when it came to a matter of milking the cows they discovered but little skill at first. Gervase tried his hand with very poor results. Anne then took a turn, and at last the pail began to fill.

She it was who drank first this nectar of the gods. Then followed Gervase; then followed Anne again, and then again Gervase. Never in their lives had they had so rare a breakfast. But so completely had they been absorbed in their task that they had paid no heed to the passing of the time, or to that which was going on around them. The enjoyment of this illicit repast had taken more than an hour, and the farmyard was now astir.

Of this fact they were soon made aware. Indeed their

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meal was scarce at an end when a man's shadow was thrown across the doorway of the cowhouse, and there was the farmer standing looking at them.

He was a very powerful man, broad and heavy, and dressed in a suit of russet leather. His hands were tucked in his jerkin and his chin was sunk upon his breast as if he were wrapped in profound thought. The look upon his face was not so much of anger as of amazement. "I trust ye have had your fill?" he said at last, speaking in a slow, deep voice.

"That we have," said Gervase heartily.

All the same he felt a kind of shame for having debauched himself so freely upon another's property. Yet it would be idle to deny that a sense of well-being was uppermost in his mind at that moment. When all was said, this feeling outweighed any that he might have had of moral turpitude.

"Well, then, having had your fill," said the farmer, speaking as one who chooses his words, "you will not object perhaps to make payment?"

"That I cannot do, I am sorry to say," said Gervase.

"It is just as I thought," growled the farmer.

"I ask your pardon," said Gervase, "for taking your milk, but we have no money to pay for any food and we are starving."

The face of the farmer was very ugly now. "Starving, are ye? Well, my lad, ye shall both come with me to the constable."

"I am sorry I cannot oblige you in that," said Gervase. "I own I have done you a wrong, but not such a wrong as to allow the law to mend it."

"Well, my lad, you shall not go without payment of

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some kind," said the farmer, "and you can lay to that. Either step wi' me to the constable, or if you'd rather have it that way, come out into the yard and have the properest thrashing you've had in all your born days."

"Well, perhaps that is not unfair—if you can give it me." Gervase spoke with the modest readiness of a man of mettle.

"Oh, I'll give it you right enough," said the farmer, "and you can lay to that."

Certainly he was a most formidable-looking fellow, and he spoke with a truculence sufficient to strike terror into all save the very stout of heart. But Gervase, having slept soundly and breakfasted well, was not inclined to quail. He stepped briskly into the yard at the farmer's behest. But there a rude shock awaited him.

"Diggory," called the farmer to one of his hands at work in the yard, "you just fetch my horsewhip along. Ask mistress to give it thee. Now then, step lively."

Gervase, however, proceeded to show cause why Diggory should not step lively. "Oh no, you don't, Master Giles," he said to the farmer with a laugh. "Pray don't think I am going to take it that way."

"Then what way are you going to take it, my lad?"

"Man to man with the bare knuckles if I take it at all."

"Then by God you shall!" The farmer suddenly flung off his coat. "But you don't know what you are out for, young fellow. 'A bit o' whipcord will come a lot kinder to you than these ten commandments o' mine."

"I think I'll risk that," said Gervase modestly.

The farmer rolled up his sleeves, disclosing a pair of mighty arms. "I'm the man," he said, "who pretty nigh

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killed Job Nettle in the fight at Lichfield twenty years ago. They talk about it to this day. 'And I reckon, young fellow, I'll pretty nigh kill you. There was never none as could stand against Gideon Partlet as ever I heard tell of. Did you, Diggory, ever hear o' such?"

"Naw," said Diggory, "naw, I niver."

'And the eyes of Diggory began to start in anticipation.

CHAPTER XI

CERTAINLY the farmer had the look of a bruiser. Moreover he had a robust confidence in his own powers, and this was expressed by the grin of satisfaction upon his face. A number of the farm hands soon came up, attracted by the never-failing charms of a bout of fisticuffs.

Gervase followed the example of his adversary by discarding his doublet and rolling up his shirt-sleeves. He was far slighter of build and cast in a mold altogether more delicate than the farmer. Still he was a very likely looking fellow.

As became a gentleman of his time, his education had been liberal. Martial and manly exercises had played their part in it. Even in such a simple affair as a set-to with fists he was not without instruction from professors of the craft. Therefore he had a modest hope that he would be able to take care of himself, even if his foe was a man of greater power and experience.

Gervase gave Anne his doublet to hold. She, alas! was terribly distressed when she saw what was going to happen. But there was no help for it. If Gervase did not fight the farmer he must submit to the hands of the law.

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Her natural woman's instinct was to run away and hide while the battle was fought. But her staunchness forbade such a course. She mustered all her resolution in order to remain where she was. Gervase might have sore need of her help before he was through with a business so grievous.

Although the blows turned her sick, she forced herself to stand by the wall of the cowhouse and with wildly beating heart watched the progress of the fight. The might of the farmer's arms was terrific. Happily he was a man past fifty; he carried far more of flesh than when he was in his prime as a fighter; and thus was Gervase given an opportunity to ward or avoid the worst of his blows. Well it was for him that he was able to do this, for in his prime, which was twenty-five years ago, Gideon Partlet had been a famous fighter. Even now much of the old skill remained; but the muscles were not so supple and he could not get about as craftily as of yore.

All the same the farmer brought such a zest to his fighting, he delivered such a rain of blows, and there was such a power behind them, that had not Gervase been uncommonly quick with his hands and feet it must have gone hard with him.

The farmer's great fists would have dealt out terrible punishment had the milk-stealer been unable to parry them. Even as it was, and in spite of all that he could summon of youth, activity and skill, Gervase did not get off scot free. To the huge delight of the farm hands who were shouting loud encouragement to their master, the milk-stealer received one blow on the side of the jaw that shook him terribly, while another caught

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the young man on the nose and drew his blood. But this was slight punishment compared with what might have been, for had Gervase been wholly without experience he had paid heavy toll for his felony.

Now Gervase was enough of a man to accept and perhaps even to desire punishment for his offence. He could not help feeling that Master Gideon Partlet had received a deep wrong at his hands, so that he felt at first no very great animosity toward the farmer. But if the truth must be told, the crack on the jaw shook considerably this chivalrous desire to make payment in kind for his felony; the starting of the blood rendered it in imminent danger; and when presently he was so hard pressed that his right eye was like to be closed, the noble sense of equity of which all men do well to be jealous, was thrown to the wind.

It seemed then to grow clear to the mind of Gervase that Master Gideon Partlet somehow lacked a sense of proportion. The buffets on jaw and nose were in his opinion quite as much as the milk was worth. The assault on the right eye was usury. But the farmer did not share this view. Once blooded, he fought more furiously than ever. Moreover he accompanied each blow with a savage grunt and did all he knew to pin the younger and lighter man against the wall of the byre.

The distress of poor Anne was dreadful. Brave as she was, after a few moments she could endure the sight no more. Shuddering, she hid her eyes in the doublet of her champion.

Would the fight never cease? She began to fear that the farmer would kill Gervase. No longer dare she look at the cruel spectacle, but the ever-recurring sound

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of the blows chilled and sickened her. At last there came a loud cry from the onlookers, and then the dread sounds ceased. When she ventured to look she made the discovery that a very strange thing had happened.

The farmer was prone on his back in the mire of his own stackyard. He lay motionless; and Gervase and one of the hands were bending over him and were in the act of raising him up.

"Oh, is he dead?" gasped Anne.

"Not he," said Gervase cheerfully. He besought her to bring a little water from the pump in the milk-pail.

By the time this had been brought the farmer was sitting up rather ruefully in the straw of the yard. Gervase supported him with a shoulder; but soon finding that Gideon Partlet was little the worse for the blow on the point of the jaw that had leveled him to mother earth, the young man proceeded to clear the blood from his own face by dipping it in the bucket.

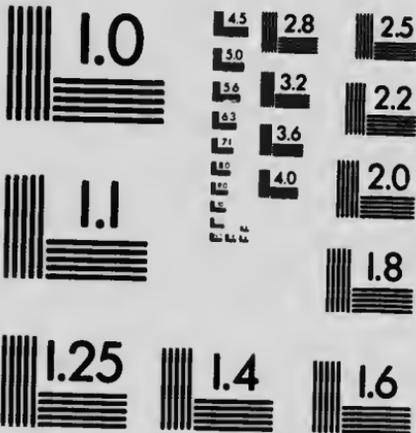
The farmer watched the process with an air of grim approval. "Here's my hand, young man," he said when Gervase's countenance had been put in some sort of order. "You are a lad of mettle and a pretty fighter. By God, young fellow, I didn't think ye kept such a clip as that in your shirt."

The farmer seemed to think it was the finest jest in the world that one so wise and crafty as himself should have been careless enough to lay himself open to such a blow. And, as became one who had enjoyed many triumphs in his youth, he was too good a fellow not to be able to laugh at his own expense. "Tell me, young man, where did ye learn that buffet? A thing like that don't come by nature."



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"I had it of Christopher Tattersall, the Yorkshire champion," said Gervase modestly.

"Did ye so?" said the farmer, with a kind of enthusiasm. "Well, it's the prettiest buffet I've smelt this thirty year."

"I would not have used it had you not forced me to," said Gervase.

"And if I'd known you were keeping it in your sleeve I'd not have held ye so light, young fellow, and you can lay to that."

The farmer spoke with a kind of grim admiration, as became an old warrior who had dealt many a shrewd knock in his time. He bore no malice, either for the rape of his milk or for the blow to his pride. Besides, much was to be forgiven a lad of the true mettle.

"If you and your young doxey will step as far as the kitchen," said he, "perhaps the good wife can find ye a bite o' breakfast apiece."

In spite of the quantity of the new milk they had consumed Gervase and Anne needed no second invitation.

The good wife, to be sure, viewed them at first with little in the way of favor. Certainly neither was very reputable to look upon. Fragments of straw and flakes of dried mud were clinging to their clothes, and their faces had not met soap and water for many hours. Also the face of Gervase was sadly swollen and discolored.

Still, in spite of the good wife's misgivings she gave them a delicious breakfast of collops, hot cakes and ale. Never in their lives had they had such a repast. And the farmer, for all that they had stolen his milk, was fain to heap up their p'atters with the large generosity of one who has been a first-rate fighter in his youth.

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"I know not who you be, young fellow," said he. "You have an air of quality, although you may be none the less a cutthroat for that. Perhaps you are Tat Barcey, the gentleman prig. Still, I care not who you are, but by God's life you are a mighty pretty fighter. Wife, give the young rogue another slice o' the cake and give some more swipes to the young doxey. Let it never be said that Gideon Partlet knows not how to honor a stout and crafty fighter."

Thus it was that an hour hence they went forth furnished royally. High of heart, they took the road again. A night's rest and a square meal are wonder-working things. For a time they were no longer the hunted fugitives of the previous day. Girt by the spirit of youth and braced by good cheer, they struck across the country into the Derbyshire woods. Here their path was spread with primroses and all manner of spring delights. The bursting buds caressed their faces, the odor of wild flowers was in their nostrils, a thousand golden-throated voices filled their ears.

In the high-hearted freedom of the moment they forgot their tragic peril. This was life in its rapture, life in its fulness. Soon Gervase began to sing.

In the merry month of May,
In a morn by break of day,
Forth I walked by the wood-side
When as May was in his pride.

The green aisles re-echoed his voice. Presently they rested on a moss-grown bank with the great river flowing far beneath them.

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There I spied all alone
Phillida and Coridon.

They looked in the ardent eyes of one another utterly heedless of what was to come. In this joyous morning of spring they were determined to forget the horror that held them in thrall. Let the morrow bring what it might, in this glorious hour they were determined to rejoice. For the moment let the moment suffice! They would give themselves up to the rapture of this little hour.

Why have a care? Their pursuers were outrun. They had the whole wide world in which to hide—the whole wide world, which was full to the brim with glorious adventure. They asked nothing beyond the comradeship of each other. Let chance continue to serve them for their modest need.

For their luncheon they took a young turnip out of a field. But this did not prove a very satisfying bill of fare. Alas! they soon began to crave an ampler meal. Nor did this craving grow less when early in the afternoon the sun went behind a cloud and presently a cool wind arose accompanied by the threat of rain.

Turnips are doubtless excellent things, but they are little enough upon which to maintain the fires of youth. Thus were they driven, at whatever risk to their lives, to strike out again toward the haunts of men. Again was Gervase consumed by a desire to barter the silver-hilted dagger for a flageolet by means of which he reckoned to get pence, or failing that, he hoped to turn the superfluous weapon into current coin of the realm.

They passed through several hamlets, but in none

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did the opportunity arise of fulfilling these desires. Moreover charity was lacking, so that by sundown a bitter hunger took them in its grip. To add to their woes they were again growing footsore and there had come a change in the weather. The wind had a sting in it and the heavy gray clouds were flying low.

Anne, however, was the bravest companion. She trudged along patiently by the side of Gervase and nothing would make her admit that she was hungry or weary or afraid. But had it not been for the solace of each other's company they must have given in long before they did. Each was sustained by the other's valor. Yet with night at hand, supperless and without a roof for their heads, heaven knew what would befall them now.

At last, when the cold twilight had come down on the woods and fields, they felt no longer able to go on. They rested awhile by the side of the road. Gervase nestled Anne's cheek against his coat, and it seemed like ice.

"Poor soul," he whispered, and could hardly restrain his tears.

It was quite dark by the time they had gathered the strength to continue their journey. At first their limbs were so stiff that they could hardly walk. But the bitter wind, the heavy darkness and the threat of rain spurred them cruelly. Their strides grew shorter and shorter, they fell sick at heart, yet they did not complain of one another or of Providence.

On and on they trudged until they were like to drop. Exactly what they hoped to find in that inhospitable night was more than they could have told. Perhaps some

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hovel or shepherd's hut or a byre with cows in it was the bourne of their desire. But the weary miles passed by and none of these things came to them.

After a time they turned from the hard and bleak high road, which gave no protection from the merciless wind, again into the fields. They felt now that they could not walk another mile. Utterly weary and dispirited, they still clung to the slender hope of finding shelter in a wood wherein to pass the remainder of the night. But the country now was flat and cheerless. It contained little else than low-lying marsh-land fringed with stunted willow-trees.

Disappointed of even this small crumb of solace, they crept at last under a hedge which in the total darkness was the best protection they could find. And grateful were they for it. At least they were saved from the wind and rain. But fatigue galled them in every bone and they were most bitterly hungry.

They were too miserable to think of sleep. For the sake of warmth they lay very close together, but little enough there was of it that crept into their veins. But never for a moment did their courage fail. They were sustained with a sense of miraculous deliverance from infinite perils. In body they were fainting, but in ardor of spirit they were unconquered still. God who had given them so much would continue to hold them in His care.

Almost as if in answer to their faith they saw suddenly a light quite near. It seemed to be no more than a couple of fields away. Yet again, tortured by hope, they painfully gathered their weariness and dragged their worn-out bodies toward this fitful and unexpected

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beacon. Alas! the two fields became four and yet the light seemed to be no nearer. But once afoot in its quest, they stumbled on miserably through the driving rain, in the teeth of the icy wind, over wet furrows and through close-set hedges. On and on they stumbled, till at last a moment came when they were like to fall in sheer fatigue. But Providence was with them still. For in this last dire extremity they were rewarded by the sight of that which they had come so far to find.

CHAPTER XII

THE light proved to be a fire which had been made by a band of gypsies in a corner of a field. As Gervase and Anne approached, hope revived them again, since a most exquisite scent of food began to pervade their nostrils. Suspended above the fire was an enormous cauldron from which this most delicious savor proceeded.

Gervase staggered toward a very ancient crone who was stirring the contents of the cauldron with a long-handled iron spoon. "For love of God, good mother," he said, "give us leave to lie by your fire a bit. And if we may have a share of your supper, by my soul we will remember you in our prayers."

The old woman looked at them both very doubtfully. "Who be ye?" she asked suspiciously. "Whence come ye?"

"That I cannot tell you, mother," said Gervase, and his tone was pleading hard. "But we are a-cold and we are famishing. Do but grant us this and you shall never have cause to rue your kindness."

"Ye have the trick of fair speaking at any rate," said the crone. "I like the sound of your voice, young chal. Yes, you shall eat and lie by the fire a bit."

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The contents of the pot proved to be not less delectable than the smell that came out of it. The crone made free use of the large iron spoon and gave Gervase and Anne each a huge platterful. They did not inquire of what the savory mess consisted. It was enough that it was good.

While they ate thus dim figures emerged continually from the shadows beyond the fire. Soon these were stretched before the pot and fell to eating also. They were a rough, ill-kempt company. Their table manners were none of the nicest. But they were a hearty, friendly, genial people. They asked no questions of the guests who lay before their fire, but rather seemed glad to find them there. Moreover they handed about freely a flagon of excellent ale.

A dozen or more of these cheerful, dark-visaged wanderers were soon about the fire. And after supper, as the night was still young, one of their number produced a flageolet and began to play upon it not unpleasantly. It was a well-toned instrument, far superior to the one on which the draggle-tailed wanderer of the village still wrung such doubtful music. Indeed Gervase, with the true ear of the true amateur, was delighted with the whole performance.

He was fain to compliment the musician upon his melody. And in such a wonderful manner had warmth and good cheer revived the young man's spirits, which less than an hour ago were at their lowest ebb, that now he begged to be allowed to discourse a little on the gypsy's pipe—a request that was readily granted.

Now it chanced that Gervase, for all that he had a very humble estimate of his own powers, had a certain

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skill in this, the most charming of the arts. Upon a natural and refined taste was grafted years of delighted study. Moreover the instrument was rather a choice one.

The gypsies had a real love of music; and when cunning strains began to rise from their midst as they lay round the warm fire, they were spell-bound. First Gervase played a soft, refined piece he had learned in Italy. Its delicacy composed the ear even while it ravished it. Then followed bolder harmonies, less exquisite perhaps, but none the less delightful. Finally he passed into a couple of ranting pieces known and admired over all the countryside.

When they heard these famous tunes some began to sing and others rose and danced round the fire. They would not hear of Gervase ceasing to play. For long enough was he kept at his task; all kinds of revelry accompanied the cheerful strains of the pipe, and when at last the accomplished musician was so weary that he could play no more it was gravely whispered about the fire that this soft-spoken wanderer with the wonderful gift was none other than Tat Barcey, the gentleman prig.

All went well that evening with Gervase and Anne. An almost superstitious respect was paid to them. The old woman gave them a good place beside the fire in which to pass the night, and when the morning came they had another good meal.

The gypsies showed them so much kindness that they were in no hurry to go forth. And before they left these friends, so heedful were they of present opportunity, that two things of consequence befell. In the first place a

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great desire had been kindled in Gervase to get possession of the gypsy's flute. Again was the dagger with the silver hilt produced. Devoutly he hoped it would be deemed a full equivalent for the thing he coveted.

The owner of the flute examined the weapon closely. Gervase's heart began to beat excitedly. At that moment he desired the flute beyond anything else in the world. The value of the dagger tempted the gypsy to make the exchange. "Why, yes," said he, "certainly I will."

When Gervase was given the pipe he felt a thrill of joy, for here was a means of life.

But this was not the end of their good luck.

It was most necessary that Anne should disguise her sex at the first opportunity. The hawking-breeches and long boots of untanned leather surmounted by a woman's bodice and feminine canopy of curls had already excited remark. Therefore was the crone persuaded to cut off the long tresses with a pair of shears, and out of the gypsies' wardrobe she provided a boy's leather jerkin and a cap to match it in exchange for the woman's gear that Anne was wearing.

A great change was wrought thereby in her appearance. She was no more a maid. Her thin, tall figure, graceful as a willow, did remarkably well for that of a very slender boy. Charming she looked; her form was of a singular delicacy, but it passed very well for that of a boy. Awkward questions need no longer be feared along the road. Both were now unmistakably of the sterner sex in the sight of all men.

They went forth in good heart. Armed with this blessed pipe no longer need they fear for a modest sustenance by the way, unless they should fall in with a

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singularly barren land or one notoriously averse from music.

All the same they must use great caution. It had been proved to them already that the chase was like to be hot at their heels. Still if they kept to little frequented places, there was for the present a chance of eluding their pursuers. But beyond that they did not dare to hope.

CHAPTER XIII

FROM this time forth, as far as it was possible, Gervase and Anne kept to the woods and the fields. For several weeks they yielded themselves to a free life in the open. Drenched by the rains, combed by the winds, baked by the sun, they soon became as brown as berries.

All day would they wander hand in hand. But this was a state of things that could not last. A clear conviction had grown up in the heart of Gervase that a term had been set to his days. At any moment he might be taken. Therefore would he have his taste of life.

He welcomed nature in all her moods. He basked in her sunlight, he turned his face to her winds, he rejoiced when her sudden plumps of rain drenched him to the skin. And the brave thing ever beside him, to whom he owed the life which was still his, she too in her courage and devotion was in a mood of highest fortitude.

Come what might, they would live their hour. Already Anne had made a vow that when the call came to Gervase she would obey it too. When that dread hour came in which they could no longer put off their captors they were resolved to die together. Soon or

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late a tragic fate must overtake them. But in the meantime let them taste of life in its abundance, let them rejoice in the ever-mounting passion of their love.

Often a barn or a byre sufficed for their night's lodging, but they seldom lacked food. Even in the most rural places Gervase's skill upon the flute, blended occasionally with the fresh and charming voice of Anne, hardly ever failed to bring a few pence which served to buy them a meal.

It was a good life and yet a very hard one. They dared not venture into the larger places where pence might have been more plentiful. Thus for the most part the fare was coarse and scanty, and often were their bones a mass of aches from the unkindness of their couches. They were tanned like gypsies, fine-drawn as greyhounds; and all too soon their clothes began to display holes and tatters in spite of the care with which they tended them.

Small wonder was it that as the days passed this severe life of the road began to pall. Greatly as they exulted in their freedom, they began to long intensely for gentler fare. Besides, they were inclined to view their perils more lightly. Nerved by hardship, very hungry and also grown a little desperate after a long succession of most uncomfortable days and nights, they found themselves on a glorious morning in the streets of the famous town of Oxford. And here a thing befell that was to change the current of their lives.

It was hardly more than eight o'clock by the time they came into the Cornmarket, where stood the Crown Tavern, which was the principal inn in the city. The season

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was June, and young as was the day the sun was already hot in a sky that was without a cloud.

A man dressed neatly in a doublet of black velvet, and with a short cock's feather in his hat, sat on a bench in the sun by the tavern door. On his knees was a mass of papers which he was studying intently. The expression upon his face was a little dubious at times, and more than a little pensive at others. Now and again as he read he indulged in a trick of brushing back his rather long hair with the palm of his hand, and to this he had free recourse when he came to a passage in the close-written folio that particularly engaged his attention.

As the strains of Gervase's flute, mingled with the notes of Anne's rather plaintive treble, caught the man's ear he paused suddenly in his task. With an eager, inquiring eye that was singularly searching he looked up; and as it fell upon the pair of vagabonds who were coming slowly across the Cornmarket toward where he sat, there was something in their aspect which seemed to arouse his curiosity. At any rate he laid his papers down on the bench, and regarded the musician and the singer with an air of great candor and interest.

It may have been that the performance on the flute struck him as possessing a merit beyond the common, or it may have been that the sweetly plaintive voice touched a chord in his heart, or again it may have been that some subtle quality in the aspect of these ragged robins spoke to him. For at least his scrutiny was grave, direct, very regardful. It was as if he saw, beyond the tawny skins, the unkempt locks, the tattered clothes, an

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underlying strangeness as of something far other than was as yet revealed.

So oddly was this man taken by the appearance of these wanderers that when they halted, rather timidly as it seemed, some twenty paces from where he sat, he was fain to beckon to them to come nearer. Yes, here were youth and grace indeed, and beneath their tan was an unmistakable beauty. Very slowly and very gravely the man on the tavern bench looked them up and down from top to toe.

"Playing for a breakfast, young sir?" he said in a tone of amused friendliness, when at last this scrutiny was at an end.

"Yes, sir, we be," said Gervase.

Of late the young man had affected a kind of Doric in his speech, the better to accord with an appearance that grew more and more rustical. But as soon as the man heard the tone of his voice a smile played furtively upon his lips.

Again were those observing eyes directed upon Gervase and Anne. There was neither unkindness nor impertinence in that whimsical gaze. It was hardly more than the sympathetic curiosity of a subtle mind in the presence of a mystery it is tempted to solve. But to Gervase at least it brought a sense of discomfort. The man's whole aspect made him feel that here was a mental power, a faculty of divination far beyond the common.

"My friend," said the man, with a disarming air of courtesy, "if I may say so, you perform so choicely upon the flute that you should seldom go wanting a meal."

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"Ah, sir, we lack one sometimes," said Gervase.

"There should be no occasion to do so this morning at least. Persons of taste abound in this old university town."

"That is good news, sir," said Gervase guardedly.

"And had I been bred at this ancient seat of learning I myself might have claimed to be of their number." So soft and gentle was the tone of the man's voice that Gervase was set more than ever upon his guard.

The young man tried to show by a gesture that the conversation was being carried above the plane on which his bucolic wits were accustomed to move. But unhappily its very politeness defeated the object in view. No rustic since the world began had ever been able to convey a deprecation so delicate in a manner so urbane.

The man could not forbear to be amused. "Well, sir," said he, "let me make myself clearer. May I, as a humble lover of the arts, offer a breakfast to you and your friend in order to celebrate your genius upon the flute?"

"Certainly, sir, you may," said Gervase, with grateful alacrity, and casting all prudence to the wind.

The man bowed as if aware that an honor had been done him. "Is there any particular dish, sir, you crave for your breakfast?"

Instead of replying to the question Gervase looked at Anne, as if he desired that in a matter of such importance hers should be the responsibility of choosing.

Quick to follow the glance, as he was quick to follow all things, the man was fain to take it for his guide. "What do you desire for your breakfast, young sir?" he said to Anne.

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"A dish of sweetbreads, if it please you," said Anne, without an instant's hesitation.

"The devil you do!" The man broke into a cry of laughter. "You eat delicate, young sir. Is a dish of sweetbreads your usual fare of a morning?"

"No," said Anne. "But you asked me what I would like for my breakfast."

"Well, young gypsy, you shall have 'em, confound me if you shall not, if good Mistress Davenant can rise to such fare. I will go and inquire."

The man gathered his papers, rose from the bench and entered the tavern.

Anne and Gervase were left on the threshold to speculate, perhaps a little dubiously, upon this new turn in their fortunes. Gervase was already spurring his memory to recall who this man might be. He had the clearest recollection of having seen him before. But where he had seen him and in what circumstances he could not remember just then. Still, he felt not the least distrust of him. The countenance was subtle enough, and wholly unlike that of any other man, but it had also a frankness, a candor, a large geniality which wholly forbade the idea of treachery.

Soon the man returned with a roguish light in his eye and the assurance that Mistress Davenant would furnish a dish of sweetbreads in twenty minutes.

These were glad tidings. Gervase rendered his thanks in his best Doric and begged to be allowed the use of the pump in the courtyard of the inn. Surely such a noble repast called for some amenity on the part of those who would yield to its delights.

CHAPTER XIV

WHEN a few minutes later Gervase and Anne, as wholesome as the pump in the courtyard could make them, were ushered by their new friend into the breakfast parlor of the Crown, they learned without surprise that his calling was that of a play-actor. Several of his colleagues were seated at a long table that ran along the center of the room.

This man's entrance with two nut-brown vagabonds, whose clothes were in tatters and had the appearance of having been drawn through a hedge, gave rise to not a little curiosity. And when he led them to a small table spread for three persons that was set in an embrasure of the window looking on to the street, and sat down to eat with them, covert glances were stolen at so singular a spectacle by more than one member of the Lord Chamberlain's Company.

Still, even in that age there was a certain indulgence among the elect for a man of acknowledged genius. And of such persons whom nature and fortune had favored there was a number round the table in the center of the room. At the foot of it, immediately opposite the vacant place of his slightly eccentric co-manager, was Richard Burbage, who had recently built the fine new

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playhouse on the Bankside in Southwark, and who was held by all whose opinion was of weight to be the first tragic actor of the time. Near to him was William Kemp, the famous comedian, a burly, rubicund fellow, whose rolling, unctuous tones had been nourished upon many an honest quart of sack. Farther along the board were such excellent mimes as Taylor and Lowin and Heming and Harrison, men highly accomplished in their calling, and of whom any body of players had a right to be proud.

The Lord Chamberlain's servants were on the floodside of success. At this time they were going from strength to strength and outdistancing all competitors. Even the Lord Admiral's men had grown to envy them. These were no unworthy rivals; men of wit and parts from the universities were writing plays for them, but they had not the good fortune to be inspired by a man of very brilliant and remarkable genius.

Richard Burbage's co-director and part-proprietor of the new theater on the Bankside was William Shakespeare, like all of these men an actor, and perhaps a rather mediocre one. Yet wild horses would not have dragged any such admission from his more accomplished brethren. For these well knew that this man, whose air was so modest, so charming and so friendly, was one whose own special gift was beyond all price. Times and again, at the shortest notice, had he taken the lifeless corpse of a forgotten play and with a few magic touches had made the dry bones live.

More than once had Richard Burbage gone to him with a demand for "something new for Twelfth Night." And as sure as Burbage had done so something new

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had been forthcoming; a piece such as to make the town ring, and cause the Admiral's men to bite their nails with envy. Plays of all kinds, running through the whole gamut of the emotions, had William Shakespeare devised. All sorts and conditions of men had been enthralled by his remarkable talent.

"What new maggot has Will got in his brain?" inquired the famous Kemp of the still more famous Burbage as he rolled a large and rather bloodshot eye in the direction of the window.

"Nay," said the tragedian, with an indulgent shake of the head, "I know not, except that, as he would say, he is studying the great human comedy."

"Well, Dick," said the comedian, "if you and I did not know that he had rarer wit than any man alive we should think he was as mad as a March hare."

"It is a form of madness, friend William, that will never trouble you and me," said the tragedian, fetching a deep sigh in which there was more than a suspicion of the idolater.

Richard Burbage in particular was sealed of the tribe. In those reverent eyes the true prince had no peer. The tragedian was not only a magnificent actor; he was also an uncommonly shrewd and practical man of the world. He of all men was able to appraise the merit of William Shakespeare. Burbage knew that his touch had an astonishing mastery. He knew Shakespeare to be an incomparable craftsman who had already furnished him with wonderful parts in which to display his own genius. Moreover the tragedian firmly believed that this wonderful man carried many another fine play as yet unborn in his brain.

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It mattered not what the theme was. It might be as old as the moon or it might be invented expressly for the Globe Theatre, but as soon as William Shakespeare took the pen in his hand the realms of gold were unlocked. An incommunicable thrill was given to the stale old plot; the light that never was on sea or land glowed over it; every line acquired a cadence, a fire, a magic that Richard Burbage, acknowledged monarch of its interpreters, knew to be incomparable.

In the presence of the other members of the company, and particularly in that of the younger ones, Burbage would often allude to the playwright in terms of awe. His attitude of whimsical adoration was apt to amuse his brethren not a little at times. Whenever the playwright expressed an opinion on things and men—and an uncommonly shrewd one it was as a rule—it could count invariably on the approval of Richard Burbage. Furthermore all that he was moved to say or do had some high sanction in the sight of the tragedian.

There might be those at that table less prone to idolatry. Some of the younger men, having much to learn, were tempted to smile at the spectacle of their chief sitting apart with a pair of nondescript vagabonds, who to judge by their clothes were no more than a couple of strolling Egyptians. But with Burbage and Kemp this was by no means an occasion for levity. Their implicit faith in their colleague enabled them to see method in his madness.

“Another of his discoveries, I trow, Dick,” said William Kemp, with a sly glance in the direction of the window.

“You can lay your sweet life upon that,” said the

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tragedian, fixing a stern eye upon a somewhat froward junior a little farther down the table. "Do you mind how he found Edgumbe and where he found him?"

"That I do, and Crosby too and Parflete also if it comes to that. There is not a man in all England has such an eye for a youth of likelihood."

Nor had this view to wait long for confirmation. Presently the playwright rose from his seat by the window and came over to the long table. There was an expression of keen pleasure upon his face. He laid an affectionate hand upon Burbage's shoulder. "Dick," he said, "we are in luck. I've found two of the prettiest boys I have seen this many a moon. Well-mannered, gentle-spoke, right excellent in address. One plays the flute in the manner of a musician; and the other is straight and limber, soft-voiced and neat-legged. There is the making of such a *Rosalind* there as Parflete himself could not better. Give your old nose one more dip i' th' tankard, Dickon, and then come over and pass the time o' the day with my dainty young Egyptians."

The tragedian needed no second invitation, but with a "There-what-did-I-tell-you!" expression of countenance accompanied William Shakespeare to the table by the window.

"This is my friend Burbage," said the playwright to the brown and handsome Egyptians. "Not of much account as an actor, I am afraid, but without a superior in the handling of a tankard with a toast in it or in tossing off a cup of sack either before or after supper."

Gervase and Anne rose from the table and bowed respectfully to the tall, grave and dignified tragedian who yet had a subtle light of humor in his eye.

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Now the name of William Shakespeare was already familiar to Gervase. He had heard his kinsman speak of him with high approval. Moreover Gervase had sat on the stage at the theater and seen him perform in a number of his own plays. To be sure he was nothing great as an actor, but those who could judge of such things, his cousin Harry to wit, were of opinion that he was without a peer as a deviser of plays.

But whatever the man was or whatever he was not, in the estimation of Gervase he was undoubtedly a very agreeable fellow. He had given them a delightful breakfast. He had regaled them with free and lively discourse. Also he had depicted the life of an actor—particularly of one who had the good fortune to be taken into the Lord Chamberlain's Company—in most glowing colors. Nor had even this contented him. He had ended by making them a formal offer to join that famous band.

They should have clothes of a good style and quality; their cheer should be abundant; they should be comfortably housed and cared for; and during the first year of their apprenticeship they should receive a tester a day. The whole craft of the theater should be taught them; they should tread the boards of the Globe; and, with due diligence, upon a day they might hope to play before the Queen at Richmond or Greenwich.

It was an alluring prospect that the actor had painted with a lively and glowing fancy. And now that Burbage had seen these singularly attractive youths and had learned that Shakespeare had set his heart on securing them for the Lord Chamberlain's Company, they had the tragedian's wiles of speech to combat.

Gervase was tempted sorely. The hard life of the road

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was growing intolerable. Food was scarce, beds hard and often to seek; they were continually exposed to the weather in all its inclemency; they were haunted by a constant sense of peril. Should they exchange all this discomfort for the happier prospect that was now dangled before them?

It was a grave problem and one that called for much hard thought.

"'Tis the finest profession in the world," said the tragedian, with the light of enthusiasm in his eyes, "and you, with your looks and address, are bound to rise in it. Twenty years ago I was by trade a carpenter, and as for Will here he was even less than that."

It was not, however, the worldly advantages of a player's calling that were making their appeal to Gervase. No doubt they were considerable, for both of these men had prosperity written upon them. It was not for these things that he cared, however, nor overmuch for his own ease and security. But for Anne, poor brave Anne who was already beginning to fail from sheer fatigue, it would mean a far gentler way of life.

When, however, Gervase came to consider the alternative that was offered he could not be blind to its perils. It was bound to mean a life of publicity, in places moreover in which he was likely to be known. No; the more thought he gave to the matter, the clearer his conviction grew that it would add tenfold to their dangers if they threw in their lot with the Lord Chamberlain's men.

Gervase liked so well these honest, genial and courteous fellows and the gay, free and pleasant life they offered that it went to his heart that he could not answer in the way he would have chosen. What a boon such

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a life would have been, what a relief from the hard road and the open sky! Day by day their case was growing worse. But they must not yield to these beguilements so long as they set any value on their lives.

It was with much reluctance that in the end Gervase informed the players that he and his companion could not throw in their lot with the Lord Chamberlain's servants. They were sensible of the liberal offer that had been made to them; they expressed all proper gratitude for it, but their business lay elsewhere.

The playwright in particular was much disappointed. Already he had begun to count upon a couple of most promising recruits. The shy grace, the light-flanked slenderness of the younger gypsy had especially intrigued that perceiving eye. But it was in vain that Shakespeare pointed out the advantages such a mode of life afforded over their present one. It was in vain that he assembled all the glowing colors of his fancy to depict it.

"I would, sir, that we might do as you wish," said Gervase, with a deep sigh.

The keen-witted player was quick to notice the wistful tone of the voice, the look of pain in the eyes. All at once it came into his mind that this young man was not what he appeared to be.

Surely he had seen this young man before. For the life of him he could not then say when it was or where, but he had not the least doubt that he had met him in very different circumstances. Yet his delicacy of mind was such that the knowledge that he had come to the threshold of a mystery made him less insistent than he would have been otherwise.

Presently with many sincere expressions of grati-

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tude Anne and Gervase took the road again. As Shakespeare watched them depart his professional feelings got the better of him. "Dick," he said to his faithful henchman, "I am sore to see them go. No two such springalds as those, so fair, sweet and likely, have I seen for a month o' Sundays."

"It may be so," said Richard Burbage sagely.

"Still, things a're not always what they seem, Dickon," said the playwright.

"How mean you, you old wisacre?" The tragedian linked his arm affectionately within that of his friend. "What new hare is started in that wild demesne which you are pleased to call your mind?"

"I mean, dear shrew, that those are no more gypsies than Richard Burbage is Emperor of Cathay."

"Then who the plague be they?"

"Ha! you have me there. But I'll wager there is far more in this matter than meets the eye."

"So be it, then," said the tragedian, rolling his rich voice. "But in the meantime let us see if a large cup of sack will sharpen your recollection; you subtle-minded maker of plays."

CHAPTER XV

ALAS! a large cup of sack did little to sharpen the remembrance of Mr. William Shakespeare. It was in vain that he brought his mind to bear upon the problem that now engaged it. He felt sure he had seen both the gypsies before, and in very different circumstances; slight threads of recollection were alive in his memory, but for the life of him he could not piece them together into any hopeful clue.

The playwright spent the rest of the morning on a bench in the sun before the door of the Crown, conning diligently the close-written sheets of the latest heir of his invention.

Art is long, time fleeting. He read with mingled feelings: relief that the thing was done at last; regret of the true artist that it was not to be done all over again, so far it was from those first blithe runnings of the fancy which had peopled his mind with such glad shapes as no eye of mortal could ever look upon. Even now it wanted a title, this pleasant conceited comedy. And how was it possible to find a name for this absurd, sweetly foolish fantasy of the greenwood and a banished duke, of love and girlhood and high poesy?

Art is long, time fleeting. It was a poor thing, but it

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would have to serve, since the Queen had called for it to be played before her next Thursday se'nnight in her palace at Richmond. And it made the playwright sigh to think that there was only young Parflete to play *Rosalind*, that fair emblem of victorious girlhood, upon which he had feasted and quickened his imagination. The prosperity of the play depended on a single character, and Parflete, with all his grace and talent, came not near the poet's ideal of the part. Perhaps no mortal youth could ever hope to do that, and yet what a glorious *Rosalind* had walked up that street but an hour ago!

It was a stroke of perverse fate that his eyes had been ravished by that charming gypsy boy. But for that sight, Parflete, for whom the part had been designed from the first, would have contented him. But now having seen the true *Rosalind*, for all that he was so fine-drawn and shy, so ill-kempt and rustical, it made the poet sad to think of Parflete in the rôle, youth of breeding and talent as he was.

The playwright sighed heavily as he turned the last page. Alas! he felt already that he had leaned too heavily on his chief female character. Oh, if—! But such a speculation was idle . . . he must dismiss it. Let him spend his mind more profitably in seeking a name for the plaguy piece. But how was it possible to find a name for such a patched coat of fantasy?

While William Shakespeare was in this mental travail, his friend Richard Burbage came out of the tavern. "Dick," said he, "of your charity give me a name for this curst piece. I know no more what to christen it than does a blind tinker his dog."

Richard Burbage removed from his mouth his pipe of

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tobacco, a fashionable action which seemed to call for a slight air of magniloquence. "A name, my William, for the curst piece?" The tragedian shrugged his shoulders and spread his hands nonchalantly, while the light of a large good-humor shone in his shrewd face. "Oh, call it as you like it or what you will."

The fist of the playwright descended upon the bench in front of him. "Dick, you've hit it at the first shot!" he cried. "As You Like It!—you've hit the target right in the middle."

"Why take two bites at a cherry, my son?" said the tragedian, with another amused shrug. "In fact, the matter merely amounts to this: If William Shakespeare of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire, would engage one Richard Burbage, an honest good fellow, to write his plaguy pieces for him, it would save him a vast deal of trouble and inconvenience and the world would never be able to tell the difference."

Thereupon Mr. Richard Burbage sauntered back into the Crown Tavern with that large air of benevolent tolerance which should be the attitude of a superior mind toward all men and all things.

"As You Like It," said the playwright. "The name is as good as a better, confound me if it is not!"

He dipped his quill into the horn of ink that was on the bench beside him, and, with the never-failing instinct of the true craftsman, wrote the title on the first page of his new comedy.

Scarce had he time to do this, however, when that swift, alert and curious mind was engaged by an entirely new affair. There was the sound of a horse's hoofs on the cobbles leading to the tavern door. And

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the playwright's quick uplooking glance was met by the sight of a singular traveler.

The newcomer was a man about twenty-five years old, riding a useful-looking horse. But that which particularly drew the notice of William Shakespeare was the hapless plight of man and beast. Both were greatly distressed. The horse had evidently traveled far and swiftly: it was caked with mud up to its withers; it was lame of a foreleg; it was covered with sweat, and seemed hardly able to do another yard.

The case of the rider was in keeping with the horse's unhappy state. The man looked so limp and wretched that he could scarce sit in the saddle. Moreover, he was wild-eyed and haggard; and his leather riding-suit which seemed to denote a servant of a superior sort was in sad disorder.

The man rode into the courtyard of the inn and handed over his weary horse to an ostler. Then the rider, no less weary than his steed, staggered painfully to the inn door. In a hoarse voice he called for a tankard of ale and then flung himself heavily on the bench near to where the player sat.

Shakespeare eyed the traveler with deep curiosity. The man was in such a sorry plight that he could not refrain from pitying him. "You appear to have traveled far, friend," he said.

The man looked at the speaker in a manner to suggest that he might be strongly averse from the delights of promiscuous conversation with a total stranger. "Yes, I have traveled far," he said, with a weary sigh.

He buried his head in his hands as if he were in despair. And even after refreshment had been brought

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to him he did not heed it, but continued in this attitude for some little time. Then suddenly he shook off his lethargy and drank the ale. Feeling a little renewed, he called for a second tankard.

"You don't happen to have seen a couple o' young gypsies traveling through Oxford?" he asked suddenly.

Immediately the player grew very alert. "What kind of gypsies do you mean?" he asked in a casual but wary tone.

"The taller of the two might be playing on the flute, I reckon, and the younger one, who has the voice and look of a girl, might doubtless be singing."

William Shakespeare, as became a thoroughgoing man of the world, was far too acute to blurt out on the spur of the moment the full measure of his information. Rather he preferred to parry the question of this singular traveler by putting a few of his own. "What might you be wanting with them?" he asked cautiously.

The traveler drank copiously of his second pot of ale before he answered. And when answer he did it was in the rather surly manner of one who strongly desires to keep his own counsel and yet is not well enough trained in the art of politeness to be able to keep it gracefully. "That's my affair," he said bluntly.

The player was too wise a man to pursue his inquiry at the moment. But by now his curiosity was fully engaged. There was a mystery here. And mystery of any sort was apt to engage that subtle mind. When he had first set eyes on that picturesque pair of young vagabonds he had been strongly inclined to believe that they were other than they seemed. Now this man's coming, his agitation and his secrecy confirmed him in that theory.

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Clearly there was a good deal more in this matter than met the eye. The player was convinced that he had seen both these ragged robbins before. And in some vague way he felt he had seen them in circumstances and surroundings wholly different from those in which they were at present.

He knew how to keep his own counsel, however. It was left to the traveler himself to renew the topic. And this the man presently did, and in the manner of one who against his natural judgment is driven by some remorseless, some irresistible force.

"Did you say you *had* seen a pair o' gypsies pass along the road?" he asked.

"I say neither that I have nor that I have not," said the player. "Still, if you care to tell me more it is possible that I may be able to help you. But," he added, with well-assumed indifference, "after all, it is hardly likely that the persons I have in mind are those whom you are seeking."

The man hesitated as one impaled on the horns of a dilemma. Evidently he was very loath to tell all he knew. Yet at the same time he realized that the information he sought could only be won by a measure of frankness on his own part. After a careful weighing of the pros and cons of the matter he seemed reluctantly to conclude that his silence might lose him more than it would gain.

"I know not who you are," he said at last. "But you have a fair-seeming air and the face of an honest man. And God send you are all of what you appear, for it is a very strange and grievous story that I have to tell."

The traveler spoke in the manner of one who is en-

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tirely desperate. He seemed to have been driven to the limit of his mental as well as his physical endurance.

In the face of the player was that beacon of true sympathy which is as a talisman in the sight of all men. He had the power to put himself in the place of others. And here was a kindness, a candor, an openness for all men to read, and reading for all men to trust implicitly.

"My story is one you will find very hard to believe," said the young man. "But there is no reason why it should not be told. It is in the power of no man to make things in a worse coil than they are. And while I do not think aught is to be gained by making others a party to them, after all it can do no harm, and I may even gain a certain ease of mind."

The player showed very clearly that he was following every word with the closest and most sympathetic attention.

"To begin at the beginning of my story," said the young man, "my name is John Markham. My calling is that of a falconer. I have been eight years in the service of Sir John Feversham, who is Constable of Nottingham Castle, and chief justice of the Forest of Sherwood. He has the reputation of being a hard man. But I have always found him a very just one. Moreover I say to you, whoever you be, that no man could desire a better master.

"Well, to come at once to this dreadful story, which it hurts me to tell, some months ago, six perhaps or more—at least it was in the fall of the year—the Queen caused to be imprisoned privily in the Castle a Mr. Gervase Heriot. He was a highly placed young man. But he had mixed with the Papists, and after a trial

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which had been held in secret before the Court of Star Chamber, he had been found guilty of complicity in the Round House Plot, which you may know had for its object the taking the Queen's life. By a good providence the plot was discovered in time, but the conspirators were able to fly the country, except Mr. Heriot, who alone was taken.

"Mr. Heriot, as I say, was tried in secret, because the Queen's advisers were anxious not to inflame the public mind, and they wished as little as possible to be made of so ugly a matter. Mr. Heriot was proved guilty of conspiring against the life of the Queen, and he was committed to the Castle of Nottingham to be held there by Sir John Feversham, my master, until such time as her pleasure concerning him should be further known.

"Some two months ago the Queen signed the warrant for Mr. Heriot's death. The day for the execution was fixed. And now I come to the strange, the grievous, the incredible part of the story." In the sudden flood of his emotion the falconer's voice almost failed. "On the very morning that Mr. Heriot was to die by the ax on the block, within three hours of the time appointed, he escaped from his durance."

The young man could not go on. But the unspoken sympathy of his auditor nerved him to continue. Yet as he did so a kind of tragic horror entered his voice.

"At first nothing was known of the circumstances of Mr. Heriot's escape. Yet without loss of time all of us of the Constable's household who were able of body mounted our horses and rode off in all directions in order that the prisoner might be re.aken. And it fell to me as

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I rode that same morning in the meadows beside the Trent to come upon Mr. Heriot hiding in the grass."

For a moment the unhappy young man covered his face with his hands. It was as if he was wholly unable to proceed with his story or to contemplate that which was coming.

With an ever-mounting interest William Shakespeare waited in silence for this emotion to pass.

"I had but to speak," the young man was able to continue at last. "I had but to cry out to my comrades, who were less than fifty yards off, and the prisoner would have been ta'en. But I did not do this."

Again came a dire threat from an overwrought mind, but with a powerful effort of will the falconer was able to proceed with his story.

"But I did not do this, for beside him in the grass was Mistress Anne Feversham, the daughter of the Constable my master."

A sharp cry broke from the lips of William Shakespeare. He rose from the bench in the stress of his excitement.

"You let them go free!" said the player.

"Yes," said the falconer. "I had it not in my heart to take them when she, for whom I would have given my life, had given hers for the man she loved better than her own soul."

The face of the player was all melted with compassion. His eyes of strange somberness grew fixed and dark.

"But this is not the end of what I have to tell," said the falconer. "I let Mr. Heriot and my young mistress go free; yet before that day was out the truth came to

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the Constable my master, that it was his own daughter who had contrived the prisoner's escape and that she was away with him over the country-side. And my master, being one to whom honor is a jewel, posted at once to the Queen to her palace at Greenwich. With his own lips he told her that Mr. Heriot was broken free. And not a word did he speak of the part his daughter had borne in the affair, but took the whole blame of the matter upon himself.

"They say that when Sir John told the news to the Queen her displeasure was terrible. They say that his story—as in faith it must with the chief part of it left out—carried so little credence to her mind that she at once suspected him of treachery, old and loyal servant as he was. She had him straightway committed to the Tower. He is to stand immediate trial before the Court of the Star Chamber on a charge of aiding and abetting the escape of a prisoner of state. And as I learn from those best able to judge of such a grievous matter, my master, unless the prisoner is retaken at once, will without a doubt be condemned to the block."

Shakespeare had followed with a growing excitement as strange a story as he had ever heard in his life. There were elements in it which appealed intensely to his dramatic sense. Besides, he did not doubt that two of the chief actors in the tragedy were very close at hand. He did not doubt that they were that fascinating pair of vagabonds who had wrought upon his curiosity so short a time ago.

CHAPTER XVI

SELDOM had the mind of William Shakespeare been exercised more severely than in this hour. No story could have been more poignant. Yet was it the duty even of a true subject and of an honest man to confide to the distraught John Markham his knowledge of the nearness of those whom he sought?

Anxiously he considered this problem; but the more thought he gave to it, the more baffling and complex seemed to be the difficulties it presented.

Shakespeare talked long and earnestly with the falconer as they sat out in the sun on the tavern bench, 'And the result of this intimate conversation was that he came to form a high regard for the character of this unhappy man.

The mind of the poor fellow was grievously tormented. On the one side was worship of his young mistress; on the other his fealty to a good and honored master. He was as one rent in twain. A high adoration had divorced him from his duty, and now, in horror of an action that was to cost his master his life, he was determined to do all that lay in his power to repair his crime.

Up hill and down dale, in all weathers, at all hours

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of the day and night, had he journeyed for more than a fortnight past. Far over the country-side by little-frequented ways had he ridden in his quest of the fugitives. N. lid he hear of them from one of whom a few days before they had obtained a night's lodging; now from a masterless man upon the road; now from a tribe of wandering gypsies; now from the keeper of an alehouse. He was ever upon the point of coming up with them, yet ever by the interposition of some strange providence had they eluded him.

As Shakespeare listened to the tale of John Markham's wanderings the sore problem was ever posed before his mind. Should he discover to the distraught falconer the whereabouts of the fugitives? Must he set him upon the road they had taken but a brief two hours ago?

It was not at once that the player could come to a resolve. Indeed an extension of time was unexpectedly granted to him, for as John Markham sat on the bench in the sun a great fatigue suddenly overcame the young man and he fell asleep.

Thereupon the player retired to the pleasant garden at the back of the inn. Here he paced up and down the box-bordered paths with his hands tucked deep in his doublet.

To him presently came Richard Burbage.

"O'ho, my William," said the tragedian. "Piecing out, I presume, a further parcel of neat verses for the fair Rosalind?"

"No, Dick, a greater affair than that is toward."

The tone banished all levity from Burbage's lips. "Why, what is the matter?" he said.

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"Must I tell it or must I not?" The playwright seemed to be thinking aloud. Then he broke out with a kind of petulance. "I would to heaven I was not curst with this fell disease!"

"Which of your fell diseases is that, dear coz?"

"The bitterest of them all—the disease of not being able to bow your own mind."

"The penalty of high imagination, my friend," said Richard Burbage, with an air of understanding and sympathy.

"You are right, Dickon. The penalty of imagination, as you say. One of these days I will take a revenge upon myself and make a play of it. It is the bitterest thing in the world. There's no peace in this life for those who suffer it. But I have here a matter in which I crave your help. Sit ye there, by the yew-tree yonder, and I will unfold the most tragical tale that ever came from the lips of man."

Burbage sat as his friend desired. In spite of his colleague's perplexed face he was prepared for one of those odd, fantastic, whimsical inventions that often enough had been poured into his ear. But this was to prove another kind of matter altogether.

The story did not take long in the telling. The tragedian was thrilled by it. He listened with fascinated attention.

"And now, Dick," said the playwright when he had come to the end of the tragic story, "I ask you what is to be done?"

"Aye, what indeed!" said Burbage in his deep voice.

"God help them, poor souls!" said the poet tenderly.

"Amen to that!" said Burbage.

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These were wise men. There were few of the coils that fate weaves for her children with which they were unacquainted. But here was a matter which in its sinister and tragic complexity seemed to lie beyond their grasp.

The problem was indeed a sore one. They were true subjects of the Queen. As loyal, chivalrous and honorable men they could appreciate the cruel pass of the unfortunate Sir John Feverham, and also of the ill-starred falconer. But how was it possible to deliver up two such fugitives, two who were little more than children, who had dared and done so much, to the vengeance of the law?

"I ask you, Dick, what is to be done?" said the playwright.

The tragedian sat with his head in his hands, the picture of desolation.

"Nay, Will," he said haplessly, "you would do better to consult God and your own conscience."

"An' I do that," said the playwright, "a curse will lie on my soul for ever-more."

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER their fine repast at the Crown, Gervase and Anne left Oxford at once. Soon they were in the pleasant meadows that lay all about that famous city. It was a really glorious morning of the early summer, with the sun, which day by day had reached them, more powerful than ever.

All the forenoon they wandered idly in the fields. Anne shamed her boy's apparel by plucking the wild flowers, gathering a great posy. There seemed hardly need for a care just then. They had money enough to carry them through the day and even provide a modest lodging at nightfall. The grass in which they lay for long hours was soft, dry, delicious.

Every day that passed strengthened the sense of comradeship that sustained them. They were all to one another now. Yet enraptured as they were with their love, they were never able to forget that they were proscribed. This glimpse of happiness could only be a transient thing. Any day, at any hour, Gervase was likely to fall into the hands of his enemies. But whenever that dread accident befell them, as sooner or later it must, they had made their pledge that they would die together.

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Was there no way of ultimate escape? Each day that passed had seemed to minister to their love of life. As they lay in the grass, gazing afar into a heaven so gorgeous that it filled them with wonder, this longing to live took hold of them both with a still greater intensity. Was there no way by which an entirely innocent man could escape the scaffold?

If only they had a little money to buy a passage on board ship they might hope to escape across the seas. Instead of wandering aimlessly from place to place, void of purpose or design, there was no reason why they should not make for the coast. Unhappily it was likely to profit them little when they came there unless they could provide themselves with some money.

The whole of Gervase's property had passed into the hands of the wicked man who had borne false testimony against him. This man was his uncle, Simon Heriot, who had succeeded to his personal effects and his estate in the west of England. These had been confiscated by the Crown. And in that age it was customary to bestow the spoils of successful prosecution upon the person or persons who had procured the conviction of the offender!

Gervase knew that he was the victim of a very wicked conspiracy. Simon Heriot, cunning, covetous, unspeakably vile, had laid his plans only too well. So deftly woven the plot, so wisely chosen its instruments and so skilful their use of forged proofs and false evidence that from the first the unlucky Gervase had had little chance of escape.

He had been caught securely in a trap. The charges had been laid against him with such diabolical skill that

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it was almost impossible to disprove them. It was in vain that he had cast himself upon the mercy of the Queen. Simon Heriot, ignoble as he was at heart, was a person of some place, and not without consideration at Court; and he had always been able to mask his cunning well enough to pass for a high-minded and honorable man.

It chanced, however, that as thus Anne and Gervase lay together in this golden afternoon, whiling away the sweet hours that were likely to be so few, this intense desire for life suddenly found expression in a desperate resolve. Gervase remembered that the house of Simon Heriot was but a matter of ten miles or so from the city of Oxford. And no sooner did this fact occur to him than he was taken with the idea that it might be possible to go there and force his uncle to disgorge enough of his ill-gotten gains to enable Anne and himself to fly the country.

This bold scheme began to exert a strange fascination over him. The more thought he gave to it the stronger grew its hold upon him. Certainly it must prove very hazardous; it was the wild design of a desperate man, but it appealed to his mood.

When he came to confide the plan to his comrade she too approved it. To Anne it opened up a new world of possibility. The spirit of desperation urging her, she could see no reason why they should not break into the house of Simon Heriot in the middle of that night and seek the means to carry them into safety across the seas.

Yes, let that be their project! Both saw, however, that one fatal drawback confronted them. To put such

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a design into execution it was of vital importance that they should go armed. Thus they now regretted bitterly that the silver-hilted dagger was no longer in their keeping.

It would be sheer folly to present themselves unarmed at the house of Simon Heriot. A weapon of some kind must be procured if the project was to have any chance of success. Gervase hoped that, with a little luck, he might be able to barter his flute for a pistol but, unhappily, by so doing he was likely to deprive them of their sole means of getting food.

This question of arms was a sore problem. However, they decided to take a night's rest before coming to grips with it in earnest. And they may have been moved to this wise course by the fact that the house of Simon Heriot lay out upon the Banbury road, and that in order to come to it, it would be necessary to retrace their steps and pass through the town of Oxford.

They bought a bowl apiece of bread and milk of a kindly farmer's wife, and this made them a delicious supper. And for the sum of twopence they were allowed to lie snug in the barn during the night. And as they lay thus, discussing the prospects of the strange hazard upon which they were determined to embark on the morrow, a new expedient came into the mind of Gervase.

Ever since their meeting that morning with the man at the Crown, the thoughts of Gervase strayed continually toward him. He was not a man to forget. And now as Gervase lay in the straw in the darkness considering what must be done, his mind reverted to him again.

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All his instincts seemed to tell him that this was an honest man; moreover a man capable of rare kindness and instant sympathy; a man whom it would seem possible for even a couple of hard-pressed fugitives to trust implicitly.

Yes, let them return to Oxford to the Crown. Let them seek out this man Shakespeare and tell him as much of their story as might serve to win his help. As Gervase lay that night he took a resolve to do this. He would confide in the man as far as might be necessary. Perchance this friendly player might approve sufficiently this hazardous excursion to the house of Simon Heriot to provide him with a weapon to serve the occasion.

When the morning came, however, this plan seemed to err a good deal on the side of boldness. In broad daylight it appeared very far from wise to put such trust in a man, who, after all, was no more than a total stranger. Might he not prove, when their story was told to him, one of those zealots whose devotion to the Queen would cause him to betray these fugitives from justice?

Still, in spite of all misgiving, Gervase finally determined to take the risk. Even when every argument had been urged on the other side of the question, he still felt that if only they dared to put their faith in this man who had already shown them such kindness, they would not appeal in vain for his friendship.

They were about seven miles from Oxford. Having laid out their remaining store of pence on a frugal breakfast they trudged forth and in less than two hours had re-entered the city.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE had had a bad night. Indeed he had hardly slept at all. For the life of him he could not rid his mind of that tragic matter in which by fate's unkindness he had come to be an unwilling actor.

His thoughts reverted continually to those hapless children of destiny begging their bread in the hamlets round Oxford, while their lives hung by a thread; and to the luckless falconer, man of high instincts and strong tormented soul, pursuing them relentlessly from place to place. To this man, moreover, whatever his God and his conscience might have to say to him, he had been tempted to lie.

It was now eight o'clock of another glorious summer morning, and the playwright, looking rather wild-eyed and haggard, sat on the bench before the door of the Crown Tavern as he had done the previous day. But now, instead of holding a mass of papers on his knee he was seeking solace from a thick brown folio lately from the press, North's noble translation of the Lives of Plutarch.

It is strange how events repeat themselves. As on the previous day at that hour, the player suddenly looked up from the page and beheld the identical sight upon

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which his eyes had then rested. Two nut-brown wanderers were coming towards him, without a noise of music this time, but walking hand in hand as if each desired the sustenance of the other's courage.

Clearly the player was more than a little startled by the sight of them. A curious look flitted across his face. It was almost that of one who has seen a phantom in the daylight.

The fugitives were quick to notice that the player's manner towards them had changed. For all their raggedness his address was far more considered than it had been the previous day. In lieu of the air of light, graceful badinage that had charmed them then was a grave tone which was not without a note of respectfulness. It was as if he had learned since last he had seen them that they were not as they appeared.

"I give you good morrow, sir," said Gervase.

He kept the humble tone he was wont to use in his present condition. But now a look of pity came into the face of the play-actor.

Somehow this entire change in Shakespeare's manner, together with the nature of the errand on which they had come, served to embarrass discourse. On the side of neither was the lightness and ease of the day before. The few lame sentences they exchanged seemed further to increase the difficulty.

But at last said the player suddenly, fixing them both with his gentle but somber eyes: "Sit here, my friends, on the bench beside me and tell me a little of yourselves."

The look of the man was so gravely beguiling that they were fain to do as he desired.

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How to begin his strange, his incredible story was now the problem for Gervase. How much should he tell? He would take this man fully into his confidence in all that concerned himself, but in regard to Anne it was another affair. Indeed, so little did the part she had borne relate to their present need of this man's kindness that Gervase was determined not to mention her unless circumstances forced him to do so.

It was not easy to begin the story. But, after a moment of awkwardness in which there was a slow gathering of all he had of resolution, the young man took the plunge. "First," he said, turning his own candid eyes full upon those of the player, "I would have you to know that I am about to intrust my life to your hands."

The player did not speak except that which his eyes spoke for him.

"My name is Gervase Heriot," said the young man. "I am being hunted for my life. I broke out of my prison three hours before I was to die by the ax."

"You say you were to die by the ax," said the player in a tone so low as hardly to be audible. "For what reason had you to meet a death so sharp and so shameful?"

"For the reason," said Gervase, "that a wicked, covetous man has plotted away my life."

"Why has he done this?"

"It is merely because he would succeed to that to which he is not entitled."

"He has sworn away your life, you say?"

"Yes, he has himself borne false testimony. And he has suborned others as vile as himself to swear a tissue of lies in order to prove me guilty of a crime of which I am incapable."

"Who, pray, is this infamous man?"

"He is my uncle, Simon Heriot."

"And have you no means of disproving this black conspiracy?"

"None, alas. My Uncle Simon has a very cunning and subtle mind. His design has been laid very deep. It is a matter of my unsupported oath against those of specious knaves who are well found in the trade of swearing away men's lives."

The play-actor grew silent. Not for a moment could he doubt that Gervase Heriot was innocent of the crime alleged against him.

It was a grievous story. And one-half of it had not been told. And he knew it to be all compact of those elements of which his own mind was formed. It was such a tale of passion, of poetry, of high romance as the imagination could not surpass, and the living evidence of it was before him.

A great desire to help these hapless wanderers surged in this man's soul. There were those who were seeking them far and near; a price was on the head of Heriot; yet if he were allowed to get clear it might be that a cruel and shameful penalty would be paid by a man of stainless honor. All these swift thoughts were thrown into the alembic of that wonderful mind. But the call of nature was too strong; his heart went out to these fugitives in their tragic need. Cost what it may, he must render any help that lay in his power.

"Mr. Heriot," said the player after a long interval of silence had passed, "I would fain save your life?"

The young man shook his head gravely. "There's little chance of that unless I fly the country."

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"I was thinking so," said the player.

"But in order to do that I must have some money. 'And I will now tell you, sir—' Gervase sank his voice very low—"the manner in which I propose to get it."

Thereupon the young man divulged the plan he had formed of visiting his uncle that night.

"Simon Heriot lives in solitude in his gloomy old manor-house but ten miles off, with only a few decrepit old servants to take care of him. And my design is to break into his house in the middle of this very night, to frighten the wits out of the old knave and make him disgorge money enough for mine and my brother's journey across the seas."

This hasty and ill-considered scheme, however, did not appeal to the player. It was too clearly the expedient of a thoroughly desperate man. There were many reasons which seemed to make it impracticable. "No, Mr. Heriot," he said, "I do not think that way is to be commended. Let us try to find a better. I will go and think upon this matter. And in the meantime do you and your friend remain here and I will send you out some food, which I have no doubt will come not amiss to you."

For that surmise at least the player had good warrant. Soon a stately pigeon pie and a noble flagon of October ale were laid on the bench before them. And they were able to eat without misgiving. They had given this man all their trust, and they had staked their lives on the fact that he was incapable of betraying it.

CHAPTER XIX

MEANWHILE William Shakespeare had gone in quest of Richard Burbage, that *fidus Achates* whose counsel was often invoked by this eager, but, at times, irresolute spirit. Now, however, Shakespeare was fully determined to help these ill-starred fugitives to the utmost of his power.

To render aid that should be in any way effective was likely to prove a supremely difficult matter. The most obvious thing to be done was to give them money enough to enable them to fly the country. Such a course offered a strong temptation at the moment. But when Shakespeare came to consider all the consequences that would follow upon it he put it out of his mind. At the back of his thoughts was ever the distraught figure of the falconer, the unhappy man whom he had been compelled to deceive. If Heriot fled the country Sir John Feversham would lose his life. No, the hour was not yet for such an irrevocable step. "But, my friend," whispered a sinister voice, too often heard in that overwrought brain, "you of all men have reason to know that delays are dangerous!"

Alas he was face to face once more with the old sore problem—the problem of how to make up his mind. Once

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more he began to see too much of this grievous matter, as he saw too much of all things. He owed it to himself that he should do all in his power to help this unlucky pair. But no hurt must be done to the falconer, or to the honorable man his master, who lay in the Tower in such tragic case.

The playwright, in the toils of an irresolution as great as he had ever known, went to seek the tragedian in his favorite place, which was the pleasant garden at the back of the inn. Fortune favored him, inasmuch that Richard Burbage was found to be seated on a bench in the ample shade of a yew tree.

The manager was alone, and with the aid of a pipeful of the new Indian weed which seldom failed to excite the wit of his peers, was diligently conning the acting parts of the new comedy to be given a fortnight hence in the Queen's presence.

"William Shakespeare," said Burbage, looking up as the shadow of the playwright was cast across the page, "let these young fools say what they please, but my belief is you have never written anything choicer."

"I am glad to hear you say that, Dick," said the playwright, who spoke, however, as if his thoughts were elsewhere. "If I could have taken another fortnight to it perhaps it might have been tolerable, but as it is I am afraid it is a poor thing."

"The thing is good enough," said Burbage robustly. "It is full of most excellent fantasy. The fact is, some of these fools have not wit enough for a thing of such delicacy."

The playwright shook his head. "Yes, Dick," he said, "but a man makes a great mistake when he gets above

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the crowd. There should be something for all the world and his wife in a comedy."

Richard Burbage, one of the intellectuals of his day, was a little shocked by such a banal observation. Had it been possible for the god of his idolatry to seem less than himself, he had never been in such imminent danger. But the true prince must ever be allowed to speak as it seemed good to him.

"We will thank God that Gloriana has at any rate a shrewd and seizing mind," said Richard Burbage, with enthusiasm. "At least, it will not be above *her*."

The playwright smiled the little sad smile that was so often his when others chose to refer to his writings in his presence. None had ever been able to interpret that gesture; none ever would, but it was a smile of pain rather than of happiness.

With a sudden effort of the will the playwright cast these trivialities out of his thoughts. "Dick," he said, "I am come to talk of a matter of more account than this. I would have you know that our poor young Egyptians are returned."

"Oh, a murrain on them!" The face of the tragedian grew startled and discomposed. "Plague take them," he said, "I had hoped we had seen the last of them."

"Poor souls!" said the playwright.

Never had Burbage seen his too-sensitive comrade—to whom he had come to stand in the relation of a protective elder brother—in such a state of distress. The tragic story had torn his heart. But the counsel of the tragedian was sadly discouraging.

"If you will be ruled by me, my friend," said that sage and practical man of the world, "you will take precious

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care to keep out of this matter. Let them go their ways. The times are perilous. And he who touches affairs of state generally finds it easier to lose his head than to keep it."

"You are right there, Dick," said the playwright, with an odd light in his eyes. "But better a man should lose his head than forswear his soul."

Burbage knew that it was vain to argue with William Shakespeare in a matter of this kind. There were certain things in which he was not as other men. For all his childlike simplicity of character, he had yet the power, as he had proved many times, to take a line of his own when occasion called.

"Dick, we must help them," he said.

"The surest way to do that is to give them money enough to quit the country," said the tragedian.

"But what of Sir John Feversham?"

Burbage threw up his hands impatiently. "He concerns us not," he said. "And I beseech you, my dear Will, to give not another thought to him."

The playwright shook his head. "Nay, my friend," he said, "let us not leave a brave and honorable man to die."

"To that I would say amen if in any sort we could avail him."

"The Queen should learn the truth, I think."

"How, pray, is she to learn it?"

"Cn Thursday se'nnight, if this unlucky man still lives, we must find a way to tell her."

But Burbage dissented strongly. "It would be madness, Will, sheer madness for us to breathe a word on the subject. You know what the times are. And when

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it comes to treason it takes but a very slight thing to undo the best man alive."

The playwright had sadly to admit that that was true enough. But his face showed clearly that he could never be the slave of mere worldly wisdom. And Burbage knew it. He might do his best to dissuade his friend from touching this ill-starred affair, yet from the outset he had little hope of success. William Shakespeare's mind was made up already.

"Come what may, Dick, we must help these poor souls to the utmost of our capacity."

"Yes, but how will you do it, my master?"

But now that the sympathy of the playwright was fully engaged he was proof against all scepticism. "First I would have you give me the key of the tiring-room," he said.

"For what purpose, you mad fellow?"

"An uncivil question breeds an uncivil answer. Whatever the purpose it is nothing to it."

With many misgivings and great reluctance, Burbage gave Shakespeare the key of the tiring-room.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Shakespeare returned to the fugitives, they had finished their meal. They were still sitting on the bench by the tavern door.

"Mr. Heriot," said the player, "I have been thinking very deeply upon your pass. First let me say that I have a great desire to help you—and your friend—to help you as far as lies in my capacity."

Gervase thanked him simply.

"But in order to do that," said the player, "I have to ask you to yield yourselves entirely into my care. I would have you do in all things as I desire. It is not that I can promise your deliverance. It may be that your pass is beyond my aid or beyond the aid of any man. But if it is possible for help to be given, that will I do my utmost to render—that is, if you are prepared to trust me to the full."

Gervase knew that it was his life he was giving into the care of this man, but not for an instant did he hesitate.

"I trust you to the full," he said. "And may God requite you for all that you may do."

"Alas, it may be but little. But no failure on my part can make your case more unhappy than it is now. And

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one matter at least is imperative. You must find a better disguise than your present one. Happily, there is the means at hand. Perhaps you and your friend will come with me to the players' tiring-room, which is across the inn yard?"

Gervase and Anne rose from the bench in order to accompany the actor.

As they did so, however, their attention was for a moment diverted. A man, attended by two servants and whose style was that of a gentleman, rode up to the inn door. He dismounted within three yards of where the fugitives stood, and as he was about to enter the tavern, he turned his bold eyes upon them.

It was hardly more than a glance in passing, and not more than he would have bestowed on any other pair of picturesque vagabonds, but brief as it was, there yet seemed in it a kind of subconscious recognition. The glance was withdrawn instantly to alight on Shakespeare, on whom it dwelt long enough for the recognition openly to declare itself. In this case it was followed by a shrug of insolent contempt. The newcomer then entered the inn.

In the meantime, Gervase had grown as pale as if he had seen a ghost. But it was not until he was half-way across the inn courtyard that he revealed the cause of his emotion.

"Did you, by any chance, recognize that fellow?" he asked.

"Yes, I did," said Shakespeare. "He is a man well known about the Court, a certain Sir Robert Grisewood."

"Yes, Sir Robert Grisewood," said Gervase. "And it was he, at the instance of my uncle Simon, who swore away my life."

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The player stopped abruptly in the middle of the inn yard, an exclamation upon his lips.

"That's undoubtedly the man," said Gervase, "by all that's unlucky. Or may be it is not unlucky, since Providence works in ways so dark and strange."

"Wherein I fully agree," said the player. "And it may be that even in this Providence is working for us in a mysterious way. But I hope this man did not know you."

"I think he did not," said Gervase. "His eye would have dwelt longer if he had. But you he certainly recognized; moreover, he did not seem to approve you."

Shakespeare smiled.

"He is one of a hundred bullies who ruffle it about the Court. When they are not cringing before their betters, they are generally browbeating those whom they are pleased to consider their inferiors."

"He is a very dangerous man," said Gervase. "And if I cross his path, my life will not be worth an hour's purchase."

"Well, the tiring-room is not far away," said the player. "And there, I think, we can find you a disguise that will tax the wit of Sir Robert to penetrate."

The inn was a large, rectangular building, provided with galleries which overlooked the spacious courtyard. It was in this that the Lord Chamberlain's servants had arranged to give the first of their performances that afternoon. The room to which the actor now led Anne and Gervase opened on to one of these galleries, at the extreme end of the yard.

Here were all sorts of stage properties. Not only was there a number of costumes, but also there were wigs, powder and cosmetics and other trappings of the theater.

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Much searching among this apparel was necessary before clothes could be found which Shakespeare deemed suitable for Gervase and Anne. Many of these costumes were very rich; and at last an elegant suit of boy's clothes was found for Anne. She went into a room adjoining to put it on. And, in the meantime, Gervase was provided with a much more elaborate disguise.

First, he was put into a suit of plain black velvet, modest in appearance, but excellent in quality, very similar to the player's own. Then his eyes were carefully darkened and lines painted under them to add to his years. A pair of fine moustachios was fixed to his upper lip and a short beard to his chin. Finally, he was accommodated with a hat with a plume, a ruff for the neck, and at his own request, a very serviceable sword, which he buckled to his waist with a feeling of keen satisfaction.

The transformation Gervase had undergone was so complete, that when Anne returned wearing her own excellent suit, which fitted her admirably except that it was a little loose in the shoulders, she did not know him.

"Allow me to present Signor Bandinello," said the player. "A famous music master from Italy."

Anne, in the surprise of the moment, so far forgot her own disguise as to curtsy. Whereupon, greatly to her discomfiture, Gervase and the player fairly shouted with laughter.

Anne's clothes really became her very well indeed. They could hardly have fitted her slender form better had they been made for her. She, too, was given a ruff for her neck, a hat with a plume and a dagger to wear at her waist. Thus accomplished, she made a particularly handsome and modish boy.

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Gervase's disguise, which had added at least thirty years to his age, was so complete, that the player had no fear that he would be recognized. Accordingly, he led him boldly into the inn and duly presented him to Burbage, Kemp and one or two other members of the company as a celebrated musician who had consented to take charge of the music at Richmond on Tuesday week. Anne was introduced as his son. And it was suggested that Arrigo, a name bestowed upon her by the playwright on the spur of the moment, should understudy Parflete for the character of *Rosalind*. Indeed, the author of the new comedy seemed to be clearly of opinion that the young Signor Arrigo had been designed expressly by nature to play that delicate and exacting rôle.

Burbage guessed at once who Signor Bandinello and Arrigo his son really were. But he was far too loyal, even if he had not been too astute, to share his knowledge with the other members of the company. These, to be sure, were a little surprised at such an unexpected addition to their number. Yet not for a moment did they suspect the truth.

Thus, for the time being, a very remarkable change was wrought in the fortunes of Gervase and Anne. No longer need they seek a roof or a meal. No longer need they go footsore and hungry. Providence once more had taken them into its care. It was true that, in some ways, they had added threefold to their dangers. They had given their lives into the keeping of a man of whom they knew little or nothing. But having burnt their boats, they had the courage wholeheartedly to embrace this new way of life.

They entered into the doings of these new friends with

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spirit and amenity. And Shakespeare sustained the deception with great tact and wit. Moreover, Gervase and Anne were ever ready to second him in all his inventions and contrivances. Indeed, Gervase, who was familiar with Italy, was able to counterfeit a slight accent, which heightened the illusion of his broken English; while Anne, although not a little shy, bore herself with a modest grace, that made the young Signor Arrigo extremely popular with all the members of the Company.

It chanced, besides, that when these two Italians had made their appearance but a few hours among the Lord Chamberlain's servants, an incident occurred which added greatly to their prestige.

It had been arranged that the chief members of the Company, who were lodged at the Crown Tavern, which was reckoned much the best in Oxford, should dine together at noon in the large parlor. This would allow plenty of time against the performance of "The Merchant of Venice," which was to be given in the inn courtyard at two o'clock that afternoon.

The players had sat down to their meal. Shakespeare, at the head of the long table in the center of the room, was carving a sirloin with the dexterity of one who had been a butcher's apprentice in his youth. Burbage, at the foot of the table, was dealing with a couple of roast fowls with an air of manly conviction. Anne had already been given a wing, and William Kemp, that famous comedian, was cutting a piece of ham to accompany it, with a flourish of wit as well as of knife, when the door of the dining-parlor was flung open suddenly. A man entered rudely and roughly with a clank of sword and spur. He had not even the grace to remove his hat.

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One glance he cast round the room, saw no place was set for him, and then called loudly for the landlord.

"The place is full of these stinking play-actors!" he cried out. "The best inn in Oxford is now the worst. These mimes have taken all the best rooms, they infest the place like vermin. They are sticking up a filthy stage upon filthy trestles in the middle of the courtyard, so that a man hasn't even room to water his horse, and now, by God's blood, they crowd their betters out of the dining-parlor!"

The man was Sir Robert Grisewood, whom Shakespeare and Gervase had seen already. He was an insolent bully, of a type common in that day; a man of brutal and dangerous character, who lived by his wits and his sword, with just enough surface manners when it suited him to pass muster with those with whom he wished to consort, but whose chief pleasure was to ruffle it through the world and take the wall of those less well placed than himself.

This morning, however, Sir Robert was a little out of his reckoning. The man with the mild face who was carving the sirloin paused to look at him. And if ever a high scorn was expressed in the human countenance, it was here to be seen.

"Yes, I mean you as well as the rest, you paper-faced potboy," said Grisewood, having failed to stare him down. "Go back to your filthy playhouse in the stews, and don't come among your betters until they send for you, unless you want to get your nose pulled."

The coarse bully had drunk a cup of wine too much already that morning. He was bitterly angry, besides, that his favorite chamber overlooking the garden was in

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the occupation of this mean fellow, who lived by the public favor instead of by cheating at cards. With a string of oaths, he advanced upon Shakespeare and shook a fist in his face.

In an instant, several of the players had risen to their feet. But foremost was Burbage. He laid down his knife, and then, white with anger, he came over very deliberately to where the man stood and touched him on the shoulder.

"Have a care, my friend," he said. "Keep a civil tongue in your head. And lay but a finger on that man, and you go into the horse-trough."

"But you go to perdition first, you calf-livered merry-andrew."

Grisewood had swung round with a face of fury. He drew his sword. But in almost the same moment Heriot, who had risen with the rest, had drawn his.

Grisewood had not meant to make use of his weapon. Yet in the next instant, and quite without expecting it, he was having to use it for dear life.

Gervase at once struck up the weapon with his own and then engaged it. Grisewood was a man of formidable reputation. More than one good life had paid the toll of his exceptional skill. His adversary was aware of this. But he also was an accomplished swordsman. Moreover, an intense and furious hatred had armed him suddenly. This was the man who had sworn away his life.

CHAPTER XXI

THE sound of the clashing steel, of chairs overturning, of shouting and scuffling, brought John Davenant into the room. The sight that met him turned him sick. A man of whom he went in mortal fear was defending himself as best he could from the furious lunges of a tall, elderly foreigner, who yet used his sword with all a young man's address and agility.

"Oh, stop 'em, for the love of God!" cried John Davenant.

But the players knew better than to intervene. The bully was being pressed so close and with such a bitter animosity, that for any man to have attempted such a task had been highly dangerous. Also they knew the man for what he was. And now was as fair a chance as was ever likely to offer for him to pay his dues.

The Italian music master was pressing Grisewood at the point of his weapon all over the room. But only one of those present was aware that he had murder in his heart. And this was the man who knew what was the real issue between them. That agile mind, moreover, had the power to look swiftly ahead. In an instant, it had grasped the full significance of that which was happening and of the grave danger that threatened.

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In the stress of the moment, Shakespeare threw discretion to the wind. He approached far nearer than was wise to the combatants. Their breaths were coming in fierce, low grunts. Sweat was on their white faces. Murder was in the eyes of both.

Utterly heedless of his peril, Shakespeare went to the side of Gervase.

"Have a care," he said. "For God's sake don't kill him."

Well it was that Gervase was of those who can keep a hold upon themselves, even when a savage blood-lust has them in its toils. Desperately as he was fighting, he heard the words of his friend, and well he understood them. But he was out to kill. With a contained rage that was terrible, he meant to pierce that strong and resourceful guard, and then should the man pay the penalty of his crimes.

Grisewood was not a coward. He was among the coarsest and most brutal of his kind in a coarse and brutal age. His life had been ignoble, but he was a man, in any circumstances, to sell it dearly. Yet as this tall and furious fellow drove him all over the room, he felt that now his hour was come.

This would have been the case without a doubt, had not Gervase realized the importance of the player's warning. He must lay aside his revenge for a season. This man was a link in the slender chain that one day might save him. But he was determined that the ruffian should not go scot free. By sheer vigor, he drove Grisewood finally against the wall. And once there, he broke down the man's guard and drove the point of his sword through his arm.

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It was the end of the fight. Grisewood was totally disabled. Suffering great pain and bleeding fiercely and streaming curses, he was glad enough to have his hurt attended to and then, under a chirurgeon's advice, to be put to bed by John Davenant.

From that hour, the Italian music master was a hero in the sight of the Lord Chamberlain's servants. To be sure, his son, Arrigo, disgraced himself utterly by going off into a dead faint as soon as the fight was over, and although such behavior was felt perhaps to be ultra-Italian, it did not lessen his popularity among his new comrades.

Two o'clock that afternoon was the hour fixed for the Lord Chamberlain's players to give their first performance in Oxford. Much of the morning had been spent in erecting a stage in the center of the spacious courtyard of the Crown. It seemed that the visit of this famous company had given rise to grave controversy. Shakespeare had applied for leave to play three pieces in the large hall of Balliol College, or of some other convenient place within the precincts of the University. The question was referred to the Vice Chancellor. "Yes," said that worthy, "after giving the matter anxious consideration, as we have a favorable report from London touching your band of comedians, and we learn that her Grace the Queen has approved them on divers occasions, the University will accede to your request, provided the pieces are given in their original Greek or Latin."

Upon this, the playwright made the modest rejoinder that, much as he regretted the circumstances, it was, in point of fact, impossible to play the three pieces in either of those chaste tongues, since he himself had written them in the vulgar English language, which unfortunately

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was the only tongue with which he could claim an acquaintance, and that a very imperfect one. Such a statement was very shocking to the University. The permission was at once withheld, but in language of great politeness and dignity. "We do not well understand," it said in effect, "how one who is not even a member of this University or of the sister foundation of Cambridge, who, we are credibly informed, is a mere hackney writer for the theaters, and who, we are further informed, is a little better than one of the illiterate, can prefer such a request."

After this rebuff, the playwright, quite undaunted, applied to the city authorities for permission to use the Town Hall. In the meantime, however, the news had been carried to the bench of aldermen that the University had rebuked this importunate fellow. And if the vulgar English tongue was beneath the dignity of the Gown, how much more was it beneath the dignity of the Town, which had a reputation to maintain and so much less upon which to maintain it. "No, sir," said the bench of aldermen, "we would have you to know that that which is not deemed worthy for only a part or moiety of this fair city, is deemed still less so for the whole of it."

Thus there was nothing left for the poor playwright to do but to seek permission of honest John Davenant, mine host of the Crown, to set up trestles and boards and rig up a curtain in the middle of his large inn yard. And John Davenant, having less in the way of learning than the Gown and less in the way of dignity than the Town, and being promised, moreover, a full ten percentum of the takings at each performance, was nowise averse from such a proceeding.

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The play to be given that afternoon was "The Merchant of Venice," a pleasant comedy that had already been played several times with success in Shoreditch. The author of the piece had not to play in it himself, a contingency for which he expressed himself devoutly thankful. "A bad play is doubly damned," he said, "if the author himself has to preen and strut in it."

That afternoon, the more congenial and not less onerous rôle was to be his of sitting at the receipt of custom. But his friend, Richard Burbage, had for his sins to play the Jew. And the famous tragedian was fain to declare that the playwright as usual had got the best of the bargain, inasmuch that it was far easier to play the Jew in the box-office than it was upon the boards.

These players were a high-spirited, light-hearted, genial crew. The incident in which they had been concerned in nowise affected their gaiety. They lived in and for the moment; they took life as it came to them; theirs was the sovereign faculty of being able to lay care aside. They were prone to set all sorts of tricks upon one another, and to crack jokes and tell tales at one another's expense. They seemed to have no particular respect for anybody, not even for Shakespeare himself, but Anne and Gervase noticed that only one man in all that merry, careless company ever ventured to break a lance with him.

Richard Burbage was the man in question. The tragedian was a short, powerfully-made man, with a solemn face of much good-humor and an organ-like voice that was both rich and deep. When the playwright and his friend crossed swords, which they did pretty frequently, the whole table would cease to ply knife and spoon in

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order that it might attend the combat. These duellos, to be sure, were carried off in the highest style of pleasantry, but the play was very keen while it lasted.

The dramatist sat at one end of the long table, and his trusty henchman at the other.

"They do tell me," said the tragedian, in his slow, rolling speech, and bestowing a wink on those that were near him, "that this plaguy piece we have all got to play in for our sins this plaguy afternoon is the work of a certain court gallant by the name of William Shakespeare."

At this, the dramatist at the other end of the table laid down his knife very deliberately, and after gazing around as if in search of a thing he could not see, said, "I wonder whence that growl proceeds. I do believe there is a dog in the room. Young Parflete"—this to the youngest and smallest member of the company—"young Parflete, I will thank you to pitch it out with your foot behind it."

"A friend," proceeded the tragedian, in a very audible whisper for all that he spoke behind his hand, "of the Queen's most gracious majesty. This is no reflection upon the Queen, still it must have been a sore trial to her friendship when such a burden was laid upon it."

"Yes, it is a dog," said the dramatist, very gravely. "One of those brindled, flop-eared, yellow-coated, squabbelled mongrels by the sound of it. It is the kind of dog that is only fit for a blind pedlar to trundle at the end of a string. Hi, Thomas!"—addressing a servant who had entered with a dish—"there is a dog in the room."

"I don't see it, sir," said the servant, looking round.

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"Oh, but there is, I tell you. One of those squat brutes all body and no legs. One of those half-begotten starvelings that lies all day by the hob and whines all night to the moon."

"I see no dog, sir,"

"Have you looked under the table, Thomas?"

Thomas looked under the table, but still could see no dog.

"But I heard it, man, I tell you. There is no mistaking such a voice as that."

"There is no dog here, sir," the servant assured him, solemnly.

"Upon your oath, there is no dog?"

"No dog, sir, upon my oath."

"Then the sound must proceed," said the playwright, "from that queer, rude fellow who sits at the foot of the table there, of whom I am credibly informed that, since he retired from the theater, he gains a precarious livelihood by training bloodhounds to sing like canaries."

CHAPTER XXII

THE inn courtyard was seething with excitement long before the play began. Handbills had been distributed in the town for some days past, and notices of the performance had been set up in prominent places.

A love of the drama, amounting almost to a passion, had taken hold of all classes. From the Queen in her palace to the village idler in his hedge alehouse, provided he could raise a penny to buy standing room in the yard of the Crown Tavern, all took the keenest delight in the new and wonderful drama that was rising in their midst. Every phase of these strong and moving plays was followed with a breathless excitement. They were given without scenery or the thousand and one devices that help to sustain illusion in a modern theater. There was literally nothing between the play and the audience, not even the lure of sex, since all the women's parts were played by boys, but the success of these performances was extraordinary.

The Lord Chamberlain's men were known to be a famous company. Their headquarters were the Globe Theatre, the playhouse that had been built recently on the Bankside in Southwark. But as their provincial tours

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were numerous, their reputation had spread up and down the country. They were already known as the best players of the time, and the plays in which they appeared were held to be the strongest.

The stage had been set up at the end of the inn yard. Standing room could be had for a penny on the cobblestones of the yard itself, but the best and most comfortable places were those in the galleries, which ran round three sides of it and commanded a full view of the stage. A shilling was the charge for places here. But the most coveted place of all was a stool on the stage, which was reserved for a few persons of distinction.

Among those who had been given a seat on the stage this afternoon, were three who had come in a spirit of scepticism. They were men of dignified and authoritative bearing, keenly alive, no doubt, to their condescension in gracing the proceedings with their presence. Much discussion had taken place among these personages as to the importunity which had sought to gain the sanction of the university for the play about to be given, also for two others by the same uneducated hand.

There is little doubt that the subject would not have been thought worthy of discussion in such exalted circles, would in fact have been dismissed as a matter of not the least consequence, had it not been that quite recently that august man, the Dean of Christ Church College, had enjoyed the privilege of eating with Gloriana in her palace at Greenwich. And she had spoken in his hearing with high approval of the man Shakespeare, and was even pleasantly anticipating his new interlude, which was to be given for the first time in her presence on some fine summer's afternoon in Richmond Park.

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In Ascalon they never referred to the fact that Gloriana, with all her merits, was an unlettered woman, whose taste was robust. For a queen is a queen even in the eyes of a Dean of Christ Church College; and when this curious, little bald man in a furred gown confided to the Master of Balliol, his distinguished coadjutor, that this mime whose name he forgot was undoubtedly *persona gratissima* in royal palaces, they agreed that while such clowning could receive no sanction from the University, it would hardly be seemly in the circumstances to drive the mummers out of the town.

It happened, at that time, that the Master of Balliol had staying with him in college a young man of promise, Mr. Francis Bacon by name, who knew his way about the Court. And when the Dean chanced to mention that this man, whose name he had forgotten, desired to perform three of his interludes within the precincts of that ancient home of learning and that the Queen approved him mightily, Mr. Francis Bacon, who even at that time had taken all knowledge for his province, exclaimed, "By God, it must be that plaguy fellow, Shakescene, that all the Court is mad about!"

"Shakescene is the man's name, undoubtedly," said the eminent divine, gravely. "An importunate Shakescene, moreover, who would play three of his rustical interludes within the precincts of this old foundation."

"Importunate enough, I grant you," said Mr. Francis, taking snuff with a great air. "Wat Raleigh tells me the numscull comes to Court in a barred cloak and affects the style of a gentleman. However—fine feathers make not fine birds. But why not let the rogue play his interludes, eh, Master? How say you, Mr. Dean? And

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we will go ourselves and witness 'em. I have long sought the opportunity to watch one of the performances of this ripe scholar."

"The rogue shall perform in the town, Mr. Francis," said the Dean of Christ Church, "if perform he must, but not, I promise you, within the precincts of this old and honorable foundation."

"I doubt not he would perform still better at the whipping post, where such knaves more truly belong," said the Master of Balliol, taking a prodigious pinch of snuff from the box of the Dean. "But as you say, Francis, let the rogue set up his booth in the city, and thither we will repair of an afternoon. We can then judge for ourselves what it is that the taste of Gloriana the peerless approves."

Thus it happened that Gervase and Anne, who had been stowed away in a corner of the gallery out of the sight of the multitude, were able to gaze directly down upon these three grave and serious gentlemen, who were seated upon the stage itself.

Grave and serious they might be. Yet as they decked the proscenium, their demeanor was spiced with not a little levity. Not only their surroundings, but the whole of that which was taking place, seemed to provide food for their sly mirth.

Gervase had marked one of the three in particular immediately upon his entrance.

"I know that man," he whispered to Anne. "Yes, the fellow in the feathered bonnet and the blue cloak. He is always about the Court. Sit close, dear soul. He's got the eye of a hawk, but, thank God, he won't look to see me like this."

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Indeed, Mr. Francis Bacon had eyes for nothing save the comedy that was being performed for his benefit. Greatly condescending, the future Lord Chancellor had come in the company of two learned pundits with no better intention than to deride the piece and its author.

Now there never was yet a critic since the world began who accosts an author in such a mood who has the least difficulty in making good his intention. If the man has wit, he lacks propriety. If he has invention, he lacks art. If his writing is marvelously alive, it is of course barbarous. If it is poetical, it is not true to nature. If it should happen to be true to nature, the whole performance is so flat, stale and mediocre as to be unworthy of the pains spent upon it. Whichever way the author turns, the critic is ready for him. Every merit he possesses serves as a fresh weapon to assail him.

Had these gentlemen had the good fortune to live two hundred years later, when the reputation of the author was already secure, they would have been among the first to make him the standard of comparison. It would have then been quite legitimate to admire "The Merchant of Venice," and even to have taken credit for doing so. But how was it possible for men of polite learning to treat seriously the production of a shabby fellow who took your half-crown at the entrance to the inn yard?

Yet, in spite of themselves, Mr. Francis Bacon and his two august friends were not a little diverted by the briskness of the piece. But any entertainment there was to be derived from it had, of course, to be laid to the door of the actors. The acting was undoubtedly excellent, but the less said of the play, the better.

Still, notwithstanding the fact that the opinion of the

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critics who graced the proscenium was not very favorable, all the rest of the house appeared mightily to approve the play. The afternoon had turned wet and there was no roof to the inn yard, but those who were packed in it so closely that they could hardly breathe, followed the whole of the piece with ever-growing excitement. They roared with delight at its humors. *Portia*, who was played by young Parflete, enchanted them. They execrated the Jew, yet Richard Burbage, as became the great actor he was, invested his defeat with a pathetic dignity that almost drew their tears.

"Ha! now, that is the man," said Mr. Francis Bacon. "I ask you, what had the play been without such incomparable acting?"

"What, indeed!" said the learned doctors.

"I must make that fellow my compliments upon his performance," said the Master of Balliol College.

And a few minutes afterwards, when the delighted audience was streaming out of the yard, these great men condescended to approach the tragedian and express their approval.

"Fain would I make you my compliments, sir," said Mr. Francis Bacon, in his highest style, in order to impress the person he addressed, "upon the inimitable art you have used this afternoon. The performance would have been barren enough without it. Never have I seen acting so choice lavished on a play so inferior."

The tragedian looked very doubtfully at Mr. Francis Bacon.

"By your leave, sir," he said, "I would not have you exalt me at the expense o' the piece."

"To be sure, sir, your modesty does you honor," said

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the Master of Balliol College. "But your genius, if I may so express myself, is deserving of something far better than the clumsy work of this rude journeyman."

The tragedian shook his head.

"Nor would I have you exalt me at the expense of the writer," he said.

"Ah, my friend, you are too modest," interposed the Dean of Christ Church in an amiable manner.

"If it is the part of modesty," said the tragedian bluntly, "to decline to be praised by the ignorant, then I grant you that modest I may be. Because I would have you to know, you learned doctors in your furred gowns, that the play you have just witnessed is by the first dramatic author of this age or of any other."

The three gentlemen were unable to repress a polite snigger.

"What!" said the Master of Balliol College, "that odd-looking fellow with the beard who sat in the pay box and bit my half-crown as if he feared it was a counterfeit?"

"The same, sir," said Burbage. "And if you can put a counterfeit upon him, you are an abler man than I have yet cause to consider you."

"No doubt, sir," said the Master of Balliol College, with an air of pained dignity. "But, pray, convey my compliments to your Johannes Factotum, and inform him that if he will give his days and nights diligently to the study of Aristotle, he may, by the time he is a very old man, be able to produce a passable play without doing grave violence to the dramatic unities."

"Perhaps you will be kind enough, sir," said the tragedian, "to pay William Shakespeare your own compli-

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ments, for here he comes staggering under the receipts of the performance."

The playwright, his face beaming with satisfaction, came towards them.

"We had near ten pound in the yard, Dick," he said, with a frank disregard of all things except the business in hand. "That is, unless a half-crown that a little half-faced, chapt-shot, under-hung mouse of a fellow in a furred gown put upon me is a counterfeit. And I am sore afraid it is, unless my pooh old teeth have lost their integrity. Do you try it, Dick."

The playwright handed the dubious coin to the tragedian.

"I presume you refer to my half-crown, sir?" said the Master of Balliol College, with great dignity.

"I hope, sir, I may presume to refer to it as your half-crown," said Mr. William Shakespeare, "if my friend Shylock here adjudges it to be one. How now, Usurer, what say you?"

"If that is a half-crown," said the tragedian, who had already bitten the coin nearly through, "I'll never be paid in anything but five shilling pieces as long as I live."

"But I protest, sir," said the Master of Balliol College, warmly, "that coin was paid to me last evening by my much-honored friend here, Mr. Francis Bacon, over a game of primero."

"The more shame to Mr. Francis Bacon, then," said the tragedian, "that he should use such a coin for such a purpose in such a company."

Mr. Francis Bacon examined for himself the dubious currency.

"It cannot be the one I gave you, Master," he said,

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as soon as he was able to assure himself that the coin was false.

"Certainly it is, Francis," said the Master of Balliol College, with a pained air.

"I cannot believe it, Master. However—" Mr. Francis put the coin in his pocket with the quiet dignity of one who realizes the force of the old adage, *noblesse oblige*: which, in plain English, may be taken to mean that it ill becomes gentlemen to argue among themselves in the presence of the commonalty. "However, as I was saying, Master, to return to Aristotle, that much-overrated sciolist, I do most cordially approve your critical acumen when you say that if our friend Master Shakescene——"

"Master Shakespeare," interposed the tragedian, solemnly.

"I beg his pardon. If our friend, Master Shakespeare, here would study the drama *ab hoc*, and give his days and nights to that matchless work, the "Ars Poetica," of Aristotle, there is indeed no reason why, in the process of nature and always under the courtesy of providence, he should not one day produce a work of the imagination that pays some little regard to the laws that govern such quaint abortions of the human mind."

Mr. William Shakespeare listened with an air of grave courtesy to this sage counsel. Like all men of parts, he was at heart a very humble man, with a deep reverence for true learning. It was too late in the day for him to hope to acquire it. He had never known the want of wit, yet in his mind was ever the thought of how much better his plays would have been could he have fashioned his rude verses after the manner of the ancients.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Lord Chamberlain's servants were in the highest spirits. The remarkable success of their first performance in the famous city of Oxford had pleased them greatly. They had been put upon their mettle by their cold reception at the hands of town and gown. Seldom had they acted even one of their most effective plays with such force and sincerity.

Long before the play was at an end, a triumph was assured. They had a proud sense of having struck a shrewd blow to prejudice. Those in the thronged galleries and the close-packed press all about the stage had shouted themselves hoarse. The author of the play, who had a share in the profits of the company, lost no time in turning the flood tide of popular favor to account. His mind was a remarkable blend of business acumen and high poetic genius. He arranged at once that the Lord Chamberlain's servants should extend their visit by three days, in order that other of his pieces might be given. And among these was to be a first performance of the new, pleasant, conceited comedy of "As You Like It," which in the following week was to be given at Richmond Palace in the Queen's presence.

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There is nothing like a sense of success to uplift the heart. When a man goes from triumph to triumph, his wit becomes more nimble, his fancy expands, his talent runs the more free. And at this time, all these happy conditions were fulfilled in the career of William Shakespeare. He was at the zenith of his mental and physical power. All things to which he turned his hand ministered to his fame and affluence.

The unlucky Gervase Heriot, lying in the shadow of a peril that would have wrecked the strongest will, had come upon this man in an hour when nothing seemed beyond the scope of his invention. The tragic history of this young man, and of the noble girl who had forfeited all in order to save his life, had wrought deeply upon the player's pity.

Shakespeare had resolved to help the fugitives to the utmost of his power. Such a decision in circumstances of such grave peril and difficulty could only have sprung from the large generosity of a great nature. He had all to lose by mingling in the affairs of one in this grim pass. Nothing could be more perilous than to help a convicted traitor to escape his doom, but in spite of the solemn warnings and even the earnest prayers of his devoted friend, Burbage, the playwright's mind was now set upon this task.

It was easier, however, to form this resolve than to give it practical expression. But the outcome of much anxious thought upon the matter was to make one fact clear. If the life of Heriot was not to be spared at the expense of a man as blameless as himself, an appeal must be made to the Queen. 'And in order to do that with the smallest hope of success, the young man must be able to

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adduce a strong proof of his innocence and, at the same time, engage the Queen's sympathy.

There lay the crux of the whole matter. And as soon as this conclusion had been reached, the keenly practical mind of the playwright began to grapple with this sore problem. At first, it seemed hopeless to do anything. There appeared to be no means of obtaining the all-important proof of Gervase Heriot's innocence, without which it would be the height of imprudence to bring the matter to the notice of the Queen. For none knew better than William Shakespeare, that she was a woman of harsh and imperious temper.

Thus was it beyond all things necessary that a proof of Heriot's innocence should be found. The playwright sat late that evening in a secluded corner of the inn parlor, anxiously discussing with "Signor Bandinello" every aspect of his unhappy case. It was true that he deemed it wise to withhold all mention of the falconer's visit and the sinister news he had brought. Shakespeare was convinced that such information had only to come to the ears of Gervase Heriot for the fugitive to give himself up at once. This was not the kind of man to allow another to suffer in his place.

Many were the questions with which the player plied Gervase, in the hope of finding some way out of this tragic coil. The natural starting point of this search for a means of escape was the presence in that inn of the man Grisewood. In a sense, it would almost seem that the hand of providence lurked in such a coincidence. But how to turn it to account, that was the problem.

Would it be possible to make him play false his ignoble partner, the man Simon Heriot? A very little reflection

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convinced Shakespeare that any such hope was vain. To begin with, nothing was less likely than that Grisewood would run the risk of putting his neck in a noose by confessing the truth; again, having very recently experienced the thrust of the sword of "the Italian music master," he had now the best of reasons for nursing an implacable hatred against the man whose life he had sworn away.

From a consideration of the man lying upstairs sick with the pain of an ugly wound, it was a natural transition to the sole author and inspirer of the whole tragic business. The house of Simon Heriot was but ten miles away. And if hope of any kind was to be derived from the nearness of the chief actors in the sordid drama, it seemed to lie in this fact.

Quite apart from the pass of Sir John Feversham, the playwright was too wise a man to approve the wild scheme that Gervase had formed, which indeed was the cause of his return to Oxford. The risk would be great, the gain slight and uncertain. But indirectly, it was Gervase's crude plan which now set the subtle brain to work. Many were the questions Shakespeare asked touching the character, the habits, the mode of life of Simon Heriot.

Among other things he learned was that this man was of a morbid imagination, holding himself aloof from his kind. Of late, he had mixed but little in the world. It was even thought by some that his mind had at last turned against itself, and that it had begun to show signs of a failing sanity.

It was not at first that the significance of these things revealed themselves to the playwright. It was not at first that he realized the use to which they might be put. Un-

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consciously, however, they were stored in his brain against the time they should be cast into the crucible of its invention.

Shakespeare learned much that evening from his talk with Gervase Heriot. Keen as had been his pity for him from the moment he had first heard his tragic history, their present intercourse deepened it rather than made it less. He was quick to recognize the depth and the valor of this young man's soul, and that of the great-hearted girl who had dared all to save him from the scaffold. Theirs was a wonderful story, all compact of the very life-blood of drama. And when Shakespeare was told very simply that upon the arrival of that hour in which they could no longer hope to put off their foes, they had a plan whereby they might die together, such a declaration had the power to thrill the heart of one who spent his life in the devising of plays.

Long they talked together. On the one side was an intense sympathy, a fervent pity; on the other, a clear and manful courage that was not afraid to trust its instincts. And in this case those instincts were to put implicit faith in this stranger by the wayside, the power of whose personality was so compelling.

It happened about midnight, while Gervase and the player still talked together, that a traveler came into the inn parlor. Shakespeare saw at once that it was the falconer returned weary and despondent from his quest. The man came over to where they sat. His face and bearing were very tragic.

"You don't happen to have seen anything of those gypsies I spoke to you about?" he said to the player.

Shakespeare shook his head.

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"I have lost all track of them now," said the falconer. "My belief is, they are somewhere in Oxford. At least, they were last seen outside this inn. And, in any case, I can go no farther to-night."

"What gypsies are you seeking, friend?" asked Gervase.

The falconer and he had only seen each other once, and then only for a moment. Thus neither knew who the other was. The falconer gave a brief description of those whom he sought, but it was explicit enough to tell Gervase that Anne and himself were the objects of his quest.

"What might you be wanting with them?" asked Gervase.

"It is a long story," said the falconer. "I am too weary to tell it to-night. But to-morrow, perhaps."

Thereupon, he went out of the room. Shakespeare was much relieved to see him go. But the man's inopportune return had much increased the difficulties of the situation.

"I have seen that man before," said Gervase, "yet, for my life, I cannot think where. And I have not the least doubt that it is my brother and I he is seeking. To-morrow, I must have a talk with him."

"Might it not be well," said the player, "first to find out whether he is a friend or an enemy."

"In any case, he is not likely to recognize me in this guise," said Gervase.

"It would be wise to take no chances, my friend," said the player.

The task he had set himself was now beginning to press very heavily upon William Shakespeare. He well knew it would be fatal to any plans he might evolve if the

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fugitives learned what the business was that had sent the falconer scouring the country-side. He must do all that lay in his power to prevent the man conversing with Gervase Heriot. And he must also contrive a means to keep Anne Feversham out of his sight, lest he recognize her in spite of her boy's dress.

Thus it was in a state of dire perplexity that the player sought his bed that night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE rose early, after a troubled night. Throughout its interminable watches his mind had been dominated by the necessity of keeping the falconer and the fugitives apart. It was almost certain that the man would recognize his young mistress. And if this came to pass, she would learn at once her father's tragic peril.

Soon or late, the news would have to be told her. At least, that was the view Shakespeare had now come to hold. But this was not the season for the Constable's daughter to learn what had happened. As the playwright had lain sleepless that night in his bed, with the eager brain racing courser-like over the whole matter, the core of a plan had come to him. It was little more than a shadow at present. It had yet to take shape, yet to acquire a hue of reality, but it might be that under providence it would develop into a scheme that could offer some hope of their deliverance. Yet he must have time in which to mature it; and if by a mischance the fugitives learned at this moment Sir John Feversham's peril, nothing was more likely than that a self-sacrificing impulse would cause them to give themselves up to justice before anything could be done to help them.

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All that day the falconer hung disconsolate about the Crown Tavern. There was reason to believe that the fugitives were still in the vicinity of Oxford, but for the time being all further trace of them had failed. A number of persons in and about the town appeared to have seen the young gypsies. Among others, John Davenant, the landlord of the Crown, had a clear recollection of having seen them early the previous day on the bench outside the tavern door. They could not be far away, yet for the present the falconer's inquiries yielded no result.

Shakespeare was careful to keep Gervase and Anne out of the man's way. He hardly let them out of his sight, and during the performance that afternoon they were given a secluded corner in one of the galleries where they could enjoy the play without being seen by the audience.

The piece was "Romeo and Juliet," and its success was as great as that which had been gained on the previous day by "The Merchant of Venice." News of that brilliant performance had spread, so that the press in the inn yard was greater than ever, there being hardly room to squeeze another soul inside. This play was finely acted, and it was received with bursts of rapturous applause.

It was part of the scheme that was being formed in Shakespeare's mind that Anne should play *Rosalind* before the Queen. He knew that such an innovation would be perilous, and he foresaw that it would arouse the opposition of his colleagues. But that shy and slender grace was the ideal of his fancy. He knew now that it was the sight of her in hawking dress in the tailor's shop that had set his mind upon the forest of Arden. Parflete was an efficient actor, but no member of the company could have

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the charm and delicacy of this gracious thing, if only she could be taught to play the part at so short a notice.

The playwright was too astute even to tell Burbage of the fantastic scheme that had come to lurk in his mind. But he lost no time in giving Anne a copy of the play to read. She declared herself enchanted by it. It was not then, however, that he ventured to reveal to her his design. And, in the meantime, perils were multiplying.

The man Grisewood remained three days in the privacy of his chamber, suffering much pain during that time in his disabled arm. And when at last he emerged with his wound dressed in bandages, he hovered about the tavern like a brooding and vengeful presence. If ever a man might be said to be biding his hour in order to work mischief, this was he. Yet for the present, it was little he could accomplish. Moreover, he was constrained to keep a civil tongue in his head, since Richard Burbage, who was no respecter of persons, was fain to inform him that the horse-trough was still likely to be his academy of manners.

Grisewood, it appeared, had come to Oxford for a particular purpose. That purpose was to seek out Simon Heriot, his partner in infamy. He wished to inform him of the prisoner's escape, which was not generally known to the world, and incidentally to learn what prospect there was of being able to replenish a depleted exchequer. This indeed was its permanent condition, so far as Sir Robert Grisewood was concerned. But now that his foul work was accomplished he looked to it to provide a source of revenue for many years to come.

In the course of the day Grisewood chanced to inquire of John Davenant, in the falconer's hearing, whether he

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could direct him to Greenfield Manor, the house of Simon Heriot. The falconer's attention was attracted, and presently he entered into conversation with Grisewood. Both men, at first, were not a little wary of each other. The business of neither enabled them to open their hearts to a chance acquaintance, but a few cautious questions judiciously answered were enough to prove their common interest in a matter which concerned them both very deeply.

Grisewood had more cunning, and therefore less frankness, than the falconer. Thus he asked questions rather than answered them. And it was not long before he had learned the nature of the falconer's mission.

Markham, to be sure, was very loth to tell his story. But once upon the track of it, Grisewood was not a man to be gainsaid. On a pretence of being able to tell far more than he knew, he drew the main particulars, word by word, out of the reluctant falconer. Thus he learned the manner of Gervase Heriot's escape, and how the fugitive was roaming the country-side in the company of Sir John Feversham's daughter.

This was high and strange news for Grisewood. Indeed, Markham was one of the very few who knew this fact. Not even the Queen herself was aware of it.

Had Markham been in a mood less desperate, he would not have divulged the share of his young mistress in the prisoner's escape. But this man had affected to know far more of the matter than, in point of fact, he did know; besides, the falconer did not see how any words or any act of his could make the affair more terrible than it was. His one desire was to overtake the fugitives in order that he might inform his young mistress of her father's dire

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peril. This was neither more nor less than the morbid craving of an overburdened conscience. It would not be at his instance even if Gervase Heriot was given up to justice. His wish was merely to make known to the prisoner all that had occurred, and then leave any further action in his hands. By this means the falconer hoped to rid himself of the stain of his master's blood.

As soon as Grisewood had heard the falconer's story he brought the whole force of his cunning mind to bear upon the matter.

"You say, my friend, this traitor and Sir John's young daughter in a boy's dress are roaming the country in the guise of gypsies?"

"That I do," said Markham.

Grisewood strove to amplify in his mind a picture the falconer's story had conjured up in it. At last he was able to do this.

"By God's life!" he said, "that was the pair of vagabonds I saw in the company of that accursed play-actor at the tavern door on the morning I came here."

"Why do you call him accursed?" said Markham, remembering with a pang that this player was a man in whom he had already confided.

"Why do I call him accursed?" said Grisewood. "All the world knows him for a notorious rogue, as are all men of his sort. And I'll wager a golden angel he is concealing these fugitives in order to serve some purpose of his own."

"But why should he conceal them," said the falconer, "when there is a large sum on the head of Mr. Heriot?"

"A large sum, eh! The rogue may not know that."

It was more to the purpose, perhaps, that the rogue who

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spoke had not known it. He grew silent. In this business he must go cautiously indeed. It might be possible for one who lived by his wits to take profit from this strange business. At least, in his own mind, he was reasonably sure of two things. The first was that the fugitives were near at hand, the other that the play-actor was in a position to throw light on their whereabouts.

The effect of this conversation was to keep Sir Robert Grisewood very wideawake, and also to implant the seed of distrust in the mind of Markham. It might be, after all, that the player was not so open and honest as he seemed. At any rate, the falconer determined to watch him narrowly. With that end in view he marked all that Shakespeare did. And he soon found more food for his suspicions.

Close observation of the player's comings and goings enabled Markham to learn that there was a certain room in the upper part of the inn, which claimed a large share of his attention. Much of Shakespeare's time was spent in it. Another person who had recourse to it was a certain tall man profusely endowed with a beard and moustachios, said to be a foreigner, who had lately joined the Lord Chamberlain's Company. He was reputed to be a swordsman of much skill, and in proof of it he had lately given Grisewood a thrust through the arm.

The falconer was able to learn that this man, an Italian who went by the name of Bandinello, had a son. And although he, too, had joined the Lord Chamberlain's Company, and was staying at the Crown, Markham found it impossible to get a sight of him. For one thing, neither of these Italians took their meals with the rest of the players in the dining-parlor, but as the falconer contrived

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to learn, these were served to them in this upper chamber.

This fact deepened Markham's suspicions. He did not think, well, however, to confide them to Grisewood. Inquiry of the landlord had been sufficient to fix a very evil reputation upon the man. And it had also served, in a measure, to reassure Markham in respect of the player. The landlord, who seemed a shrewd and honest fellow enough, had no hesitation in affirming that William Shakespeare was a very upright man.

Markham kept to himself his growing belief that the player, for purposes of his own, was concealing the fugitives. But the falconer, once engaged by this train of thought, began to grow more and more certain that he had good ground for his suspicion. A close scrutiny, moreover, convinced him that Signor Bandinello was by no means the individual he gave himself out to be.

Upon reaching this conclusion, Markham determined on a bold course. By hook or by crook, he would get a sight of this boy who was kept so close. Yet only one means seemed to offer of doing this. He must choose a favorable moment, and boldly invade this private room. Doubtless the best time would be when the players were assembled at supper in the dining-parlor.

In accordance with this plan he watched a servant ascend with a tray of food, and then a few minutes later he walked fearlessly into the room.

As John Markham had surmised would be the case, he found two persons seated at supper. One was the so-called Italian music master, and the other was doubtless the person who had passed as his son. But, with a single glance of an almost terrified swiftness, the falconer was

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able to pierce the disguise. For all her close-clipt curls and her boy's dress, the second occupant of the room was undoubtedly his young mistress.

In spite of the fact that the falconer was fully prepared for the discovery he had made, he uttered a cry.

Signor Bandinello sprang to his feet.

"What is your pleasure?" he asked sharply, and in an English as pure as any man need wish to use.

For an instant, the two men stood looking at one another blankly, while Anne's dismay was so great that she could neither speak nor move. But each of these men had recognized the other already.

Beyond a doubt this was the man the falconer sought. Also this was the servant of Sir John Feversham, whom Gervase had encountered in the meadow.

Gervase laid his hand to his sword.

"Nay, sir," said Markham, simply. "I am here as your friend, and as—and as the humble servant of my mistress."

The sound of the falconer's voice broke the spell that had been laid upon Anne. She rose from the table, and in spite of all that she had undergone of suffering, something of the old imperiousness was in her tone.

"What do you here, John Markham?"

"I bring news, mistress."

"Of whom?"

"I bring news of your father, mistress."

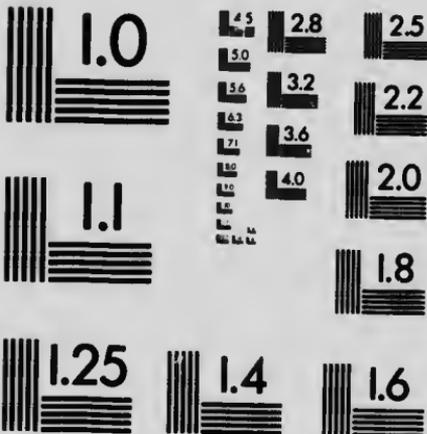
"Of my father!"

It seemed almost too great an effort for Anne to cast back her mind to the stern man whose very existence she had nearly forgotten. In the stress of those terrible weeks, which had called for all that she had of endurance,



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her former life had grown so vague, so remote that it was almost as if it had never been.

"What of my father?"

Tragedy unspeakable was in the falconer's face. For the moment, a power outside himself forbade his answering the question. Days and nights had he given to this quest, that a load of misery might be taken from his heart. But now that at last his tireless wanderings had achieved their purpose, a force beyond his own will held him captive.

The falconer knew as he gazed at his young mistress that it was her life he was about to sacrifice in order to save his master's. It was her youth and her high devotion in the scale, against one who had lived the flower of his years. Surely it behoved him to have a care.

"What of my father?"

The man shook his head impotently.

"Is he dead?"

"No, mistress, he is not dead."

But in the falconer's tone was that which sent a chill to the heart of Sir John Feversham's daughter. In spite of himself, Markham had told her that which he would now have concealed.

"My father is in peril?"

Again there was silence. But the woman's swift instinct all too soon divined its meaning.

"In peril. And it is because—because——!"

A shudder went through her veins. She buried her face in her hands.

A dreadful anguish came upon the falconer. Any words he would have spoken died on his lips.

In the midst of this unhappy scene Shakespeare en-

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tered the room. His eye fell on the somber figure of the falconer. And then he saw the piteous face of Anne.

"Oh, what have you done!" The player's bitterly reproachful words were heard only by the falconer.

Markham shook his head dismally.

Gervase turned a distracted face upon the player.

"This man is concealing something," he said. "What it is, I do not know. Perhaps you can tell us."

In spite of the fact that Markham's presence in the room had taken Shakespeare altogether by surprise, he seemed to realize the situation almost at once. Gervase Heriot's air of bewilderment and the falconer's look of pitiful irresolution served to make it clear that the man's will had failed when it came to the telling of his story.

But it was equally clear to that powerful intelligence that Anne had come very near to divining the grim truth. She was the picture of woe. And her distress could only proceed from one cause.

"You say my father is in peril!" Heedless of the player's presence her words were addressed to John Markham. "And it is because of me."

The falconer did not answer. But his white face answered for him.

"Tell me all, John Markham. I must, I will know all."

In the presence of that instancy of will which now as ever held the falconer in thrall, he could not do less than obey. It was in vain that the player sought to check him.

In a few broken, brief words, the dismal story was told.

"Sir John lies in the Tower, mistress, in peril of his life. He is accused of complicity in his prisoner's escape.

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On Monday next, as I understand, he is to be brought to his trial. And it is likely to go hard with him if he makes no effort to clear himself. And that, I am sure, he will not do."

Gervase interposed sharply.

"Why do you say Sir John Feversham will not attempt to clear himself?"

"For the reason, sir," said the falconer, gravely and simply, "that in such a case as this, it would not be my master's character."

"How can you possibly know that?" asked Gervase.

The falconer shook his head sadly.

"You are not acquainted with my master," he said. "Even to save his life, he is not the man to tell all that he knows of this matter."

"That is to say," said Gervase, "he has withheld a certain fact from the Queen?"

"Yes."

Despair closed upon Gervase and Anne. They did not need to be told that Sir John Feversham had taken upon himself the whole responsibility for his prisoner's escape, and that not a word had crossed his lips in regard to the share his daughter had in it.

One thought sprang at once to the minds of the fugitives. It was impossible in such circumstances to leave Sir John to his fate. All the laws of honor, of filial duty forbade such a course.

"Oh, why did you tell them!" said the player to John Markham. The too sensitive soul felt the stab of tragedy in its inmost fiber.

"It was right that he should," said Gervase. "It was his bounden duty."

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Gervase had grown as pale as death, but already resolve had braced his will. He saw at once that only one course was open to him, and that was the one the player himself had foreseen.

Yet no issue could have been more tragic. It was death for Gervase, and in the circumstances of the case, it was also death for Anne. All this the player understood, and even the thrice unhappy falconer seemed to realize it.

Gervase's mind was soon made up. He would go at once to London and surrender himself to the Queen. He would start that night or at dawn at the latest, since it seemed to him there was not an hour to be lost.

The player, however, had only to learn this impetuous resolve, in order to declare himself strongly averse from it. A plan which promised some hope of deliverance, a very slender one, it was true, had been taking shape in his mind for three days past. Any such precipitancy of action would destroy it. Therefore, he entreated Gervase to defer a step that must prove irretrievably fatal until such time as his scheme might have a chance to mature.

Shakespeare well knew how hazardous, indeed how fantastic his plan was. And he was far too honest a man to promise more than its desperate character warranted. But he did all that he could to dissuade Gervase from his intention. He implored the young man not to act until that day week, at which time the Lord Chamberlain's men had to appear before the Queen. It might then be possible to gain her ear. Gervase, however, would not consent to this. His thoughts were dominated completely by the peril of a brave and chivalrous man. Indeed, it was

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as much as the player could do to persuade him to defer his departure for London until the next day.

Finally, Shakespeare was able to wring a reluctant promise from Gervase that he would not act upon his resolve the following morning, until such time as they had met to discuss it again. 'And for the time being, at any rate, that was the utmost the play-actor could contrive.

CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was little sleep that night either for William Shakespeare or for Gervase Heriot. The early morning found them together in the inn garden. And as they walked up and down its box-bordered alleys, they talked long and very earnestly and in a manner utterly heedless of their surroundings.

In this last matter, they were unlucky. Several of the tavern windows overlooked the garden, and one at least was open wide. This belonged to the room which was occupied by the man Grisewood, who lay sleepless on a comfortless pillow, still tormented by his wound. Unable to rest, he chanced to rise from his couch in the early hours, and thrust his aching head out of the window in order to get a breath of fresh air.

His attention was caught at once by the sound of voices and of footsteps on the gravel path below. Then it was he saw the play-actor in deep conversation with the man who had run him through the arm. The sight was enough to summon all that Grisewood had of cunning, and in his case, as it happened, this was a commodity of which nature had been lavish.

At once, he knelt down by the casement, in order that he might see without being seen. Then he listened very

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intently. The process was irritatingly difficult. He was only able to hear brief, disjointed fragments of the conversation that was passing below. But it was continued long enough to enable the listener to weave into some kind of a context the few scraps of talk which he was able to glean.

Without any sort of doubt, the man who had run him through the arm was Gervase Heriot in a cunning disguise. Such a thrill of joy passed through the heart of the listener as almost to compensate for the pain and indignity he had recently undergone. It would appear that the fugitive was bent upon a course of action from which the play-actor was doing all in his power to dissuade him. Exactly what it was that was passing between them, Grisewood could not for the life of him make out. Long they talked together as they slowly paced the garden, yet even when they left it at last, the listener was unable to gather the full gist of their conversation.

Nevertheless, he returned to his bed a very well satisfied man. Opportunity for revenge lay under his hand. Moreover, he hoped to be able to pay off his score with the player. And even beyond this doubly welcome prospect, there was the further consolation of the high price that had been set on the head of a condemned traitor.

These prospects were very dazzling in the sight of Sir Robert Grisewood. And such scope did they offer that gentleman for the exercise of his peculiar faculties, that he was almost afraid he would not be able to grasp them to the full. He must not act hastily. Let him give the whole force of his mind to the great possibilities of revenge that were spread before it. Let him strike at his leisure, and only after ample consideration of the case in

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all its bearings. Justice, full and complete, must be done to the really wonderful opportunity that had been given him.

In the meantime, Shakespeare's long conversation with the fugitive in the inn garden had borne fruit. With infinite difficulty had he been able to persuade the young man to forego his surrender to the law for that day, at least. And with even this small concession, the player was not dissatisfied, for it seemed that during the watches of the night the scheme in his mind had developed considerably.

Its nature was certainly very complex and hazardous. And the player asked of Gervase that he would trust him to carry it out without calling upon him to furnish details. Shakespeare desired the young man to await the issue of his plan with an open mind. And as there was all for Gervase to gain, and there was nothing he could lose, and as he had already learned to have faith in this man who had certainly played the part of a friend, he consented to the will of the actor, and at the same time to ask as many questions as need be.

It was a delicate situation. And if Gervase had not an implicit faith in the player, it could never have arisen. But the man's intense sympathy wrought upon him. And, after all, it was not a matter of his own life alone, or even of the life of Sir John Feversham. He had to consider that of the girl who had dared and done so much.

Thus, for one day more, he was willing to defer his surrender to the Queen. And to this he was impelled by the knowledge that whatever course he took, it would not now be possible to avoid bringing Sir John Feversham to his trial. The law must inevitably take its course, but

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there would still be time and opportunity to save the Constable even after he was condemned.

It had been Grisewood's intention to pay his visit to Greenfield Manor that day. But the discovery he had made caused him to alter his plan of action. He felt he must take time to consider the new position which had arisen. Therefore, he decided not to see Simon Heriot at once. It would be well, he thought, to stay where he was in order that he might watch affairs closely and gain a further knowledge of that which was taking place.

Delays, however, are dangerous. Grisewood was not aware of the fact that his change of plan was very welcome to the play-actor. Indeed, nothing could have better suited Shakespeare's design. From the many inquiries he had recently made in regard to Simon Heriot, there was good reason to suppose that the man believed his nephew to be dead. And as this belief was essential to the fantastic design that was maturing in the subtle brain of this maker of plays, it was beyond all things necessary that, for the present, it should not be disturbed.

Thus when, in the course of that morning, Shakespeare learned from the landlord that Grisewood had decided not to visit Greenfield Manor until the next day a weight of anxiety was taken from his mind. Nothing could have accorded better with his purpose. Moreover, it put him in great heart for his enterprise, and provided a further reason for its being carried through without delay.

To be sure, the scheme was whimsical, extravagant, fantastic. It was of a kind that could only have sprung from a daringly original invention. And perhaps only the optimism of one whose life was largely that of the fancy could have expected it to yield any material re-

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sult. But it was with the zest of a schoolboy that the playwright drew his friend, Burbage, aside before that morning was out, and over a tankard of October ale with a toast in it, inquired "whether he was ripe for a midnight frolic?"

"Ripe as a medlar, my old lad of Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire," said the tragedian, heartily.

"Then we will give what we are pleased to call our minds to a stratagem, dear shrew, which I hope we may be able this night to put on a dark knave."

"I care not so long as there is mirth in it," said the tragedian.

"Mirth enough in it, I promise you, if we can but draw this badger out of his hole. But we must go well armed, in case of trouble, and we must have horses for a journey ten miles out and home."

"What! more Charlecote adventures?"

"Nay, you egregious mine, a thing of more account than a coney or two. It is to save the life of an innocent man and, as we will hope, to lose a foul knave his head."

The tragedian, in accordance with a cautious, practical and sagacious disposition, began to look dubious.

"I am by no means clear," he said, "that Richard Burbage was designed by nature for knight errantry."

"No harm shall come of this adventure, I promise you. But all I ask is, that your dove's voice shall roar a little like the Nubian lion; and that your large assemblance shall make us look valiant in the light of the moon."

"That will I promise, if I have but a flask of canary within me."

"It is a choicely pretty stratagem. And if there is no

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miscarriage, I think we may obtain a night's honest amusement at the expense of one who looks not to provide it."

"What is your plan, you mad maker of plays? And what is its aim and object?"

"All in a good season you shall be told. But first, we must prick our band for the wars. I name myself captain generalissimo, and I name Richard Burbage, a large man, frowardly given, for my ancient. And for my squire, I name young Parflete, whose light limbs and smooth face and gentle air make innocence herself seem a baggage. And then I will name Lowin, an honest, good fellow with wit enough not to ask questions, and stout Kemp who is a wag but not a fool, and of course Heriot, this poor ill-used young man whose life I will save, I am determined upon it."

"All the same, my William, I would learn the nature of your stratagem," said Burbage, tenaciously.

"Nay, Richard, possess your soul in patience for the nonce. The stratagem is a good stratagem, else may I never drink sack out of a bombard again. But I must now seek young Mr. Heriot and assemble horses for our troop."

It was part of the man's character, and a strong part, that when once the mind was fully aroused, it could combine the power of action with an infinite faculty of invention. It was not always easy for him to see his way at the beginning of an enterprise. Like so many upon whom the heavy burden of imagination has been laid, the will was apt to be weak at times. But if only the occasion called imperiously, he had a power of concentration that enabled him to overcome the indecision

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which is the cruel curse that nature has laid upon the thinker.

Now that William Shakespeare had conceived the high project of saving the life of an innocent man, mind and will were working in full harmony to compass this end. He saw clearly what had to be done; and a blend of many high qualities lent him the power to conceive and to carry out a scheme which few men would have had the audacity to undertake.

He bade Gervase and Anne be of good heart. Yet he withheld the main particulars of his design. He told them merely that his purpose was to ride at sundown to the house of Simon Heriot, that was some ten miles off, in the company of Burbage, Kemp and other of the players. It would be necessary for Gervase to accompany them. With a light of humor in his eye, the playwright assured him that if fortune was kind he had a plan that might prove very pleasant, whimsical and diverting to all except him against whom it was to be directed.

"But, tell me, what it is, I pray you?" said Gervase.

Shakespeare shook his head.

"The hour is not yet," he said. "I faint, it is one of those whimsical matters which endure the performance better than the description. I only ask that you trust me to the full and do my will, whatever it be; and, for my part, I will promise that your case shall not be made in anywise worse than it now is, and under Providence shall be made a good deal better."

Knowing so little of the plan, Gervase found it hard not to be sceptical. But this man had already gained his confidence. He was hardly likely to promise that

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which he had no prospect of being able to perform. Moreover, there was no reason in the world why he should put a trick upon one in so sorry a plight as Gervase, unless he was an emissary of his enemies. And this the fugitive had no reason to suppose. For had he not treated Anne and himself with unfailing kindness, nay, with something beyond kindness—with a tenderness, a delicacy of compassion which no gratitude could ever repay?

Shakespeare presently delivered a solemn charge to the melancholy-visaged John Davenant, of whom there was a tradition that he had never been known to smile.

“Right excellent host,” said the player, with a whimsical air, “I would have you place at our disposal about the hour friend Phoebus enters his cradle, the eight trustiest and lustiest steeds to be found in this city. John Davenant, on your honor as a licensed victualler, do I charge you to give the whole of your mind to this matter. An affair of great pith and moment is toward as soon as the sun has gone down.”

“Is it that you are leaving us to-night, Will?” said the host of the Crown Tavern, in some alarm.

“Nay, mine host. But a choice little pleasantry is afoot, and it demands that all who bear a share in it should be well horsed.”

“Well, you are ever a mad faggot,” said John Davenant. “And a man never knows what whimsey you will take next.”

“Peace, honest vintner. And upon your life as a famous Christian man, do I charge you to do my behest.”

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Thoroughly mystified, John Davenant went to carry out these instructions, perhaps a trifle unwillingly. But he was an old friend of William Shakespeare, and although a somber fellow enough on the outside, there was a light of humor within. Besides, he had a very real respect for the moving spirit of the Lord Chamberlain's Company.

CHAPTER XXVI

GREENFIELD MANOR was a very old house about ten miles out of Oxford. It lay in a secluded spot, but the road to London ran past the high walls of its park. A heavy growth of trees surrounded the house itself, which was in a state of neglect and disrepair.

A gloomy and forbidding place enough. The very atmosphere which invested this mass of decaying stonework seemed to invite ghosts to walk. Its chimneys rocked continually; its windows rattled. When the vane over the decrepit stables swung in the wind of the summer night, it was as if some lost soul was seeking to escape out of Hades.

As a fact, the house was certainly inhabited by a lost soul. Simon Heriot, its master, lay in the belief that he had done his nephew to death by a subtle, mean and cruel device. And no worthier purpose than greed had been in his heart. It had been his life-long passion to hold the fair manor and the broad lands in the west country, which generations of his name had held before him. These, however, had descended to the son of his elder brother. And the knowledge that there was only one life intervening between him

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and his great ambition, in the end, became too much for him.

The means to do ill deeds oft makes ill deeds done. It was by chance that the design was unfolded to Simon Heriot of swearing away his nephew's life. But when occasion came to him he did not resist the call. The pent-up forces of his covetous envy rose up and slew him.

If ever a man might be said to have sold himself to the devil, that man was Simon Heriot. He had a cunning and subtle mind; moreover, he was very well-acquainted with the world in which he lived. He was clever enough to make the entail of his nephew's estates the price of his testimony. And, indeed, it was no uncommon thing in that day to reward those who brought and proved charges of high treason with the property of the people they had hounded to the scaffold. The times were very perilous for all men. The life of no man was safe. Black hatred and superstitious fear of the Pope and his emissaries were rife throughout the land. In such circumstances, it was easy for a cunning and unscrupulous man to remove a rival from his path by some form of legal process. The character of the evidence was seldom tested. It was enough if it served the purpose it had in view. Gervase Heriot was not the first by many who had been done to death under the ready sanctions of the law.

Howbeit, Simon Heriot, with all his knowledge of men and of the world, was without knowledge of the power of God. As soon as the news was brought to him that his nephew was condemned to the block, a singular change came over his life. The success of

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his design gave him not a crumb of satisfaction; indeed he took a morbid, an overmastering distaste for the society of his fellows. He shut himself up in his gloomy manor house with his old and stupid servants. He shunned the light of day. His one desire was to avert his face from all men and from the sight of Heaven.

A brooding lethargy fixed itself upon his soul. A kind of slow horror stole into his brain. He could not settle his mind to anything. Asleep or awake, he knew no peace. He would have undone his deed could he have found the courage that such an act demanded.

This night was as many others. After a solitary meal in a large, dim, comfortless room, Simon Heriot sat long at the table, staring straight before him at the huge open fireplace, whose emptiness was like a yawning chasm. At his elbow had been set a large flagon of wine, of which he drank continually.

There was not a sound in the old house, save that made by an occasional mouse behind the paneling. The servants had gone to bed; it was near eleven o'clock of a perfectly still and moonless summer's evening; and Simon Heriot was alone with his thoughts.

Wine, it is true, did a little to soften their sting. But when the hand of God has been laid upon a man, it is not amenable to human resources. Behind that dull lethargy of spirit was a never-ceasing pressure. Strange phantoms had begun to lurk on the edge of the outer darkness, away beyond the flickering half-light of the candles on the table.

At last, in sheer fatigue, the unhappy man began to doze. Worn out in mind and body, he fell presently into a troubled sleep. But his unquietness of spirit would

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not let him rest. He awoke with a start. There was a sense of a continual presence, unseen but all-pervading, in the room.

He strained his eyes beyond the circle of light made by the candles set on the table at which he sat. But away in the ghostly outer darkness of the large room, he could discern no visible shape. He strove to fix some faint and remote sound that thrilled in his ears. But, after all, it was only the little sound of the summer wind stirring in the trees.

Again the jaded brain tried to pierce together the slender core of will that might disperse these phantoms and perhaps enable it to sleep. But it was not to be. Each night as he sat there, besieged by this horror that had entered his soul, the will grew more inert. There was a faint voice within that had begun to whisper to him that he would never sleep again.

Yes, it was true. He would never sleep again. He was tormented by unseen phantoms. Never again would he know peace in this life and perhaps never in the life to come.

Once again he strained his ears to listen. It was only the little voice of the summer wind in the wide chimney-place. All was silence save for that. Yet there was an abiding sense of an unseen, all-pervading presence in the room. And then, quite suddenly, without warning of any kind, a thing happened that made the very soul of Simon Heriot recoil.

He was sitting at the table, his head resting on his hand. His back was to the wide chimney-place, but as he sat his body was half turned towards it. On his right hand was a long, low casement. It was curtain-

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less, but was covered on the outside by a wooden shutter. On his left hand, at the opposite end of the room, was another casement precisely similar except that it was smaller.

All at once, without warning and without any apparent cause, the shutters of the right-hand casement were flung to the ground. Simon Heriot turned his head with a startled cry. His wild eyes stared out into the night. At first, he could see nothing but the cavernous darkness. Yet as he was still gazing, a light was flashed suddenly across the window, and then he saw that a white, ghostly face was pressed against the pane and was looking into the room.

The apparition was so real, so vivid, that Simon Heriot rose half swooning with terror and walked across to the window.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

He had no need to ask. It was the face of the young man, his nephew, whom, as he believed, he had done to death.

"Who are you?" shrieked the wretched man.

He stumbled forward to the window. But when he came there all was dark again. The light was gone, and the face of his nephew had vanished.

Like a lost soul, trembling upon the verge of unreason, he stood at the window gazing far out into the void. But there was only the darkness of the night and the little voice of the summer wind. Yet if he was not in a dream, or if he was not yet bereft of his wits, the shutters were indubitably prone on the ground.

After a moment, the unhappy man turned away from

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the window, unable longer to endure that cavern of darkness which confronted him. Yet, hardly had he done so, when the shutters which covered the window at the other end of the long room were flung to the ground with a violent crash.

Simon Heriot screamed with terror. There again was the flash of the light. There again was the face of his nephew pressed against the window. Like one possessed, the unhappy man stumbled across the room to this other window. But by the time he had reached it, the light and the face were gone.

There was nothing but the night. All was silence. And there was nought to be seen out in the darkness. He uttered another wild scream of terror.

Shuddering in every vein, he withdrew his eyes from the window. As he sought the table for support, he almost fell. And then as he reached it, his heart seemed to stop beating. For a voice deep and terrible filled the room, echoing and re-echoing in it, making its spacious gloom resound.

"Simon Heriot!"

He heard his name.

"Simon Heriot!"

The voice of the unseen re-echoed high in the wide chimney-place. The heart of the unhappy wretch was already dead within him.

"Simon Heriot has murdered sleep!"

In a frenzy that seemed to tear his soul in pieces, he pressed his hands to his ears that they might be closed against the sound. But it was in vain. No human agency had the power to shut out those terrible words, or the awful voice that gave them utterance.

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"Simon Heriot, if ever you would sleep again, attend that which is said to you."

With the shred of will that remained to him, the guilty man strung all his faculties in order to heed the words that were spoken.

"Do you attend, Simon Heriot." The voice was low, deep and terrible. "Do you take a candle and sit at yonder table, upon which materials for writing are set, and do you write as you are now directed."

It was true that quill, inkhorn and foolscap were laid out on a small table at the other end of the room. At the back of that which he was powerless to disobey, the unhappy man tottered very slowly towards the table. After a moment of indecision, he sat down and took up the quill. He was as one in a dream, except that his head seemed to be bursting.

"Simon Heriot, write as you are directed."

The terrible voice had now grown so loud and so compelling, that it seemed to tear his brain asunder. When he took up the pen, his trembling fingers could hardly hold it.

Very slowly and very clearly, the voice then uttered the following:

"I, Simon Heriot, in the presence of Almighty God and with the shadow of death upon me, hereby solemnly declare, that I have caused to be borne to our Sovereign Lady the Queen, false testimony in the matter of my nephew, Gervase Heriot. I further declare that I suborned three men, Robert Grisewood, John Nixon and Gregory Bannister by name, to bear false testimony touching the complicity of the said Gervase Heriot in the Round House Plot, by reason of which alleged com-

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licity the said Gervase Heriot has been condemned to death. In the presence of Almighty God, and as I shortly hope for eternal rest, I do hereby most solemnly avow what I have written to be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Given under my hand this second day of July, 1599—Simon Heriot.”

Under the goad of terror, the guilty man gathered every fragment of his crumbling will in order that he might set pen to paper. No less slowly than the grim voice pronounced the words, Simon Heriot wrote them down with a kind of automatic precision. It was as if his highly wrought state had become susceptible to a process of hypnotism.

When at last the task was finished and he had signed the document which made full confession of his crime, he was commanded to open a window and to fling out the paper into the night.

He would have had neither the strength nor the courage to do this of his own volition. But the dread voice compelled him. He rose from the writing-table, but now such was his condition that he could hardly stand. A palsy was on his limbs; he was as one who has lost all control of his mind.

“Take heed, Simon Heriot.”

He knew not whence the voice came, yet a power beyond himself compelled implicit obedience. Scarcely able to walk, he tottered toward the casement at the other end of the wide room.

He was destined never to reach it. With a dismal cry, he stopped midway. The paper fluttered out of his hand. Suddenly, he fell face down on the stone floor, a slight foam on his lips.

CHAPTER XXVII

HARDLY had this thing come to pass, when a number of startled faces appeared on the outer side of the shutterless window. Shaking and rattling did not serve to force an entrance, but by the time the combined pressure of four or five vigorous and determined men had been applied, the framework began to yield. Very soon they had made their way into the room.

Simon Heriot was dead.

One glance at the horrible distorted face was enough to tell Gervase Heriot what had occurred. There was no need for the young man to get down on his knees, candle in hand, and loosen the man's clothing. Simon Heriot had already breathed his last.

The men who had come with Gervase into the room belonged one and all to the Lord Chamberlain's Company. The first of these was William Shakespeare whose fantastically ingenious device had been fraught with such tragic consequences. It had succeeded beyond hope or expectation. Richard Burbage's had been the voice which had re-echoed down the wide chimney with such ghastly effect.

"Dead?" said the playwright, looking round at the

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circle of astonished and half-terrified faces. And then he said, with a passionate solemnity, with a look of terror in his own dark-glowing eyes, "God rest his soul. His crime was black, but he has paid for it with usury. God rest his unhappy soul."

A chill of silence fell upon all who had entered the room. In a sense, they had done this man to death, and perhaps that thought was even more potent in their minds than the grim and awful tragedy they had witnessed.

After a while, the spell was broken. Burbage picked up the paper that had fallen to the floor. He examined it by the ghostly light of the candles, and then handed it to the man who had caused it to be written.

It might have been supposed that the text would have been expressed in a handwriting barely decipherable, but such was not the case. The writing was sufficiently clear to bear no reasonable doubt of its authenticity. By a process of hypnotic suggestion the man's mind had been strung up to a point beyond its natural powers, and it had not given way until the last word had been written.

Shakespeare folded up the paper and put it in his pocket.

"I will bear this to the Queen myself," he said.

In the meantime, some of the others had raised the body of Simon Heriot from the ground and had laid it on a table. But Shakespeare bore no part in all this. It was not that he was callous; it was simply that the sight of death revolted him.

After the body had been placed on the table, one and all waited upon the word of the leader of the enterprise,

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who had devised all that had come to pass. But now his power seemed to have gone from him. Having done so much more than he had meant to do, he was as one overborne by the sense of his deed. He now confronted his fellow-players haplessly, apparently not knowing what to do next or what advice to give.

As it happened however, all further decision was taken out of his hands. While one and all stood awaiting that masterful initiative that was no longer at their service, the door of the room was opened very stealthily, and two of the dead man's servants entered. Each carried a candle and a fowling-piece.

Both men were evidently in deadly fear of their lives, but a sense of duty had prevailed with them over a desire for personal safety.

"How, now, you masterless rogues," said one, who was the butler, in a voice by no means valiant. "What do you here?"

Before it was possible to answer the question, the antiquated weapon he carried went off with a loud report, which seemed to make the room rock to its foundations, and half choked all those in it with the fumes of smoke and gunpowder. It was the result of accident, certainly not of design, but a cry arose from among the players.

"Oh, God!"

It was the voice of the young man Parflete.

"Put up your weapons, you fools," cried Gervase.

The unlucky Parflete had fallen against the table. Anxiously they crowded round the man who had been hit, while the butler and the old serving man who was with him, seeing their master's nephew of the company, laid down their weapons.

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The young actor had been hit in the arm. It hung helpless and bloody by his side. Suddenly he fainted, and Gervase had only just time enough to catch him in his arms.

William Kemp, the famous comedian and creator of the rôle of *Falstaff*, who was one of those who had borne a part in this tragic conspiracy, had the presence of mind to seize a horn of brandy that was on the table. Having first, by a free application to his own throat, been able to satisfy himself that the liquor was capable of stimulating the heart's action, he poured a goodly portion of it down the throat of his wounded comrade.

There was virtue in this remedy. But the unlucky young player lay shivering with pain in the arms of Gervase, while Burbage attended an ugly wound with considerable skill.

First he cut away the dripping sleeve of the doublet with his clasped knife. Then a basin of water was brought and he bathed the wound, and finally bound up the arm tightly in a clean handkerchief. But by the time this had been done, Parflete was again insensible.

In the meantime, the two servants had discovered that their master was dead. And the horror of that discovery was increased by the presence of his nephew, whom they had presumed to be dead also. Furthermore, they were not acquainted with the black part their master had played. Thus their grief and horror were perfectly sincere.

The arrival of what certainly appeared to be a lawless company of lawless and masterless men, had plunged already the entire household into a state of alarm. The cries and the noise of firearms had at once

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aroused the rest of the indoor servants. In a few minutes, these had come crowding into the room. And as soon as they had learned what had occurred, matters began to take an ugly shape.

The steward of Simon Heriot, who had now appeared on the scene, was a man of resolute character. He declared that he would hold in custody those who had been responsible for his master's death, notwithstanding that one among them was his master's nephew. Accordingly, he sent one man to call the outdoor servants; he sent another to procure a horse from the stables and ride with all haste to the nearest justice; also he proclaimed the fact that he would suffer no man to escape.

In that, perhaps, although his intention was excellent, he was not wise. The players, including Gervase and the falconer, mustered nine men in all, against seven men and four women. To be sure, one of the intruders was sorely disabled and would require the careful tendance of his friends if he was to be brought securely away. But, in the matter of arms, the advantage was with the players, inasmuch that most of them were provided with swords, and they had only to fear one undischarged fowling-piece and divers staves and short daggers.

Gervase now took command of affairs. He approached his uncle's steward coolly enough, for all that the man preserved a very threatening attitude with his weapon pointed ominously at the players.

"Put it up, you curst fool!" said Gervase, roundly. "Haven't you done mischief enough already?"

"Not half the mischief you have done, sir," said the man. "Come not an inch nearer or I——"

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Before the steward could complete his threat or carry it into effect, Gervase suddenly struck up his arm. The piece went off with a tremendous report. This time, happily, its contents were discharged into the air.

In the midst of the smoke and the general confusion, Gervase flung himself upon the steward and, with the strength and the address of youth, soon wrenched the clumsy weapon from his hands. Then, with a blow on the head from the butt of the weapon, he laid the man insensible.

"Through the window, my friends," he cried to his comrades. "Let us get out of this while we have the chance."

Gervase had now become the leader of the players—for a time at least. Already he had shown that faculty of quick initiative which belongs to the man of action. The others obeyed him instinctively. His swift decision, and the manner in which his deed leaped with his thought, showed them clearly enough that they would do well to follow him.

Burbage was first through the window. He was a powerful and active man. He lifted out Parflete bodily and then, hoisting him on his broad shoulders, began to run with him in the direction of the horses which were tethered in the lane. It was well that the wounded actor was very light of weight.

Meanwhile, the others were rendering a pretty good account of themselves. A general *mêlée* had ensued, in which blows were given freely and given as freely again. And in all this, Gervase was foremost. Many shrewd knocks he delivered with the butt of his weapon, and one of these undoubtedly saved Shakespeare a broken

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head. John Markham, the falconer, also did considerable execution with the flat of his short sword.

The onfall of the players had been so swift as to take Simon Heriot's servants by surprise. And, after all, the resistance they had to offer was not very stout. Thus those who had forced so irregular an entry were soon in excellent shape for making good their escape by way of the window through which they had come.

The breach in the casement their entrance had caused was a large one. And with far less difficulty than they had reason to expect were they able to withdraw from the room. Also, they suffered no further casualty beyond a few ill-directed blows that did them little hurt.

The dead man's servants were less fortunate. Several were laid low, although none of their injuries was serious. But these early mishaps had killed any desire that might have lurked in the others to press the conflict beyond the point of discretion. No very serious effort was made to impede the flight of Gervase Heriot and his friends, whom one and all of the dead man's household honestly believed had done his uncle to death.

It was not a difficult matter for the players to reach their horses which had been left in the lane. Shakespeare, who was a good horseman, and who had contrived to be well mounted, had the wounded man lifted on to the front of his saddle.

Parflete was still very weak from loss of blood and the shock of his wound. He was quite unable to take care of himself. But the playwright was full of solicitude for the young man. Also it was fortunate that they both rode light. Shakespeare, although well knit of figure, was hardly more than a ten stone man.

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The horses were soon untethered and their heads turned in the direction of Oxford. No time was lost in making for the Crown. It was most likely there would be the devil to pay for that evening's tragic work. The law would certainly be invoked against them; indeed, already it was in process of being summoned. As far as the players themselves were concerned, their chief hope was that none save Gervase Heriot had been recognized. If that happened to be the case, and the young man could lie perdu for a few days, the hue and cry might pass, always provided that no evidence was forthcoming against the members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company.

Not a word was spoken as they rode to the Crown. The minds of all were filled with a sense of vague horror. The sinister trick they had put upon a blood-guilty man had turned to a grim tragedy. Full many a grisly scene had these men enacted in the process of their calling. Full many a scene of pity and terror had the master mind among them devised. But never in all their play-acting had they approached the sheer horror of the human soul which had been tormented so ruthlessly that night.

It was in vain they reflected that even with his callous crime heavy upon him they had not meant to do the man to death. The world was undoubtedly a better place for his quittance; it was necessary that his soul should be wrung to its extremity if an innocent man was to escape the ax; but let them urge in extenuation all that was possible, and there was still not one among them who would ever forget the dreadful thing which he had been face to face that night.

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As they rode along the moonless lanes in the stifling silence of a midsummer night, the weird shapes of the trees far spreading in their heavy leafage seemed to affront their eyes with phantom shapes. The eerie darkness that lay like a pall on the fields and woods and the grim sentinel hedgerows oppressed them almost beyond endurance.

Never once did they ease the pace of their horses, not even to listen for sounds of pursuit. And to more than one among that band of conspirators, perhaps most of all to the mind of William Shakespeare, it was a real, an unspeakable relief when a sudden bend in the dark road showed two or three fugitive lights twinkling a little ahead where Oxford lay.

Luckily, it was not a difficult matter to get through the city gate. Still, it was necessary to knock up the porter, who rose from his couch in no civil mood and asked why virtuous men rode so late. But a gold angel that was thrown to him reassured him wonderfully.

They came into the city unmolested. And thus far there was never a sign of pursuit. But they had a deep sense of relief when, at last, they turned round by the Cornmarket and alighted under the oil lamp that had been kept burning for them before the door of John Davenant's hostelry.

CHAPTER XXVIII

PARFLETE was put to bed at once, and late as was the hour a chirurgeon was sent for. He dressed the wound, and inclined to the opinion that the limb might be saved. But the injury was so severe that weeks must pass before the young actor could hope to appear again in the theater.

Now this accident and its consequences had filled Shakespeare with consternation. On the Thursday following, but six days hence, the new comedy was to be given by the Queen's command in Richmond Park. The chief female character, that of *Rosalind*, had been written and designed for this rising young actor. It was impossible at such short notice to fill his place. There was no other member of the company who came near Parflete in fitness for the part. The author felt that much depended on a graceful, slender and attractive *Rosalind*. It was with such a personage ever in his mind that the play had been composed for the delectation of an exacting critic.

The next morning, when the full extent of the calamity was known, Shakespeare bitterly lamented the lack of judgment which had allowed Parflete to bear a part in the perilous transactions of the night before.

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It was vain to repine, but the playwright would now have given much to be able to undo this grievous accident.

There was also another aspect of the case that filled him with concern. Gervase Heriot had been recognized by his uncle's steward. The aid of the law must already have been invoked. If the young man remained at the Crown, it was doubtful whether his present disguise would be a sufficient concealment, and if taken he would certainly be charged with the murder of his uncle. Not that that mattered particularly to one already under sentence of death. But it might matter very much to those who had associated themselves with the young man in the harebrained enterprise which had ended so disastrously.

Truly the reflections of William Shakespeare were not of roseate hue this morning. Looking back on the night's adventure, it seemed to be as grimly fantastic as a scene out of one of his own plays. When he had planned the weird scene that had been enacted to the very letter of his invention, he had had a very special object in view, yet he had not looked to the matter to be pushed to that extremity. It was hardly in human nature to mourn the occurrence, for the world was undoubtedly well rid of a bad man. Moreover, the object of the playwright's audacious stratagem had been achieved. He held in his hands a paper, which even if obtained by means so irregular, was enough to clear Gervase Heriot, always provided that the Queen could be brought to reconsider his case. But the feeling now uppermost in the mind of the dramatist was one of distress. He feared that he had drawn his companions into one of those sinister transac-

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tions in which no man in that age could afford to be involved.

Two things must be done, and they must be done speedily. It was imperative for the Lord Chamberlain's players to leave Oxford at once. And an efficient substitute for Parflete must be found immediately if the comedy was to be given in its integrity before the Queen on the Thursday following.

In the stress of these urgent matters, the playwright took counsel of Richard Burbage. That worthy was in the middle of a substantial if belated breakfast.

"In the first matter, I agree with you," he said, upon hearing what his colleague had to say. "There will be security for none of us until we are out of Oxford, and perhaps not even then. As to who is to play *Rosalind* now that Parflete is sick, heaven help us but I know not."

"Tarbert might play the part," said the author of the comedy. "He has a light womanish voice, but then his legs do not match and he has no more grace than a soused mackerel. As I see my sweet *Rosalind*, she should be all grace and limberness, all delicacy, tenderness and fantasy."

"Yes, I grant you it would be asking too much of Tarbert," said the tragedian, addressing himself very seriously to a quart of ale. "It would be asking too much of any of us except Parflete. I am afraid, William Shakespeare, this is going to be a sad detriment to your play."

The playwright agreed.

"With a good *Rosalind*," he said, "the play might pass. But without a good *Rosalind*, it is like to be a plaguy

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poor thing. I confess I had Parflete in my mind from the first. The lad has not yet had scope for his talent. He is a youth of most excellent refined wit and very neat and comely besides. I am sure if Gloriana could but have seen him as *Rosalind* to young Warburton's *Celia*, she would have been very well pleased with him."

"Yes, and with the play, too," said Burbage. "'Tis a thousand pities. For between ourselves, my William, if *Rosalind* fails us, there is mighty little substance in our new comedy to set before such an appetite as Gloriana's."

"That's true enough," said the playwright, gloomily. "And a writer is a fool who leans too heavily on a single character. Yet I love that sweet saucy quean, but God help us all if Tarbert plays her."

"Would it offend Gloriana if you put on one of your older pieces?"

"Yes, accursedly—you know that, Dick, well enough. It is her whim to have something entirely new as a mid-summer masque, and if she is fobbed off with an old thing, we shall none of us ever be forgiven."

"'Measure for Measure' she has not seen."

The playwright shook his head.

"It moves too slow for Gloriana," he said. "It is too much the work of the apprentice. And she'd smell out its weakness before we were half through the first act, for that crabbed old woman—whom God protect!—has got the keenest nose in the realm in matters dramatical. The old harridan is wonderful in some ways." The tone of the playwright was more reverent than the words it expressed.

"Well, it is a plaguy ill business, William Shake-

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spere," said the tragedian, again having serious recourse to his tankard. "A plaguy ill business altogether, what with this affair of last night, which is very like to land us all in the Jug, and young Parflete's hurt, and now this offence to Gloriana. However, it is a poor heart that repines. 'Tis all in the great comedy, my William, 'tis all in the great comedy. Sit ye down, man, and cut yourself a piece of this most excellent pasty, and I'll call the drawer, who shall comfort you with an honest quart of this right excellent ale."

Mr. William Shakespeare, however, had little use just now for this robust philosophy. Mutton pasties and tankards of ale did not appeal to him this morning. Far more serious matters were afoot.

At this moment, Anne Feversham chanced to enter the inn parlor. And it was almost as if that sweetly forlorn figure had been conjured up by the instancy of the poet's thoughts. She was still in her boy's dress. Here was the natural grace, the delicacy of limb and feature, the perfect harmony of mind and mansion of the true *Rosalind*.

Indeed, that shy and slender grace was the ideal of the poet's fancy. He knew now that it was the sight of her in hawking dress in the tailor's shop that had set his mind upon the Forest of Arden. And now her presence in that room kindled once again the eager mind. An idea sprang into it; an idea audacious, impulsive, extravagant, yet not wholly outside the region of the possible.

If only this creature, all charm and grace, could be taught to play the part at so short a notice!

There was no need for the poet to put into words that which had flashed through his brain. Nay, hardly

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did he need to look at Richard Burbage for his friend to read that which was published already in a face so expressive that it declared his lightest thought.

"Yes, why not?" said the playwright suddenly, without context.

Burbage shook his head. He had a clear perception of the idea that had kindled the mind of his friend, but it was hardly to be taken seriously.

"Why not, I ask you?" said the playwright. "I am sure there is a ready wit in that face, and if she has a quick apprehension, there is no reason why she should not learn the part in a week. Besides,"—the poet began to pace the room in the stress of the excitement the idea was generating in his brain—"it would be a means of bringing her to the Queen's notice."

Richard Burbage, however, lent no countenance to this fantastic idea. He knew Anne's tragic story. But he had a sufficient awe of the Queen's displeasure to have a grave regard for the peril of such a course.

"No, no," he said, "I pray you dismiss so wild a thought. No one knows better than you the temper of the Queen. And if she took this matter amiss, it would bode as ill for us as it would for Mistress Feversham."

But already the idea had sunk deep. The playwright was alive also to its possibilities from another point of view. It might prove a means of gaining the Queen's sympathies for Gervase Heriot.

"Dick," he said, "do not forget that now we hold a proof of Mr. Heriot's innocence. And should we adduce it in the right season, as I have good hope of doing, there is every reason to suppose that Gloriana,

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who at heart is a just woman, will view the matter tenderly."

"I beg leave to differ from you there, William Shakespeare," said Burbage. "As far as I can see, there is precious little reason to believe anything of the kind. No one has yet fathomed the Queen's caprices. And it ill behoves us of all men, who exist by favor of the public, to be mixed up in treasonable matters. Besides, after what happened last night I for one have no longer a stomach for them."

The poet, however, was not to be deterred by these counsels of prudence. His sympathies were too deeply engaged. He had taken this ill-starred pair to his heart. Assured that Gervase Heriot was the victim of a callous conspiracy, he was fully determined not to rest now until his wrong had been redressed.

Like Burbage, however, he was fully alive to the peril of mixing in matters that could so readily be construed as treason. And none realized more clearly than he the danger that lurked in any affront to the Queen. Poet as he was, and a dreamer of dreams, he owed his position among his fellows primarily to the fact that he was a remarkably able man of affairs. His was the vision that could see, the wit that could mold, the tenacious power of will that could compass the design.

Thus in spite of his friend's caution, the playwright went presently in search of Anne. Ultimately, he found her in the inn garden sitting by the side of Gervase Heriot, within the shade of its single yew tree. Taken by surprise, she had barely time to disengage her arms from about the young man's neck, let alone to check the tears that were flowing down her cheeks.

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Gervase, it seemed, was bent on going to London that day. Now that he had learned Sir John Feversham's peril, he felt it impossible to stay longer in hiding. To do so would surely cause the Constable's life to be forfeit.

The player did his best to reassure the young man. Sir John's power was undoubtedly great, but hardly so immediate as all that. As he had not yet been brought to his trial, there was hardly reason to suppose that he would have lost his head six days hence, when the player would have the ear of the Queen.

At the same time, Shakespeare agreed that after the unlucky business of the previous night, Oxford was no place for any one of them. The sooner they quitted it the better, since at any moment a hue and cry was likely to be upon them. A play had to be given at two o'clock that afternoon by the Lord Chamberlain's servants. But Shakespeare had already come to the conclusion that as soon as it was at an end, the Company would do well to lose no time in setting out for London.

The player now proposed that Gervase should keep his present disguise and return that evening with the others. Particularly anxious not to lose sight of the young man, and hoping also to prevent his doing anything unwise, Shakespeare entreated him to stay with the Company and accept the hospitality of his lodging on the Bankside until such time as his case could be brought to the Queen's notice.

Much persuasion was necessary before Gervase could be brought to accede to this course. But when Shakespeare gave a solemn promise that he would return to London that evening, and that he would take care to

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keep well informed of all that related to the position of Sir John Feversham, the young man gave a reluctant consent. He would lie in hiding in the player's lodging in Southwark, until a favorable moment came to present his case to the Queen.

Shakespeare was glad to have obtained this promise from Gervase Heriot. And he then unfolded the design that was in his mind. Having referred Parflete's accident and its disastrous effect upon the new comedy which depended so much on the part that young actor had to play, the author made so bold as to suggest to Anne that she should undertake the chief female character in her boy's dress. Nature, he said, had equipped her perfectly for the part of *Rosalind*, if only she could learn to play it at so short a notice. Moreover, it would be a golden opportunity to bring her to the favorable consideration of the Queen. Would Mistress Feversham venture upon a task so delicate and so difficult?

"Yes," said Anne, "I will, indeed, if you think my doing so may help to save the life of Gervase."

She spoke with a candor, a simplicity, a decision which told the playwright that here was a firm will and a high courage. And such evidence removed at least half of the risk he was about to run. One who could take such a resolve with such a clear determination was not likely to fail in the critical hour.

"Mistress," said Shakespeare, "you shall receive instruction at once. And if you can make yourself reasonably perfect in the part by next Thursday, you shall play before the Queen."

Gervase, however, was strongly averse from the

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scheme. Still, the event of the previous night had furnished signal proof of the player's wisdom. Such a design might appear far sought, yet surely not more so than the one which a few hours ago had been brought to such a terrible issue.

Gervase, therefore, was bound to heed the proposal. And, after all, the most grievous of his many misgivings were those concerning the fate of Anne herself. In the event of his own sentence being carried out, she was determined to die, too. Even if now he went to London to give himself up, her whole mind was set on accompanying him. All that dissuasion could do had failed to move her from that clear design. Wherever he went she would go with him, even into eternity itself.

In the end, it was perhaps the resolved attitude of Anne that enabled Shakespeare to get his way. And, after all, if she had the courage to embrace a plan so desperate, it was hardly for Gervase to dissent.

And she, it seemed, with a strange faith discerned some slender hope in it. Such a faith could only spring out of the depths of her despair. But with the dauntless courage that had carried her through everything, she began at once to bring the whole force of her will to bear on the matter in hand.

Little as she knew of the man who had made this singular proposal, she could not remain insensible to his personality. It appealed to her in a subtle way. This man, with his gentle voice and face of sad expressiveness, had masked depths of power that few men and fewer women were able to resist.

Thus it was that the luckless fugitives came to yield

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themselves to the player's care. Their pass was desperate, indeed. Whatever happened now could not make it worse. God knew, the expedient offered was forlorn enough, but for the sake of the slender hope it bore, they would submit themselves entirely to this man's hands.

CHAPTER XXIX

AS if to lend color to Shakespeare's fears, he was soon to hear disquieting news. Finding himself in the course of the morning in the tavern parlor, he overheard the conversation of those assembled there. A sturdy yeoman, it seemed, was full of information concerning a murder that had been committed during the night at the Grange, the house of Mr. Simon Heriot, along the Banbury Road.

"They do say that Mr. Heriot himself has had his throat cut by his own nephew," said the bearer of the news.

"What's that you say?" sharply interposed a man who sat in the corner drinking his morning flagon.

The man was Grisewood. Instantly, he was all attention and alertness.

The countryman repeated his story, to be sure with a number of embellishments that were very wide of the truth. But the essential fact was there, that Simon Heriot had been done to death by his nephew in the course of the previous night.

Grisewood's interest was very great. He knew as a fact that Gervase Heriot was close at hand, and that he

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had a powerful motive for taking even a course so desperate as the murdering of his uncle.

"Has the nephew been arrested?" asked Grisewood, with an excitement he did not attempt to conceal.

"No, he's not taken yet," said the news-bearer. "But he will be precious soon, else call me a rogue. They do say that young villain lies here in Oxford, but I'll wager Justice Pretyman and his posse will mighty soon rout him out o' this home o' learnin'."

"Who the devil is Justice Pretyman?"

"The Justice is a great man hereabouts. There's none better than he at tracking down the evil doer. I passed him and his men along the road as I came up. They are going to search every tavern and alehouse in this city from cellar to attic for this wicked young man, Gervase Heriot."

"Well, here's luck to their errand," said Grisewood, piously, draining his tankard.

In the next moment, pensive in deep thought, he left the tavern parlor. Shakespear soon left the parlor also.

This news was very disquieting to the player. He was in such a state of grave uneasiness, that he could have wished to start from Oxford immediately. But it would not be possible to do this until the Lord Chamberlain's men had given their final performance that afternoon. Therefore he must possess his soul in patience until that time, but also he must be fully alive to all contingencies. Of one circumstance he was ignorant, and well it was for his peace of mind that this was the case. He did not know that Grisewood had penetrated the disguise of the Italian music master.

Happily, there was no reason to suppose that the

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dead man's steward had associated the members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company with the tragedy of the previous night. At least, as yet there was no evidence of this fact. But the playwright felt they must be prepared for all untoward things that might befall.

Fortune was kind, inasmuch that the officers of the law did not pay their visit to the Crown Tavern before the final performance had taken place. Indeed, as luck would have it, they went away at first on a false scent as far as the neighboring town of Banbury, so that by the time they found their way to the Cornmarket the play was over, the audience had dispersed and the members of the Company were about to sit down to a well-earned meal.

As was sometimes their habit in such circumstances, they had not troubled to change their clothes. The principal players were thus arrayed with the magnificence of gallants and courtiers. And a little group of these sat sunning themselves outside the tavern door, waiting patiently for the summons to the board within, when Justice Pretyman and his posse made their long-expected appearance.

It was well that Shakespeare had already informed Burbage and Kemp, and one or two of the others, that this untoward visit was to be expected. Thus, as soon as the officers of the law came into view, the quick-witted playwright was ready to meet the situation.

A shrewd observer of men and things does not take long to find out what a man is worth. And a glance at Justice Pretyman was enough to assure the dramatist that he might have stood for the prototype of Justice Shallow.

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The magistrate arrived with a number of sheriff's men. And he was armed with an authority to enter and search every likely place in the city and county of Oxford which might harbor the notorious traitor, Gervase Heriot, who had not only broken out of prison, but who had also murdered his uncle the previous night.

John Davenant had been told beforehand of Justice Pretzman's coming. Therefore he met him at the inn door. And the demand that a house of such repute should be searched for so dark a purpose appeared to fill the heart of the worthy vintner with grief and consternation.

"You may search my tavern, sir," he said, "but I would have you to know that, upon my honor as a licensed victualler, this is the most reputable tavern betwixt here and The Pump in Aldgate."

"That I don't doubt, sir," said Justice Pretzman, with official asperity.

He was a pompous, overbearing little man, very conscious of the dignity to which it had pleased Providence to call him.

"As *custos rotulorum* of this country, as one armed with the Queen's authority——"

"Aye, God protect her," suddenly interposed a man who stood by in a voice of fervent piety. "But I would beg you, sir, to abate all instancy of demeanor and likewise all of the same on the part of your bumpkins, whom I doubt not are excellent fellows in the right place and season, but who at this moment will best serve the Queen by bearing themselves with all the modesty they can command."

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The man who had ventured these somewhat haughty remarks was dressed in a cloak of plum-colored velvet and a feathered hat, of such style and dimension as is seldom seen out of a court. He had come up with an air of nonchalant ease, and had interposed his remarks in a manner which seemed to claim for them the highest possible consideration.

At the opprobrious term "Bumpkin," it had been on the tip of Justice Pretyman's tongue to retort, "Bumpkin yourself, sir." He was a hotheaded little man, also he was vain, also he was very self-important. But he was thwarted in this natural desire by the very patent fact that whatever else this haughty personage was, he was evidently not a bumpkin.

Now Justice Pretyman was a small gentleman, who would like to have been thought a great gentleman. And those who are thus afflicted, however much they may browbeat their inferiors, however much they may ruffle it among their equals, are of all men particularly wary when it comes to a question of their superiors.

By the courtesy of Providence, it chanced that before Justice Pretyman was able to make the proper, necessary and entirely satisfactory rejoinder of "Bumpkin yourself, sir!" his small, birdlike eye lit upon the plum-colored cloak and the hat with the feather, and further, it caught a glimpse of a wonderful doublet of black satin barred with yellow. Therefore, was his rejoinder reduced from "Bumpkin yourself, sir!" to "I beg your pardon, sir," with as little in the way of asperity and as much in the way of dignity as he could command.

The personage in the plum-colored cloak smiled with a benign gravity.

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"If you are upon the Queen's business, sir," he said, "heaven forefend that I of all men should come between you and your high and honorable occasions. But, to be plain with you, I am bound to say you and your ragged robins have come here in a plaguy ill season."

"Od's life, sir!"

The hand of Justice Pretyman strayed involuntarily to the hilt of his sword. But again his eye caught the plum-colored cloak, and he thought the better of the matter.

"I have written and signed authority," he said, "to search this house for one Gervase Heriot, a notorious traitor, and that is a course I am determined to follow."

The man in the plum-colored cloak lowered his voice.

"If such is your intention, sir, by all means pursue it," he said. "But, before you do so, there is a matter of grave concern with which you will do well to make yourself acquainted. Perhaps, Master Davenant"—he turned to the innkeeper—"you will have the goodness to inform this gentleman of the matter in question?"

Mine host demurred in a manner of obsequious reverence.

"God forbid, sir, that I should expound the matter to the worshipful justice when you yourself are by," he said, in a tone of awe.

"As you will," said the man in the plum-colored cloak.

"The fact of the matter is, sir," he said, turning to Justice Pretyman, who by this time was fully primed for some startling announcement, "a certain lady who is of the highest—I may say of the very highest—consideration has just arrived at this inn on her way to the north, and is lying here one night."

Justice Pretym: nodded with the gravity of a man who fully grasps the significance of such a piece of news.

"Indeed, sir," he said. "Is that the case? And may I presume, sir, to ask the name of this personage?"

The man in the plum-colored cloak laid a finger to his lip.

"Forgive me, Master Prettyfellow," he said, "but your style and assemblance assure me that you are not unacquainted with the Court. Correct me if I err."

Justice Pretyman did not correct him.

"And that being the case, I have the less compunction in withholding the name of the high personage who, at this moment, sheds upon this humble roof-tree the lively radiance of her presence. Master Prettyfellow, you take me, I trow and trust. You understand me, Master Prettyfellow?" The man in the plum-colored cloak laid a confidential hand upon the Justice's sleeve.

"By God's life, I take you, sir." A subtle but delightful sense of flattery had been engendered in the little peacock's brain. "That is, I think I take you. It is—that is—she is——"

The man in the plum-colored cloak checked the threatened indiscretion of Justice Pretyman with an uplifted and much-bejeweled hand.

"For heaven's sake, Master Prettyfellow!" He gazed around him apprehensively. "We are in danger of being overheard."

For this surmise, the man in the plum-colored cloak had full warrant without a doubt. Others, attired with a flamboyance and a glitter that went well with his own, were standing a little apart. And their almost excessive gravity of manner could not disguise the fact that they

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had both ears and eyes for all that was going forward.

There was one, however, who watched this play with a sour smile. He was a man more sober in dress, but whose attire was yet that of a person of quality. He stood quite apart from all the rest, and carried his arm in a sling. The look on his face clearly showed that he, too, had ears and eyes for all that was taking place. Moreover, he stroked his chin with an air of grim but deeply pensive satisfaction.

"If you are determined to have search made of this tavern, Master Prettyfellow," said the man in the plum-colored cloak, "it is not for me to gainsay you. But I am sure you will readily understand how necessary it is that this matter should be pursued with the utmost decorum."

"Sir, that I do promise," said Justice Pretyman.

"That is well," said the man in the plum-colored cloak, "with the utmost decorum. And as I understand, you have figured at Court, Master Prettyfellow"—here the voice was raised to a level that drew the attention of the group near by—"And, as I understand, you have figured at Court, Master Prettyfellow"—the words were impressively repeated.

"You may take it, sir, that I have." The tone of Justice Pretyman was full of dignity.

"I am very glad indeed to hear that." The man in the plum-colored cloak spoke with a sudden accession of feeling. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to hear that. Now there will not be the least difficulty about the whole matter. I will send in your name at once to this most distinguished lady, who must remain without one. My lord——"

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George Taylor and William Kemp, arrayed in the robes of the theater, stepped forward together in answer to this summons. Such zeal, however, in nowise embarrassed the man in the pluri-colored cloak.

"My lord duke"—he turned to William Kemp—"will you have the good kindness to take in the name of Master Prettyfellow——"

"Prettyman," corrected the justice, beginning, however, to perspire freely.

The officious provincial was not a little uncertain as to the ground upon which he stood. Judging by the demeanor of these gayly-attired gentlemen and the high tone that went with it, he began to fear that the Queen herself had arrived at the Crown Tavern. And his vanity having allowed him to claim a familiarity with the Court when he had never been there in his life, he had merely to be received in audience by her to incur the risk of a grave exposure.

"One moment, sir," he said, desperately. "If this unknown lady is the high personage I take her to be, I have no desire——"

But William Kemp, in his ducal trappings, was already away on his errand.

Justice Prettyman felt the situation to be growing desperate. And, to make matters worse, the man in the cloak was fain to misread his attitude of mind.

"I have not the least doubt, sir," he said, "that if this lady—whom we shall both do well not to name more explicitly—is informed that you are familiar with the Court, she will gladly give you an audience, although you must please remember she travels incognito."

By this time Justice Prettyman was fully convinced

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that it was the Queen herself who was lying one night at the Crown Tavern.

"You mistake me, sir," he said, desperately. "I never said that I was familiar with the Court."

"You never said you were familiar with the Court, sir!" The man in the plum-colored cloak was the picture of polite indignation. "But, ods my life, sir! this is a very grave matter."

Justice Pretyman thought so, too. At least, his perspiring red face belied him if he did not.

"How I wish, sir," said the man in the plum-colored cloak, "you had had the grace to make yourself more explicit. This lady is a bad one to cross, as all the world very well knows."

"Yes, sir, I am aware of that," said Justice Pretyman, beginning already to wish himself well out of the affair.

The richly caparisoned figure of William Kemp emerged with slow dignity from the tavern interior. He bent to the ear of the man in the plum-colored cloak. A good deal of confidential whispering followed, of which Justice Pretyman could only catch the ominous words, "Her Grace."

But it was the man in the plum-colored cloak who addressed the uneasy magistrate.

"The fact of the matter is, sir," he said, "this lady does not remember your name, but she hopes she may remember your face. She is not unwilling to grant you an audience of five minutes, but—strictly between ourselves—if you will take the advice of a friend, you will think twice before you run any risk of incurring her august displeasure."

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Justice Pretyman's mind certainly seemed to recognize the wisdom of this sage counsel. And the result of a very little deliberation on his part was that he gathered his men and made off down the street with the least possible delay, leaving the members of the Lord Chamberlain's Company to enjoy the triumph of their audacity.

To be sure, they little knew on how slender a thread it hung. Not ten yards from them, during the whole time in which this comedy had been played, a man stood marking sourly every phase of the proceedings. He could have undone them with a word.

The word, however, was not spoken. Grisewood judged the hour to be not yet. Still, he had marked very closely all that had passed. And he had been at pains to make himself fully acquainted with the matter in all its details. There and then, he could have laid his finger on the man these blundering rustics sought. But that would not have suited his purpose at the moment. For he was too astute not to realize the immense advantage his knowledge gave him, and far too cunning not to be fully determined to take some high profit out of it.

CHAPTER XXX

NO time was lost now in moving out of Oxford. Within an hour of Justice Pretyman's visit, the Lord Chamberlain's men were on their way to London. They were accompanied by Gervase and Anne, who were still disguised as the Italian music master and his son, and also by the falconer, John Markham. None of them was aware that, less than a mile behind, rode Sir Robert Grisewood and his two servants.

The players traveled that night as far as Reading, where they lay, and reached Southwark without misadventure in the course of the following afternoon, which was Sunday. Shakespeare felt a keen sense of relief when he had placed the fugitives in the comfort and security of his lodgings on the Bankside, which he shared with his friend Burbage.

The tragedian, on his own part, it must be confessed, was terrible uneasy of mind. He knew the situation to be one of great peril and difficulty. And he viewed with a feeling little short of horror Shakespeare's determination to concern himself with a matter of high treason. He had a deep pity for the fugitives, but he felt how futile and how perilous it was for men such as themselves to mingle in their sinister affairs.

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Parflete had been left at Oxford, as he was in no condition to travel. And over the question of a substitute for that unlucky young actor, the author and the manager came to the verge of a quarrel. Shakespeare kept to his determination that Anne should play *Rosalind* in the new comedy, while Burbage affirmed that it was contrary to all precedent and was courting disaster.

In spite of this, however, the author began at once to instruct Anne in the part. And she brought to her study a keenness of grasp and a quickness of apprehension that delighted her mentor. Her progress was very rapid under his wise guidance. In two days, she was almost word perfect. Moreover, she discovered a natural faculty for acting which she shared in common with her sex. All her gestures were simple, unforced, appropriate; and her bearing had an ease and grace that Parflete himself could not have equaled.

The author was delighted. It was in vain that Richard Burbage shook his head and indulged in all manner of dark orphycy. Here was the perfect *Rosalind*. Besides, there lay behind this project a higher and deeper motive than even the pleasuring of the first lady in the land.

Never for an instant was there absent from a noble and humane mind an intense desire to serve these hapless children of destiny. William Shakespeare was determined at all hazards to arouse the Queen's interest on their behalf, and if possible to excite her pity. Yet none knew better than this supreme judge of human kind the peril and the difficulty of such a task. The Queen was a woman of dangerous and vindictive temper.

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But Shakespeare was pledged to do all that lay in his power to save the lives of these fugitives. Burbage and Kemp and Heming, and others of his colleagues, might be full of alarm for the consequences likely to attend his interference, but they were powerless to turn him from his purpose. The matter had become a point of honor with him now.

In accordance with the promise made to Gervase, Shakespeare kept himself fully informed in regard to Sir John Feversham. On the morning following his return to London, the playwright went to Greenwich to the Queen's palace, and there sought an interview with a man with whom he was on terms of intimacy, who held high office in the Royal Household. From him he learned that the Constable was held a close prisoner in the Tower, that the Court of Star Chamber had condemned him already to the block, but that there was good reason to believe the sentence would not be carried out for another week at least, since Cecil, the Queen's all-powerful minister, felt it was not a case for undue haste.

The high official with whom William Shakespeare conferred shook his head sadly over the whole matter. It was very ugly, he said, and was strongly inclined to deprecate the player's interest in it. He gave him a word of advice. Let him dismiss the subject from his thoughts as soon as possible. It was one of those dark things in which no man who set a value upon his life and liberty could afford to concern himself.

The man to whom this excellent advice was given well knew that it was sound enough. But he was pledged too deeply; besides, he was not a man to count the cost. He bore the news back to Gervase, who was fretting out

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his heart in his hiding-place in the player's lodging on the Bankside, and told him he could possess his soul in patience, at least, until Thursday.

The three intervening days were fraught with much anxiety for Shakespeare. The fate of the new comedy hung in the balance. The absence of Parflete from the cast was felt by all, except the author himself, to be an irreparable blow to its prospects. And the announcement that the all-important part of *Rosalind* was to be intrusted to one who had absolutely no experience of the theater filled the other players with dismay.

Burbage alone knew the true identity of the Italian music master's son. And even in such a crisis as this, he was too loyal to his friend to make others a party to his knowledge. But the great actor was sorely uneasy. His misgivings were many, not only as to the fate of the comedy, but also as to that of the author himself, now that he had taken this unlucky resolve to concern himself with treason.

A rehearsal of the play was called for Tuesday afternoon. And here a surprise awaited those who were prophesying disaster. Complete tyro as the young Signor Arrigo was known to be, his impersonation of *Rosalind* showed a most surprising talent. Anne had been strung up to a high pitch of excitement. She brought all her high courage and her quick woman's faculties to bear upon the task and the result was far beyond all expectation. There was no denying such grace, such beauty, such natural aptitude. Not once did she falter in her lines. And then the voice was so clear and musical, that it might have been that of *Rosalind* herself.

Indeed, had not the other players known the new

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Rosalind to be the Italian music master's son, they must have been convinced that she was a woman! They were bound to agree with the author that young Signor Arrigo was born to play the part. And their spirits rose accordingly. Even the staunchest adherents of Parflete were compelled to admit that fortune had provided them with a substitute of quite remarkable powers. That gifted young player himself could not have surpassed the new *Rosalind*.

It was only promise, to be sure. Let them withhold the verdict until Thursday. These were men of experience, who knew that the happy augury of the rehearsal was not always borne out by the performance itself. But they were put in excellent heart by the brilliant aptitude of the young Signor Arrigo, which so far transcended their expectations. John Heming, one of the Company's managers, a man of parts with a well-developed faculty of criticism, was particularly delighted. He had never seen such a precocious genius for the stage. And he could not help admiring the perspicacity which had enabled the author to take a step so bold, which had led to a discovery of such importance.

All now promised well for the momentous day. If the new *Rosalind* fulfilled the promise of the first rehearsal, there need be no fears for the success of the piece. The author had yet to know failure. It was true the subject-matter of the new comedy might be flimsy enough, but Burbage and Heming declared, and these were men of ripe judgment, that it had all the qualities which had made the playwright famous.

Still, before that fateful Thursday dawned, there happened a sinister thing. Late in the evening of Wednes-

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day, Shakespeare returned alone to his lodgings. He had been ceaselessly occupied during the day with the final preparations for the morrow. Everything was now in readiness for the journey to Richmond, a few hours hence. The playwright was feeling dog-tired and had a longing for rest, as he turned the key in the door of his dwelling.

He was surprised to find a light showing through the shutters of the little parlor in which he wrote and read. The room, it was true, had been placed at the service of Heriot and Mistress Feversham. But the hour was so late, that he had supposed they had retired long ago to their rest.

As a matter of fact, this was the case. But when the playwright entered the parlor, he found a man sitting there in expectation of his arrival. It was a warm evening of July, but the face and the form of the visitor were hidden in the folds of a voluminous cloak.

The unbidden guest, whoever he might be, received Shakespeare coolly enough. He did not even take the trouble to rise from his chair when the poet came into the room, but merely held up his hand as if to imply a need of caution and secrecy, and then in a tone of studied insolence told him to close the door.

Shakespeare was quick to recognize the voice of his visitor. The man was Sir Robert Grisewood.

"To what is due this honor?" said the poet with a courtesy that was deeply ironical.

He knew well enough that his visitor was not likely to be inspired by any good motive. But long ago he had taken the measure of the man, and he did not fear him in the least. Indeed, for that matter, he feared no

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man, but with that prudence which springs from an intimate knowledge of the world, he was at once upon his guard.

"You do well to ask that question, my friend," said Grisewood, unmuffling his face in order that Shakespeare not only might see it, but that he might also be disconcerted by the sight of it.

"What is your business with me, Sir Robert Grisewood?" said Shakespeare, coldly and contemptuously.

"I will tell you." The eyes of the unwelcome visitor were full of menace. "I will tell you in a very few words, good Master Actor and Versifier. Your precious life is not worth five minutes' purchase."

The dramatist was wholly unaffected by the announcement.

"That may be so," he said, coldly. And he gave his shoulders a shrug, which implied that the information was of very little consequence.

"Shall I tell you why it is not?"

"As you please."

"Well, to be brief and round with you, good Master Poet, the whole of your doings, your exits and your entrances, as you would say, of the past fortnight are perfectly well known to me. And I would fain inform you that, at this moment, you are harboring under this roof the notorious traitor, Gervase Heriot, and also the young daughter of Sir John Feversham, who conspired with him to break prison."

Grisewood had the air of one who looses a thunderbolt. But if he looked for the dire effect, which may reasonably be expected to attend such a Jove-like feat, he must have been sadly disappointed. The man to

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whom his words were addressed showed not the least sign of fear.

"All that you say is true enough," said the playwright, "if it is any satisfaction to you to know it."

"Make your mind easy on that score, my friend," said Grisewood sourly. "It is a very considerable satisfaction to me to know it."

"And I presume you would gain a profit from your knowledge?"

"Yes, Master Actor, to be brief and round with you, that is certainly my intention. And further, I would inform you that the reward I have in my mind is not one to be despised. Because you will do well to understand that I have ample evidence to implicate you and your fellow-players in the murder of my friend, Mr. Simon Heriot, who was foully done to death in his own house in the course of last Friday night."

"In other words, Sir Robert Grisewood," said Shakespeare, with a biting coldness that seemed to exasperate his visitor, "you propose to take profit from the murder of your friend."

"Have a care, you ranting, play-acting swine!"

Although one hand of the bully was done up in bandages, the other instinctively sought the hilt of his sword. But this action did nothing to modify the stern contempt of the actor.

"You are here, Sir Robert Grisewood, to seek a price for your silence?"

The tone seemed to bite like an acid.

"Yes, my friend, that assumption is a true one, and I propose to fix just as heavy a price as you can afford to pay. And as I understand your penny peep-show

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tricks are making you a fortune, the sum I intend to exact shall not be unworthy of your figure in the world."

"Name it."

"What do you say to the sum of a thousand pounds, good Master Playwright and maker of verses?"

Less of disdain than of pity entered the face of the poet.

"The sum seems little enough," he said, "for the deed it would purchase."

"Aye, little enough, Master Moralist, as you say, but still a fairly substantial figure for those who have to earn it by the sweat of their brains. And, of course," Grisewood added with an ugly sneer, "other opportunities may arise of adding to the price of my silence, since you incline to think it too little."

"I think it neither too little nor too much," said the playwright. "For, to be as frank with you, Sir Robert, as you have been with me, I care so little for your silence, that I would not stoop to buy it if even a single word were its price."

"Very well, then, my friend, you shall hang at Tyburn."

The blackmailer rose from his chair.

"I promise you," he said, and his eyes were those of a beast of prey, "my first business to-morrow shall be to seek out my Lord Burleigh. The whole of the information I possess shall be laid before him, and you can depend upon it, my friend, you and your infernal company, upon being lodged in jail as soon as your precious interlude has been performed before the Queen. It will be a pleasant guerdon to look forward to, will it not?"

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Grisewood realized already that his choice scheme had fallen to the ground. He saw at once that he had counted on too much. He had looked for an easy prey. This highly strung, emotional temperament would yield readily to his threats. It would be easy enough to frighten the very life out of what was doubtless a craven's heart.

The knowledge that he was now free to do his worst, and that in Shakespeare's opinion the worst he could do was of such little account as to be a subject of his open scorn, filled him with fury. Also he was amazed at the utter indifference of the fellow. He had the power, as he firmly believed, to take away this man's life, and yet this half hackney-writer, half merry-andrew was too proud to sue for his life with civility, let alone to pay for it with current coin of the realm.

Grisewood withdrew with a snarl and a sneer. The morrow should see them all lodged in "The Ju_e." Within a month from that day, he would answer for it that the noose should be round their necks.

He swaggered out of the house on to the Bankside. Here his two servants joined him, for at that hour of the night it was unsafe for any man to be abroad unattended. Thinking his ugly thoughts, he walked slowly in the direction of the Falcon stairs. There he hailed the waterman, who was awaiting him with a wherry to bear him to his own lodging in a more aristocratic quarter of the town.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE morning of the great day broke mistily, with a promise of summer glory. Poor unhappy Anne, lodged in a cool and clean chamber overlooking the river, was awake at the first peep of dawn. Her few hours of sleep had been terribly disturbed. She awoke with a start and sprang out of bed as soon as the light touched her eyelids. Only too well did she know that further sleep would not be for her.

Yes, the dread day was come. It might be the last she would know of liberty. Nay, it was most likely. And it was the day on which the fate of Gervase would be irrevocably sealed.

She dare not give her mind to the grim matter, which, asleep or awake, encompassed it. Dressing in a fever of haste, as if she feared to be overtaken by the thoughts she dare not face, she went out of doors into the keen morning air. She walked up and down by the banks of the mist-enveloped river, and in the hope of composing her over-wrought mind, she began to repeat the lines of her part.

Suddenly she was aware that a figure was emerging dimly from the mists ahead. It was that of a man. A

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moment afterwards she had recognized the author of "As You Like It."

The playwright came toward her. He too had slept but little. And in that somber and wonderful face was a haggard weariness that made the soul of the girl recoil. It was the face of a man besieged and tormented by a thousand devils; of a man who had never known a moment of peace in this life, and who hardly looked to know it in the life to come.

Not so much as a word of greeting passed between them. But as the player saw the face of young and delicate fairness, seared already by the anguish of the soul, he placed a hand on the girl's shoulder with a gentleness of pity that meant very much more than speech.

"Be of good courage, mistress," that gesture seemed to say.

Without speaking a word, the player passed on like a wraith into the mists that hung as a pall upon the river.

Gervase also was early abroad. He too had slept little. Seated at the window of his room, brooding with a sick heart on the chances of his fate, he had seen Anne go forth, so that presently he followed her.

For long enough they walked together, and for the last time as they believed. A few hours hence all would be decided. And in their hearts their hope of life and perhaps their desire of it was very slender.

Their sufferings of the past few weeks had been bitter. This morning they were overborne. Whatever fate held in store for them now they felt they had reached the nadir of the soul.

Soon after nine o'clock that morning the Lord Chamberlain's servants embarked in two of the royal barges

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that had been placed at their disposal. The progress was slow but comfortable, and by noon of a glorious July day they had come to the palace at Richmond. All the players, with one exception, from the most important to the humblest member of the Company, betrayed evidences of anxiety and nervousness. William Shakespeare alone was so cool and collected that the occasion might have been of the most ordinary kind.

Those few among the players who shared the dark secret which was to make this day so memorable in the life of the author of the new comedy, were astonished by a calmness that was to them unnatural. And they could not help marveling how a man whose very life depended on the whim of a harsh-tempered and capricious woman should be able to mask his thoughts and to control his feelings in a manner so remarkable.

The terraces of the palace which overlooked the beautiful park in which it stood were thronging already with a mob of gallants and court ladies. Their wonderful clothes gave a very second-rate air to the tawdry finery affected by most of the players. Even the cloak of Shakespeare himself erred a little, but that was on the side of modesty.

One young fop was quick to turn this fact to account. Having a reputation for wit, and being surrounded by those in whose eyes he had an ambition to shine, he gravely accosted the actor. He removed his plumed hat with a sweeping gesture and made a low bow.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, in a loud voice which attracted general notice. "Pray excuse the liberty I take in addressing you, but I admire the style of

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your cloak so much that I would fain ask the name of your tailor."

In spite of the audible tittering of fine ladies and the delighted guffaws of gallant gentlemen, the playwright showed the perfect unconcern of one who has his own private standard of men and things. He did not reply, but quietly looked the impudent coxcomb up and down as if he were a new species of animal with whom he was not yet acquainted.

The fop was nettled by this nonchalance.

"Well, sir?" he said impudently. "Give me your tailor's name I pray you, in order that I may have the great felicity of taking the air in a cloak exactly its fellow."

The playwright shook his head with an air of polite deprecation.

"I have too kindly a feeling toward an honest craftsman," he said.

"God's death, sir! what do you mean?"

"I mean, sir," said the player, "that I would not like so good a fellow to run the double risk of a bad debt and an even worse advertisement."

A roar of laughter followed from those who had gathered at the pleasant prospect of a little player-baiting by an accredited wag. Many there were about the Court who were by no means well-disposed toward players in general. These actors were claiming far too much attention from those in high places. Their continually growing favor was beginning to be a matter of concern to those whose own existence depended so largely on the indulgence of the great.

But the fop was completely taken aback by the player's rejoinder. For the moment he did not know how to

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reply. He had not expected to be held up to ridicule in that place of all others by an humble individual who had not the least pretensions to fashion. But the laugh had gone against him heavily. And being in reality a dull and commonplace fellow enough, in the end he took refuge in round abuse of "those common jays who would peacock it among their betters."

"Pray, my lord, on what ground do you hold yourself to be the superior of this gentleman?" suddenly interposed a harsh and imperious voice.

It was the voice of the Queen. The group of gallants and fine ladies had been too much occupied with the sport that was afoot to notice who it was who had come into their midst.

My lord's confusion was great. And it was not made less by the look of sour disdain which animated the features of his sovereign.

This old raddled woman in farcical clothes and an auburn wig was by no means a fool. She had lived too long in the world and had mingled too freely with the very best the age had to give not to be an uncommonly shrewd judge of things and men. She had the rough commonsense which is a far better equipment than subtlety when it comes to dealings with human nature.

"Well, my lord, on what grounds I ask you?"

"On the ground of birth, your grace," said the fop, who by now had time to collect himself a little.

The Queen's lip curled contemptuously

"A man who takes refuge in that," she said, "can have little merit of his own, my lord. And to my mind a man is twice a fool who, being born to opportunity, can turn

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it to no better advantage. How say you, Master Shakespeare?"

"There are those who hold, your grace," said the player in his deep and musical voice, "that it is better to be a fool of pedigree than to be a sage without gules or quarterings."

The Queen laughed. But the ready independence of the player's answer pleased her as much as it surprised her courtiers. There was not one among them who would have ventured it. There was not one among them who was not unduly eager to acquiesce in any opinion that might be expressed by this august lady.

It was not the Queen's habit to unbend easily. She held the exaggerated Tudor view of the status of the sovereign. Her court was expected to approach her on bended knee and there were many supple backs in consequence. But there was not a trace of the sycophant about this man who conversed with her as modestly, as readily and as easily as he would have done with a loungee in a tavern. And while the gallants and fine ladies were not a little shocked by the unaffectedness of the man's bearing and marveled not a little that one so august should bestow so much notice upon a common play-actor, the Queen, on the other hand, seemed almost to forget for the moment the dizzy eminence to which it had pleased Providence to call her.

The truth was she dearly loved what she called "a man." And this was a scarce commodity in the exotic atmosphere which surrounded Elizabeth Tudor. Few there were who dared to hold opinions of their own, let alone to advance them with the unstudied assurance of this man of lowly calling, who was yet not wholly

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unmindful of the fact that he was absolute monarch of an empire more imperial than Gloriana's own.

To be sure, none of those present realized that fact. Nor was it realized by the Queen herself. Her mind was strong and shrewd rather than deep and subtle. It was the player's independence of judgment and the clear yet perfectly modest and simple manner by which he gave it expression which made such an appeal to her.

It was a sad sight for many an astonished and resentful eye to observe the Queen and the man "Shakescene"—it is a foible of the great to affect a becoming uncertainty in regard to the names of humbler mortals—walking quite apart from all the rest, up one alley and down another, talking and laughing heartily upon terms which perilously approached equality. What the Queen's majesty had in common with the merry-andrew in the barred cloak passed the comprehension of all. But the harsh and strident laugh of the royal lady, not unworthy of a raven with a sore throat, could be heard continually. Many a diligent courtier who had spent the flower of his years in waiting humbly upon the Queen's pleasure without having anything very substantial in the way of preferment to show for it, was cut to the soul.

And it was not here that the scandal ended. A little later when the Queen dined a place was set for the man Shakescene at her own table. And many a lispng, lily-white gentleman narrowly observed the demeanor of this upstart whose homely style and unaffected air offered so wide a target for their criticism.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BY two o'clock that afternoon all was in readiness for the performance of the new comedy before Gloriana and her Court. A pavilion had been raised in the middle of one of the great lawns, in order that the spectators might be shielded from the sunshine which beat fiercely from a cloudless July heaven. At the edge of the lawn was a thicket of fine trees and heather, a veritable Forest of Arden in miniature. From the depths of this glade emerged the performers in this woodland pastoral.

It was a great ordeal for Anne. On an occasion of far less importance she might have been overcome by fear. But now she was strung up almost to the breaking point. So grave was her pass and so much was at stake that a supreme call was made upon her will. And she responded nobly. No human being could have exercised a greater power of mind or brought a finer resolution to bear upon her task.

The success of the play was never in doubt. To begin with it was one of the Queen's "good days." At this time Elizabeth was past sixty. And a temper which was not particularly mild even in the heyday of its youth had grown severe. But even this old and sour woman could

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not remain insensible to the wit and poetry of this new "interlude," performed with the highest skill and grace in charmingly appropriate surroundings.

The Queen made no pretensions to literary taste as did King James, her successor. But she knew what she liked. And her untutored but extremely shrewd faculty seldom led her astray. There were those, and Heming and Burbage had been among them, who had been inclined to deplore the fact that the author had not prepared stronger food for Gloriana's palate. A play of delicacy and fantasy, all lightness and grace, would surely miss the mark. She who had held her sides at the broad humors of *Juliet's* nurse and of *Hostess Quickly* would hardly appreciate the melancholy *Jacques*, *Touchstone* and above all, the subtle charm of *Rosalind*.

But this was not the case. Those finely accomplished actors, William Kemp and Richard Burbage, had very wisely been intrusted with the two chief male characters. To be sure, it was hardly Nature's design that they should interpret them, but players of their genius dignify and embellish every rôle for which they are cast. The noble voice, the manly bearing, the persuasive ease of style, that choicest fruit of many a victory hardly won, tells just as surely in a whimsical impersonation a little away from the main lines of human development, as in the delineation of some incomparably drawn world figure such as *Hamlet*, *Falstaff*, *Lear*.

Unaided, these great men would have carried through a weaker play. And yet they did but serve as a kind of heavy relief, a somber frame for the central figure. *Rosalind* has stood for three centuries as the symbol of womanhood in its youthful glory. That embodiment of

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the divinity of girlhood still remains without a peer. And none could have given it more powerful, more appealing expression than Anne Feversham.

From the moment the slight figure came out of the depths of the forest and spoke her first magic lines in a voice as clear as a bell, a hush seemed to fall upon all. The occupants of the pavilion, no less than the humbler spectators who were privileged to sit upon the grass were spellbound. The tall figure, trim and slender, yet exquisite in outline, looked a little gaunt, a little fine-drawn in its close-fitting boy's dress. The eyes shone out of the pale face with a luster that fascinated those the least sensitive to beauty. And the voice thrilling with a nameless music ravished ears which knew it not for a cadence borne upon the long night of the soul.

In that great and gallant company, however, were those who had eyes to see and ears to hear. And when all was said, the Queen was foremost among them. Harsh, crabbed, difficult, narrow, insensible to many things as she was to the very end of that long life that was now so near its close, she retained her force of judgment and her power of seeing things in their true relation. *Rosalind* spoke to her; spoke to her not in her capacity as the sovereign of a great people, but of that even more sacred, more universal thing, which every woman verging upon seventy has once been herself. Of a sudden the raddled old cheeks were wet.

Men, too, were spellbound. Cecil, Raleigh, Pembroke, Southampton and many others almost equally famous were gazing upon that scene. These were first-rate minds, and in all ages, in all countries, the eternal verities address them in the same way. Sir Fopling knew that the Queen

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was weeping, and was amazed that she should not have more regard for the havoc of her cheeks; Cecil knew why she was weeping and held her so much more a Queen.

Anne was strung to the breaking point. And not the Queen, and not the Lord Treasurer, with all their power of mind, knew that. Richard Burbage and William Kemp for all that they evoked the magic phrases from her lips, for all that they were thrilled by the touch of her fingers and the luster of her eyes were also unaware of it. One man alone knew the perilous truth. And he was the individual in the doublet slashed with bars of yellow who stood leaning against one of the noble oaks of the Forest of Arden, in full view of the play but out of the sight of the audience.

Shakespeare never once allowed his eyes to stray from *Rosalind*. He watched her every movement, her every gesture. He had an intensity of solicitude that a father might have shown for a beloved but fragile daughter. At the end of each scene he led her apart from the others and made her sit in the inner shade of the thicket. Here while she rested the playwright encouraged her with word and deed. He was all kindness, all tenderness, all forethought and concern.

Not far away was Gervase. Still in his disguise he had been placed among the musicians. At Shakespeare's behest he was biding his hour. Before that day was out he had made up his mind to reveal himself to the Queen. But the hour was not yet. It had been agreed between Shakespeare and himself that the time and the manner of the confession should be left to the player. And among the audience was the man Grisewood narrowly watching all that passed. He too felt that the hour was

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near in which the truth should be declared. But in his case he was determined that the dramatic revelation should turn to his own personal advantage.

In the meantime all went well with the play. Moreover, as it proceeded the Queen began to show the liveliest interest in the personality of the new *Rosalind*.

"Tell me, my lord," she said, turning to Pembroke, an acknowledged authority in all matters relating to the theater, "who is that sweet chit in the doublet and trunk hose who cannot counterfeit manhood for all her strivings?"

"By the bill of the play, your grace, she is called *Rosalind* and is apparently of the sex of which she is so poor an imitation."

"Pshaw, my lord!" said the Queen contemptuously, "do you think I have neither ears nor eyes? This is a *Rosalind* that will never be able to grow a beard. She is of my own sex and a sweeter chit I never saw in all my life."

"Far be it from me to gainsay your grace," said Pembroke with an elaborate air, "but according to the bill of the play I have in my hand this *Rosalind* is impersonated by a young Italian gentleman, one Signor Arrigo Bandinello by name."

"A young Italian fiddlestick!" said the Queen. "I tell you that girl is as much an Italian gentleman as I am. She shall attend us when the play is at an end. We will go into this matter more fully."

However, when the play was over, it was the author who was first honored with a summons to the royal pavilion. The Queen received him with high good humor. For the time being she had forgotten the personality of

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Rosalind in the charm and glamour of the play itself. In the graciousness of her mood she paid many compliments to the author of "As You Like It" and was fain to admit "that she liked it very well."

"You are a wonderful man, Master Shakespeare," said the Queen. "And I think you must be the happiest man alive."

But there was nothing in the face of the player to suggest that destiny. The somber eyes framed a question which the august lady was quick to read and in the expansiveness of her mood was even prepared to answer.

"You inhabit an enchanted world, Master Shakespeare. All the persons in it are of your creation. You can order their natures and their destinies exactly as it pleases you."

"Alas, your grace!" The poet shook his head.

"Tell me, is it not so?" said the Queen.

"The world I inhabit, your grace, is that of human experience. It is neither less nor more than that which we all know. A maker of plays must depict life in its verity, and that is a hard matter and one which tears the soul."

The playwright spoke with the slow precision of one whom has felt in his inmost fibers the long drawn agony of mortal life. The Queen was a little amazed. In such a bearing and in such a speech there was not a trace of that enchanted mind, all airy lightness, all delicate fantasy, which had wrought such ravishment. Nor was there any sign of personal satisfaction in the triumph which had been gained or in the fruits of success which now he was beginning to gather in ample measure. The Queen, being a woman, was a little inclined to be piqued by the aloofness of the dramatist.

"Would you have us believe, Master Shakespeare," she

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said, "that the glad world which your inimitable fancy creates for the pleasuring of your fellow-men is not a source of joy and delight to its possessor? And would you have us believe that the homage which all the world has come to pay to you brings not pride nor happiness?"

The playwright who stood before his sovereign with a throng of great persons gathered round him, answered these rather embarrassing questions with a curiously un-studied humility. Such a modesty of bearing made an effect of perfect sincerity. Moreover, there was a complete absence of self-regard. Few ordeals could have been more trying for a man of small education, who knew but little of courts, than to be exposed to the gaze of many sharp and jealous eyes, and to be compelled to answer on the spur of the occasion a series of most intimate questions concerning himself and his art. Such an ordeal would have been a tax upon the alert readiness of mind and the self-possession of a highly trained courtier. But there was not a trace of awkwardness in the bearing of this singular man in the black doublet barred with yellow. Indeed, there was nothing to suggest that the situation in which he found himself was in any way unusual. And there was no evidence that the presence of others, of even the highest in the land, was a source of embarrassment to him. No man could have been more completely at his ease or more completely master of himself.

"I will answer the second of your questions first, your grace," he said, speaking very slowly and looking directly at the Queen. "I am indeed a very proud man that the travail of my mind should have given pleasure to those whose favorable opinion must ever be coveted by all honorable men. I unfeignedly rejoice and I am filled

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with gratitude that your grace and those about you are pleased to approve my labors. And whatever of happiness comes to me comes to me in that."

"That is well spoken, Master Shakespeare," said the Queen. "You do well to allow that. And now touching the first of these questions I would put to you. Is it that you take no happiness from the possession and the exercise of your most noble gifts?"

"None, your grace. They are but the mirror and the counterfeit of life. We makers of plays live in a world of shadows—a world of shadows woven out of our own vitals as a spider weaves his web, and from which by night or day there is no escape."

"Would you escape them, Master Shakespeare, these inimitable children of your fancy?"

"Yes, your grace, I would on occasion; I would almost yield life itself to do so."

The Queen was astonished by the almost passionate nature of the answer. This man was no shallow deviser of masques to speed a summer's day, but one to whom existence was an almost intolerable burden, which admitted of very little alleviation. And he was one who read its riddles with the eyes of a seer.

"I begin to take your meaning, Master Shakespeare," said the Queen. "I had supposed that when these children of your fancy laughed and made merry, you also rejoiced. But I had forgotten that even in these plays of yours the sadness outweighs the mirth as is the case with life itself, whereby a double burden is laid upon the endurance of their creator."

"Yes, your grace, that is indeed true. And yet that is not the full measure of a poet's unhappiness."

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"In what does a poet's unhappiness consist, Master Shakespeare?"

"It consists, your grace, in this. A poet sees too much, feels too much, knows too much. He is stretched perpetually on the rack of his excess. He reads more into life than life itself will hold. Of a most private grief he will make a little song. He will amuse the groundlings with the tale of some deep injury he has suffered in his bones. When he moves the crowd to tears, his fees are paid in blood."

There was something in the nature of the answer which held the Queen. Good sense was her highest quality, and it was that quality in others which never failed to speak to her. She was captivated by the bearing of this man, in whom she recognized not only the master of his craft, but also what pleased her even more, a mature mind which had much to say to her own acute and worldly wise one.

Indeed, so gratified was the Queen with the demeanor and the mental quality of Mr. William Shakespeare, that, as a signal mark of her favor, he was commanded to sit in her presence. The sovereign was prone to carry her Tudor sense of importance to ridiculous lengths, but there was some subtle instinct lurking within her which sought equality between "the fair vestal throned by the west" and the monarch of an empire infinitely wider than her own.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IT was such a spectacle as could rarely have been seen in that place, this homely fellow without airs or graces or pretensions to fashion, seated in the presence of his sovereign and treated by her with a respect she extended to few. But not by word, deed or gesture did he claim the estate of an equal. He was William Shakespeare, the play-actor, and she was Elizabeth Tudor, the conqueror of Spain.

But the kingdom of the mind is no Venetian oligarchy. Those who speak the same language are all made free of it. And queen and mime, alone perhaps among that assembly, were able to address each other in the universal tongue. Seldom, of late years at least, had this crabbed, difficult and arrogant woman, been seen in a mood so accessible. She spoke freely to this man of things of which few had heard her speak. And presently she said:

"I hope, Master Shakespeare, you will devise a new play for our diversion."

"Already, your grace," said the dramatist, "there is a new play taking shape in my head. And if on a day it should have the great good fortune to please the fancy of your grace, the least of your servants will be the happiest man in your realm."

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The words themselves may not have been without irony, but the gentle voice showed no trace of that quality which the countrymen of Shakespeare so much distrust.

"That is indeed high news, Master Shakespeare. And of your bounty do we pray you that your new diversion be all in the mood of comedy as is this inimitable piece we have seen this afternoon."

"Alas, your grace!" The playwright shook his head. "We poor makers of plays are no more than mortal men. And as mortal men are subject to the coils of fate, so are the characters we weave subject to those laws which govern our being."

"I don't understand," said the Queen.

"We makers of plays, your grace, often have but a small part in our own contrivances. Many a time have I devised a play in the spirit of comedy, but it is ever the characters themselves who spin the plot. And whether they shall spin it to a comic or a tragic issue none but themselves shall say."

"But you are the moulder and the master of your characters, are you not, Master Shakespeare?"

"Alas, your grace, my characters are the moulders and the masters of me!"

The Queen was perplexed by so paradoxical a saying.

"I confess," said she, "I should ever have thought it to be otherwise. Now is it that you would have us believe that although you have yourself devised the characters and the plot of your new interlude, you have so little hold upon them that you know not until your play is written whether it will be in the tragic or the comic vein?"

"It may not always be so, your grace, to the extent that it is in this particular case. But in this instance, I will

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confess that I have but little hold upon the destiny of the characters in the story."

"That seems very odd, Master Shakespeare. And our counsel to you is to take a very speedy and secure hold upon your characters unless you would court our grave displeasure."

"Alas, your grace!" The playwright sighed heavily.

"Tell me, sirrah, what is your perplexity?"

"To tell my perplexity, your grace, would involve the whole plot of the story, and a recital of that your grace would doubtless find tedious."

The Queen, however, in the expansiveness of her mood, assured the author that he need have no fears upon that account. On the contrary, she professed herself delighted at the prospect of hearing it. She avowed, besides, that her ladies would be immensely diverted by hearing the argument of the new play fresh from the mint of the poet's invention.

"Do you tell us the story, I beseech you, Master Shakespeare!" said the Queen. "And although I cannot pretend that an unlearned woman such as myself has it in her power to resolve your perplexity, there are about us those of quick parts who shall hear it, who, I doubt not, will be able to give you valuable advice upon the conduct of your play."

Doubtless the Queen spoke in mockery, since at heart she was a despiser of most men and of all women. Mr. William Shakespeare, however, was fully prepared to take her at her word.

The poet, in order to give full effect to his narrative, rose from the chair upon which he was seated. With perfect self-possession and an air of supreme mastery which

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it is given to few men to attain, he stood to confront the Queen and the expectant and critical throng of her courtiers.

The lives of Gervase Heriot and of Anne Feversham were at stake. And instinctively the poet knew that his own life was at stake also. No hazard could have been more perilous than that upon which he now proposed to embark. He was about to take a very grave liberty with an august personage who was notoriously quick to resent even a minor one.

The mind of such a man, however, moves on a plane where the mere personal equation is of very little account. Had the least thought of self entered it, such a hazard had not been for a moment possible. His own safety and freedom were as nothing. The whole force of his mind was centered in the hope of preserving the lives of these hapless children of destiny.

"I will give the plot of the play as briefly as I can, your grace. And under your grace's favor and that of the ladies and gentlemen of your court I will beg you to devise a fitting and proper conclusion for it and thereby spare the poor author many a sleepless night."

The playwright spoke in a clear and measured tone. His voice was raised so that all might hear every word distinctly. The air of the man, which was far too much infused with the play of a noble mind to bear any suggestion of effrontery, had already made a profound impression upon all. Such a voice, such a demeanor made it clear to the Queen, no less than to the youngest page within earshot, that the recital of this story involved issues far deeper, far more complex than the mere idle gratification of an author's vanity.

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"An extraordinary man," whispered the Lord Treasurer in the ear of his friend, Pembroke. "I have heard much of his plays of late, but I cannot pretend to be a judge of 'em. But if they are as remarkable as the writer, it is no wonder they stand so high in the public esteem."

Pembroke made no reply. For one thing he was sadly uneasy. He had grave fears as to the course the story would take, for he had reason to suppose that Shakespeare had actively concerned himself in the affairs of Gervase Heriot, and that by hook or by crook he was determined to bring them to the notice of the Queen. In Pembroke's view it would be the height of folly to introduce such a perilous topic in such circumstances, but poets were a peculiar race, apt to be carried away by an idea. And the subtle significance of the man's manner in the telling of the story led my lord to anticipate the worst.

An expectant silence fell on this assembly. The playwright had begun his narrative, and except for the inflections of the clear, yet low and gentle voice, there was not a sound to be heard within the precincts of the pavilion.

"A certain young man," the playwright began, "well born, well favored, well endowed, with every grace of mind and heart, fair of form as a young god, a very Antinous among his kind, a beautiful youth who has thought ill of none, much less having performed it against any, has yet been born to one signal disadvantage. And the disadvantage is so uncommon in itself that it seems strange that he should suffer it. It is merely that he is too much the favorite of fortune. And yet I would have your grace remark, for that is the essence of my story, how this one faint cloud in the

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fair heaven of this youth's tranquility is enough to contrive his overthrow, to dim all his glories, to rob him of all hope of peace and happiness in this life."

The Queen nodded her head sympathetically. She was following every word with the closest attention. And indeed the pregnant manner of the story's telling compelled it.

"The young man's disadvantage is very great inasmuch that he has the ill-hap to inspire the covetous envy of a wicked kinsman. It is a simple stroke of ill-fortune, as your grace will see, which he cannot help and for which he is not in any wise responsible. This kinsman, his father's brother, although himself a man of property and well placed in the world, is yet consumed with a desire to add to his own demesne his nephew's broad lands in the west country. He is a bitter-hearted and envious man, who has carried on a perpetual war with fortune because she has not made him the elder brother.

"Chance puts a weapon in the hands of this covetous man. The age is one of peril and unrest. It is a time in which every man suspects his neighbor. Nothing is easier for a base man who is also bold than to bring a charge of misfeasance against one he would remove and whose lands he would inherit. And this is what the uncle decides to do in the matter of his nephew. He procures two evil men to accuse the young man of having borne a part in a wicked and vile conspiracy against the person of the sovereign. In the age in which the play is cast such things are unhappily too common, and this is a bad man's opportunity.

"To be brief, your grace, the plot is laid, the charge is made, the young man is brought to trial and con-

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demned upon the evidence of two suborners. He is unable to refute the accusation, so cunning are the rogues by whom he is beset; moreover the author of the plot has always passed for a just and disinterested man.

"To add to this unfortunate young man's mischances, his trial is held behind closed doors, for, as I say, the times are greatly perilous and the public mind is much inflamed. And he is condemned privily to the block, and is sent to a strong fortress in the country, there to die by the ax on a certain day. He makes an appeal to his sovereign, an august and gracious lady whom he has faithfully served. But stealthy serpent tongues have done their work only too well. The Queen will not heed the appeals of this innocent, unhappy youth, and he is left to his cruel fate.

"The decree of heaven is otherwise, however. The inscrutable Providence which has used the young man tenderly in all things save one and in that one so unkindly, begins to relent toward him, and, as your grace shall hear, he is not left to die."

The playwright paused for a moment. The attention of his hearers was riveted by the force and cogency of a narrative which was given with a solemnity so impressive that it was made to appear a veritable page from life itself. The Queen, her ladies and her gentlemen, were spellbound by the vivid power of the recital. But Cecil and other high officers of the household, who were able to trace the parallel of the story were transfixed by the man's audacity.

Only too clearly did they recognize the source of the plot of the dreadful drama this man was daring to unfold. And if they could have done so they would have

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stopped this hopelessly indiscreet recital of it. Blank consternation was written in the faces of those who knew whence the story came.

"Stop the mouth of that madman, for God's sake!" cried the Lord Treasurer in the ear of Pembroke.

But not Cecil and not Pembroke and not mortal man in that assembly could stop the mouth of the player now.

"Your grace," the low, clear voice went on, "this innocent youth is not left to die. The governor of the fortress wherein the young man is held captive, a most honorable and worthy and highly esteemed servant of the state, has a young daughter. She too, like this ill-starred youth, is passing fair, and like him is also happy in every relation and attribute of life save one. And her unhappiness is that she has not yet known love.

"But on a day, your grace, love comes to her. One summer's morning it is the will of fate that she shall see the condemned man in the courtyard of his prison. And from his own lips she learns his grievous history. She learns that three days hence he is to die by the ax.

"A rage of pity comes upon her. At all costs she is resolved to save him from a fate he has done nothing to deserve. And this young girl, so brave and so high of soul, finds a means to let him out of his dungeon, and contrives his escape from the castle by a famous secret passage way.

"And there is more to tell. Love has come to her. She yields all that she has of security and also the many benefits she enjoys under her father's roof in order that she may share the life of this hunted fugitive. Footsore and hungry, by mere and mead, sleeping now under

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the open sky, now in barn or byre, they make their way from place to place. The officers of the law are ever upon their heels, but Providence is with them, so that at last they come to a fair and famous city and fall in with a cry of players.

"Now may it please your grace, one of these players is not only an actor but is also a maker of plays. And this man, by the bounty of the gracious lady his sovereign, has been commanded to devise for her a pastoral to be performed in her presence on the greensward of a summer's afternoon. And this man is so charmed by the grace and beauty of these vagabonds, both of whom are dressed as boys, so charmed by their fair appearance and their goodly manners, that he would fain admit them into the company of players, in order that they may be trained as actors, and perchance on a day delight the Queen with their accomplishment.

"At first these wanderers reject the proposal. But they are hard set. They have journeyed far and food and lodging are to seek. And being driven to a final desperate extremity at last, they put their faith in this play-actor. They reveal to him the whole of their tragic history and crave his help."

"One moment, Master Shakespeare." It was the harsh, imperious voice of the Queen. And it seemed to fall like a thunderclap upon the expectant hush engendered by the player's narrative. "Do I understand you to say that these persons informed this play-actor of the whole matter?"

"Yes, your grace, of the whole of their history," the player spoke with a calm fearlessness: "the whole of it as it was at that time known to them. Moreover, this

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player, having heard their tragical story, resolved to help them to the utmost of his capacity. To this end he had them put in a disguise of an Italian music master and his son."

"In order, sirrah, I presume," said the Queen's harsh voice, "to defeat the ends of justice?"

"Not in order to defeat the ends of justice, your grace," said the player with a calm deference which, however, did little to allay the rising anger of the Queen, "but rather to the end that justice might be vindicated. That only was the purpose in the player's mind as shall presently appear. But under your grace's favor, I will continue this tragical history."

"Do so, sirrah, I pray you." The voice of the Queen was now ominous indeed.

"The fugitives had lain but one night at the inn in the city in the disguise of an Italian music master and his son, when an unhappy distraught man came seeking them. He was the devoted servant of the governor of the castle. His master, it appeared, upon learning his daughter's act, had repaired straightway to his royal mistress with news of the escape of his prisoner. Moreover, he took upon his own shoulders the whole of the blame. He withheld from the Queen the part his daughter had played in his prisoner's escape and submitted himself to fate."

By now there were many who would have stopped the mouth of the player, and foremost among them was the Lord Treasurer. This man, Shakespeare, knew too much. And while some marveled at the madness of his audacity, and all deplored his grievous indiscretion, there was not one among them who might venture an

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attempt to silence him without affronting the temper of the Queen.

But for that matter it had been impossible to silence the player now. For one thing the Queen, with a face that boded ill, was marking intently every word that fell from the man's lips. And again the player's feelings were wrought to such a pitch of interest by the stress of his narrative that he seemed to be carried completely beyond himself. For the consequences likely to ensue he had no care. He was as one transfigured. Let justice, mercy and truth prevail even if his own life was the price to be paid for those brightest jewels in Gloriana's crown.

"Is there no means of stopping the mouth of that madman?" growled the Lord Treasurer in the ear of Pembroke.

But Pembroke could give no answer. He turned aside, his breast tightening, his shoulders shaking convulsively.

"Pray proceed with your story, Master Shakespeare," said the harsh voice of the Queen.

"The servant of the governor of the castle," continued the player in obedience to this command, "an honest, good fellow, no sooner learned his master's peril, than he pursued the fugitives from place to place over all the midland country-side. Thus it was that in the end he had the good fortune to come up with them at the inn at Oxford. Now I would respectfully crave that your grace remark with particular closeness that which I am about to relate."

"You can count upon our so doing, Master Shakespeare," said the Queen grimly.

The player smiled rather wanly. He could not re-

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main insensible to the ominous words and the yet more ominous tone. But there was not a tremor of fear in the dauntless face.

"It is simply, your grace, that this humble player, the least of the Queen's servants, is alone to blame for all of that which follows. In the first place, the young man was no sooner informed of the peril of the governor of the castle than he desired to yield himself straightway to the will of the sovereign. But the player, mistakenly perhaps, was able to hold him from this most honorable course until a riper season. And in the meantime, the player set his mind to work in order to adduce a tangible proof of this young man's innocence, so that when the time came for him to cast himself upon the mercy of the Queen, he should not appear empty-handed before her.

"Providence favored him. By means of a device which I will not describe, lest I tax the patience of your grace, the player was able to obtain an irrefragable proof of the young man's innocence. By the same means, moreover, he was able to adduce clear evidence of those who were guilty. But of this I will presently speak more fully.

"In the meantime, however, while all this was going forward, the hour was drawing near for the new interlude to be given in the presence of the sovereign. And the player deemed such a season to be not the least favorable for two noble but ill-starred children of destiny to invoke justice and mercy of a woman, the first in the realm."

At this point the player paused in his narrative. A profound silence descended upon all. Every person who

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had heard the singular story was now aware that it was no mere figment of a poet's mind. It was a grim and terrible reality. And that unhappy fact was declared in the harsh and cruel eyes of the Queen.

For a full minute not a word was spoken. The player had given as much of his story as was vital to his design. And now with a true political instinct he refrained from adding another word, but left it to the Queen herself to speak.

She made no haste to do so. Astonished beyond measure, resentful, angry, she brought the whole of her powerful mind to bear upon the matter before giving expression to her thoughts. Dumbfounded as she was by the audacity and the indiscretion of this man, two facts dominated her now. The mystery attending the circumstances of the young man, Gervase Heriot's escape from Nottingham Castle, was now made clear. The unlucky Sir John Feversham had neither art nor part in it after all. He had kept a stubborn silence for no other reason than to shield his daughter. And it was none other than that froward young woman who had given that charming performance in the new comedy but a few minutes ago. At last the Queen turned to her ladies with a look of sour triumph.

"Did I not say," she cried, "that that was indeed no youth who strutted in doublet and trunk hose?"

A moment afterwards the august lady had turned imperiously to the player.

"This seems but a tame conclusion to your new interlude, Master Shakespeare."

"Most humbly and respectfully do I beg your grace to devise an issue to this pitiful story." The player

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had now sunk upon one knee. "It lies far beyond the compass of my own poor contrivance. But it is within the province of your grace to fashion it in either the comic or the tragic vein. Yet if it shall seem good to you to fashion it in the latter, there is one last boon that I have to crave for these children of fate, and on my knees I do so."

"And what, pray, is the boon you crave, sirrah?" There was not a spark of pity in the face or in the tone of the Queen.

"The boon I would crave for them is this, your grace. Should it not seem good to your grace to exercise the most royal prerogative of mercy, they implore you to allow them to die together on the same block, by the same ax, in the same hour."

This grim request sent a shudder through that horrified assembly. But not a muscle relaxed in the ruthless face of the Queen.

"Master Shakespeare," she said in a slow, measured voice, "your request shall be granted. These traitors, young as they are, shall die together on the same block, by the same ax, and in the same hour. And as there is a God in Heaven, Master Shakespeare, you yourself shall share the fate they have so richly merited."

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT was an important evening at the Mermaid Tavern. Long before supper time the spacious upper chamber with the sanded floor began to fill. All the regular frequenters of the place were eager for news of Will's new comedy. But it was a long way in those days from the palace at Richmond to the famous hostelry in Eastcheap. Authentic information was tardy in coming that evening.

The hour of eight was told on the clocks of the city. Yet there was never a word of news of Will or of his comedy. This was indeed strange. Among those who came very often to the tavern for the sake of the company to be found there was a number of men about the Court. Not one of these has as yet appeared upon the scene. And neither Will himself nor any of his fellow-players had arrived.

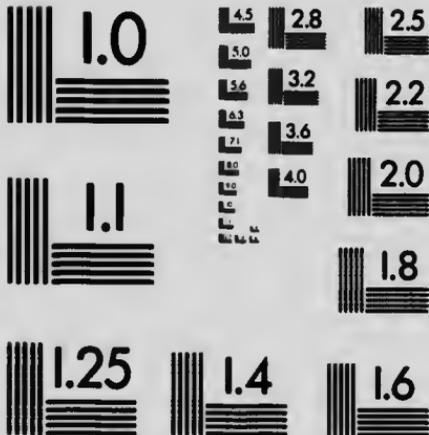
Dishes of deviled bones and flagons of wine were laid on the long table. The company sat down to a very informal repast. Tongues were unloosed and rumor was presently rife.

The assembly that had gathered in this long upper chamber was a curious one. In the shabby and careless garb of the poet, or in the soiled doublet of the writer



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for the theater was contained some of the choicest spirits of the age. On most evenings this strange company was garnished with a sprinkling of men of fashion with some pretensions to wit, but these were absent to-night. This fact, taken in conjunction with a singular dearth of news was held to be a sinister omen. No news is not always good news in matters relating to the theater.

There was genuine concern among those present. Will was a universally popular man. In spite of a very remarkable success which had sprung from beginnings of the humblest kind he bore himself invariably with a modesty and a courteous consideration for others that completely disarmed even those who had the most cause to envy him. Moreover, those who had the entrée to that sacred upper chamber at the Mermaid well knew how thoroughly his success was deserved. For these were first-rate minds. These men, as far as it was possible for the contemporaries of William Shakespeare to do so, realized and appreciated his accomplishment.

If Will had at last met with a check to his career none would regret the fact more than these friendly and admiring rivals who had an intense admiration for his extraordinary genius. And some of them, moreover, had already come to live in a kind of reflected glory that it cast upon them.

Rumors of failure grew with the arrival of each newcomer who yet had no first-hand news to give.

"Did he let you con the piece, Martin?" asked a gray and worn veteran with a ragged beard of an individual very familiar to himself who sat at the head of the long table.

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"Aye, he did so. And I tell you it is the best thing he has done yet. If he makes a failure of that, God help the age, say I."

"He was not very happy about it two nights ago."

"Ah, that's Will's way. He never does anything but that he wishes it better."

"And yet they say he never blots a line, eh?" said a young man with flaming hair who sat opposite.

"It is only Ben who says that," rejoined the veteran at the table-head. "And Ben blots so many himself that he thinks nobody else takes any pains by comparison."

"Then you consider this new piece a good thing?"

"Aye, good enough, good enough. It is a better thing than any of us will ever see our names to." The speaker sighed. He was a man of infinite courage and ambition. But he had lived long enough and had striven hard enough to learn the sharp truth that these things of themselves will not conquer. "But by God!" The fine poet and great-hearted man took up his flagon. "I'd be the last in the world to begrudge Will his good luck. His fortune is our fortune too. He is a nonesuch and not again will the world look on his like. He is a king in his own right, and by God, I drink to him. Here's to our monarch. May God protect him, and may he never write a worse comedy than 'As You Like It.'"

Dekker rose and held his flagon aloft. And all the others at the long table followed his example.

There was a murmur of voices and a clink of cups.

These men could not bring themselves to admit that by any possibility the true prince had met defeat at last. Still, the total absence of news from Richmond was very

ominous. But even if the Queen had not approved the new comedy, that was not warrant sufficient to assume as more than one among that company made bold to maintain, that the new comedy was not worthy of her approval.

"'Tis a fine thing," said the man at the head of the table, "and you may lay to that. His genius ripens every day. There is nothing in my opinion beyond the compass of Will's invention."

"He lacks but one thing," said a large, ugly and pock-marked fellow who came slowly into the room.

"And what is that, Ben?" was the question that was promptly fired at the newcomer.

"A little learning, my friends, to temper the heat of his mind. A little of the classic severity of Athens to mellow the over-sharpness of his wit, to trim and clip the excess of his redundancy, to confine the natural incontinence of his humors."

But the words of Ben were drowned in good-natured laughter. All knew the foibles of this heavy and slow-moving man. He was a surly dog fond of his growl. He must ever run contrary to received opinion. He had an exaggerated regard for the classic tongues. But there was no stouter fellow, no stauncher friend, and there was not a grain of smallness in his nature.

"Sit down, you dog," said the time-worn warrior at the table-head, "and bury your mask in a flagon. Hi, drawer, a cup of Muscadel for Master Jonson. Ben, my son, with all your learning, aye, and with all your genius, too, you will never be quite noble enough to don the mantle of William the Peerless."

"Did I ever say I would?" said Ben roughly. "Is

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there any man alive that ever heard me speak so windily? There is no man living or dead who is the peer of our incomparable William and I care not who hears me say it."

The great rude fellow brought down his bricklayer's fist with such a resounding thud upon the table that the dishes rattled and the wine slopped over in a dozen cups. But this rough diamond, who as yet did but stand at the threshold of renown, was freely forgiven all the inconvenience he caused for the sake of that honest enthusiasm whereby he did himself honor in the eyes of all.

The motley crew who sat night after night at that table were without exception men of parts and understanding. Whether their ruffles were ink-stained, whether their hands were lily-white, whether they wore silk and fine linen or plain bombazine, whether they lived by the sword or by the pen, or whether they had no need to live by either, there was no appeal from their judgments upon poetry and the drama, and posterity has not found occasion to reverse their verdicts. It was the great age indeed. These were men of rare mental power, of large and liberal intercourse. They knew the highest when they met it and knew how to pay it homage.

For example, this rude fellow Ben Jonson, this clumsy, loud-voiced, opinionative Scotsman, a pock-marked, ugly creature who had lived rough and who had the brand of a felon on his thumb was the coming man. He would go far, said the quidnuncs. He was heavy metal of the royal currency; one who under Providence was destined to be second only to Will himself.

Thus men cast in a gentler mold made room for him,

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He was no favorite, to be sure. His manners were too rude, his opinions too unqualified. But the sacred fire was in his veins. And those who were wont to dispute precedence with persons of far more account in the eyes of the world were proud to sit at the feet of Ben.

The long July evening was closing in. The candles had been brought and the shutters drawn in the long upper chamber. And that which hitherto had been hardly more than a thrill of half-expectant surmise was now become a slow agony of suspense. It was incredible that news had not come from Richmond. The play must have been over by six o'clock. The verdict of Gloriana and her court must have been delivered long ago.

Was it possible that the miracle of the age had tasted his first defeat? Well, and if he had? said the gray-beard at the end of the table. Gloriana and her Court were not infallible. Will should read his comedy to his peers that night, as he had done on many occasions previously. Theirs should be the verdict, for they alone, with all respect to Gloriana, were qualified to give it.

The brave words from the table-head were received with loud approval from a score of stalwarts who by now had gathered round the board. Such words were well and wisely spoken. But suddenly there fell a hush. A famous and admired figure came quietly, almost stealthily, into the room.

It was that of a bearded, brown-faced man of forty, trim and soldierly of look, secure and curiously authoritative of bearing. His dress was rich and fine; his air that of a courtier, urbane, polished, calm, quizzical.

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There was the coxcomb in the outward man, but not a trace of it in the far-looking, eagle-glancing eyes. This was a great figure, even in that company, which measured a man not by his outward assemblance but by his deeds.

"Ah, now we shall know," cried the man at the table-head. "Here is Wat. Newly from Richmond, else I'll never drink sack again out of a bombard until I attain the age of a hundred and twenty."

"Yes, Martin, newly from Richmond, as you say," came the courtier's lisp. "Newly from Richmond, newly from Richmond."

The newcomer sank down in a manner of extreme weariness in a vacant chair. He sighed heavily.

"A cup of the muscadel for Sir Walter," said the man at the table-head. "And lively about it, boy. No need to tell us what has happened, Wat. But we did not think it was so bad as all this. We did not think it possible that Will could fail. Is it—tell me. Wat—that Gloriana has smelt some affront in the new piece? Well, well, she is getting old, and even in her prime she was—well, shall we say?—what shall we say?—why, body o' God, what's the matter with the fellow?"

The speaker had good reason to ask the question. Raleigh—the brown-faced courtier was no less than he—seemed utterly overcome. Something untoward had most certainly happened. There was more than a mere matter of a play's failure or success in the dismay of that strong face which shone a bleak gray in the uncertain light of the room.

"Why, what's the matter? Tell us, for the love of God!"

But Raleigh shook his head haplessly. He who knew

not the meaning of fear in the presence of bodily peril. He whose resolution never failed in great crises, was wholly unable to tell the news he bore.

"Is it Will?" A sense of foreboding had descended suddenly upon all. "Tell us, I pray you."—The eagerly anxious voices sank in the oddest manner. "Has aught happened to Will Shakespeare?"

Raleigh did not answer. But that face so eloquent of power and high capacity seemed to grow a little bleaker. And then twenty pairs of eyes that were turned almost fiercely upon it saw that a rush of sudden tears was shining there.

The man at the head of the table laid a hand to his heart.

"Oh!"

His exclamation went echoing through the silence of the long room. Again the solemn hush descended. That which Walter Raleigh had not courage to tell, not one of these men could muster the courage to ask.

What could have happened? Those were perilous times indeed; times in which the quietest, most law-abiding citizen took his life in his hand when he walked down the street. The tragedy of poor Kit Marlowe was in every mind. Had Will Shakespeare, the incomparable poet and charming personality, met the assassin's knife by chance or by design? The face of Raleigh portended not less than that. Yet not one of these men could summon enough resolution to set his doubts at rest. The silence was painful. A pin could have been heard to fall in the room.

Suddenly there came sounds of heavy feet stumbling, blundering up the wooden stairs. The door was flung

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open. A thick, squat, gnarled-looking fellow reeled in like a man under the influence of wine. His face shone livid in the light of the candles.

It was Burbage the tragedian.

"Speak, man! Tell the news!" came the hoarse demand of a dozen voices.

"Shakespeare," The voice of the tragedian could hardly be heard. "He is arrested by the Queen's order. They say—they say he will lose his head."

CHAPTER XXXV

GRIEF, consternation, horror surged through the room. For the moment, the shock of the announcement was more than they could bear. It was as if each man present had been stunned by a blow. But the calm was for the moment only. In the next came a babel of tongues framing a score of incoherent questions.

Richard Burbage replied to none of these. He stood an instant swaying, his ashen face framed in the eerie glow of the candles. And then without a further word he turned and passed like a ghost through the door of the room with the same abruptness with which he had entered it. He went headlong, stumbling and creaking down the rickety stairs of the old tavern and out into the July evening.

In the street, hard by the signboard, under the shadow of the tavern wall, two men lay in wait for the tragedian. One of these was his fellow-player, William Kemp, the other John Heming the manager of the Globe Theatre. These also were men of strong feelings, but they had them under control, whereas Richard Burbage who might almost be said to worship the ground on which the poet trod, had been carried completely away

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by this direst of tragedies, which he knew not how to face.

As became good men, true friends, staunch comrades, Kemp and Heming were fully determined not to let Burbage pass out of their sight during the remainder of that night. But they must not show themselves in his. Already he had resented their presence fiercely, had cursed them when they had sought to console him, and had so far fallen from that poise of mind and temper which at ordinary times made him a most agreeable companion, as to threaten to do them violence, "if they would not have the goodness to keep themselves to themselves and stand out of his light."

Thus William Kemp and John Heming remained well in the shadow of the tavern wall. But when their distracted friend came out of the inn, perhaps a little sooner than they had expected him to do so, they proceeded to follow him at a respectful distance. Without betraying their own presence, they contrived to keep him well in view.

Certainly there was very good ground for such solicitude. The tragedian swayed about from side to side like a ship in a gale, now up one deserted street, now down another. And all these dark purlieus of the city swarmed with perils at that hour of the night. Moreover, the ostensible condition of this pedestrian, the vagaries of whose gait certainly resembled those of a man far gone in liquor, seemed to cry aloud for the attentions of the vigilant cutpurse or the lurking footpad.

With unseeing eyes, with unstable limbs, with mind insensible of its surroundings, with steps not knowing whither they were bent, the tragedian walked the by-

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ways of the city during the whole of that night. In the fate-riven figures in those soul-shaking tragedies whose delineation he excelled all men, he was at the mercy of an anguish of mind that was tearing him in pieces.

This was a large and noble nature. And bitterly was rent because it had not been more vigilant. Richard Burbage felt himself unworthy of the sacred duties imposed upon him by his fraternal intimacy with the poet. He had an insight into human nature which enabled him to understand a certain weakness that must inevitably attend such transcendent powers as those of William Shakespeare. And this understanding seemed to lay the charge upon him of watching over this man who was not as other men.

To this trust Burbage felt he had not been true. Yet it was not easy to know by what means he could have saved his friend from his terrible pass. Time and again he had besought him to be prudent, and his counsels had been urged with intense conviction. None realized more clearly than Burbage that it was indeed a perilous hour for any man to be concerned with treason. The Queen's temper was implacable. She who had done to death a kinswoman and a queen because her own personal safety was held to be remotely threatened was not likely to know the meaning of pity in the case of a humble play-actor who had mingled so openly in the cause of a condemned traitor.

Burbage mourned the madness of his friend. Pacing the dark streets of the city during the watches of the night in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy, he was a man self-tormented. Yet after all, he was in

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no wise to blame. No grace of his, no vigilance, indeed, no human foresight could have averted this tragic issue.

The two comrades of the tragedian kept the swaying figure ever in view. Wherever it went that night they followed it. Hour after hour Burbage wandered purposeless about the city. His grief, silent and contained though it was, was a thing dreadful to behold.

Towards midnight he came to the river. A new fear then gripped the hearts of his comrades. Very stealthily they crept up closer behind him. What more likely than that one in such a frame of mind should have recourse to those dark waters which have done so much to ease the misery of the world? Bareheaded, unsteady of gait, wild of mien, the tragedian walked hour by hour upon the very brink of death. And all that time his two friends watched and waited yet dared not show themselves.

The night was oppressively hot. The summer air was charged with pent-up forces, and while it was still dark these sought opportunity to wreak themselves upon the thirsting earth. The moon and stars were hid; all the heavens were a dense mass of pitch; presently came lightning and peal upon peal of thunder. It was the prelude to a terrific storm and the man by the verge of the river welcomed it with every fiber of his being.

The words of *Lear* were yet unborn. But in such a night and tempest of the soul was to walk that figure which this unhappy man was one day to teach the ages to pity. His head was bare and unbent to the storm; a hurricane lashed the upturned face; he was drenched to the skin; and yet this rage of heaven was as nought to the tumult in the mind of one poor tragedian.

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And like their friend, wholly undefended from this wild fury of the elements, William Kemp and John Heming stood cowering a little way off in the lee of a wall. All the long night through, in spite of darkness and tempest, they never left him. And when at last came the dawn, and with it some abatement of the frenzy of the heavens, they stood with him still by the bank of the grim river.

Drenched to the skin, and utterly weary and wretched as they were, they did not once allow Richard Burbage to pass out of their sight. Wherever he went they must go also; to all that he did they must be a party. Yet only in the last resort must they venture to declare themselves to him.

The slow hours passed. Richard Burbage still lingered by that river which in one brief instant would have eased him of his pain. But at last, just as the hour of eight was told by the churches of the city, resolve appeared to brace and quicken the exhausted frame. A new purpose, a new strength enfolded that unhappy figure. Burbage suddenly started to walk briskly along the river bank in the direction of Richmond.

Hungry, exhausted, profoundly miserable, his two comrades continued to follow him. All night had they been waiting for some such manifestation of design, for this was a man of powerful and resolute character. It was now more imperative than ever that this vigilance should not relax. They knew not what secret spring of action had moved him. And in his present mood there was nothing of which he was not capable.

On and on he walked, briskly now and with an appearance of ever-increasing resolve. Through fair mead-

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ows and riverside gardens and hamlets they passed. By ten o'clock, they had left the river below them and were ascending the steep and gloriously wooded slopes of Richmond Hill.

Every fiber of the tragedian's being seemed now in the thrall of his new purpose. Not once did he tarry or look back. All unaware that he was being so closely followed, he turned at the top of the hill into Richmond Park.

It was a morning such as makes of earth a paradise. The air was cool, fragrant, delicious after the great storm of the night. Long shafts of gold light pierced the branches of the trees; the wet bracken shone with crystals; the sky was one wide unbroken promise of a gorgeous noon; the deer flitted in and out of the clean-washed spaces, between low-hanging canopies of leaves. Earth was rejoicing this morning of July in the solace and refreshment that the night had brought to her. All was well with her now. Her fainting energies had been renewed. And all was now well with one among her children, one poor and frail tragedian.

The squat, rather ungainly figure, striding wide as though the boards of the playhouse were still its theater, neither passed nor faltered in its course. Bared head upflung, a curious rigidity in the face, there was high purpose in every movement now.

Richard Burbage sought the broad path that led to the Queen's palace. And no sooner had he come to it, than he greatly increased the pace at which he walked. Indeed, as the row of imposing turrets of the royal demesne came into view at a turn in the road, he almost broke into a run.

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William Kemp and John Heming, so exhausted by now that they could scarcely drag one foot after the other, suddenly awoke with a kind of bewildered dismay to the fact that the Queen's palace was, beyond doubt, the goal of their quarry. Breathlessly, they followed ever in his wake, but in the last hundred yards or so, he had gained upon them considerably.

Before the gate of the palace, however, Richard Burbage had to call a halt. Certain formalities had to be observed before the halberdiers on guard could be induced to pass a stranger through. And to their question of who this stranger was and what was his pleasure, the two comrades of the actor were able to come up to the gate just in time to hear his reply.

"I am Richard Burbage, the tragedian, and I desire to see the Queen without delay on a matter of the most urgent importance."

Moreover, these words were spoken in that magnificently rotund and authoritative voice that never failed to send a thrill through the Globe Theatre.

And even now in these strange circumstances, it did not fail of its effect. The guards of the Queen were no more than mortal men. And this man with great eyes burning in an ashen face was more than mortal now. He was in the thrall of a divine idea. It was not for those on a lower plane of being to deny such an imperious instancy. Without delay, Richard Burbage, the tragedian, was permitted to pass through the gate.

William Kemp and John Heming stood at the threshold of the Queen's palace to watch the tragedian pass from their view. But when they also were asked by the sentinels at the gate who they were and what they

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sought, they did not venture to proclaim either their business or themselves.

They drew off silently a little way into the bracken, there to await the issue. Sick at heart, overcome with despair, they flung their completely exhausted bodies into the wet grass.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE Queen was taking counsel already with the Lord Treasurer, Cecil, her all-wise and all-powerful minister. This morning, she was in a harsh and vengeful mood. Many were the plots she had known in the course of a troubled life against the security of that person for whose well-being she had so great a reverence. And each one, as it occurred, had the effect of hardening that naturally ruthless temper to which, like others of her race, she was never afraid to give free play.

The young man, Gervase Heriot, had been proved guilty upon that which was held to be good and sufficient evidence, of a plot against her life. He had been condemned to death by the Court of Star Chamber sitting in camera. But by the wanton and wicked connivance of the young daughter of Sir John Feversham, in whose custody he was held in Nottingham Castle against the time of his execution, Heriot had been able to break out of his prison. Subsequently, the condemned man, in the company of this wicked girl, had wandered about the country many weeks, finally falling in with one Shakespeare, an actor and writer for the theater, who, well knowing they were proscribed, had actively befriended

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them. Moreover, with unforgivable effrontery, this play-actor had chosen to make public confession of his guilt at a singularly ill-chosen time.

The Queen was not in a mood to hear of leniency in this heinous matter. But Cecil, the Lord Treasurer, was a very wise man, deliberate in speech, tardy in judgment. And the view he held was at direct variance with that of his august mistress.

The Lord Treasurer had already brought the cool and detached mind of a statesman to bear upon a most difficult problem. The actors in this unhappy drama were nothing to him in themselves. Heriot was a man of family, with a considerable estate in the west of England; the girl was the daughter of Sir John Feversham, a man of good reputation, who had rendered thirty years of honest service to the Queen. The man Shakespeare was by profession an actor, and of him there was nothing more to be said. Indeed, as far as the Lord Treasurer was concerned, there was nothing more to be said of any of the persons of the drama. As mere private individuals, they had not the least interest for him; the merits of their cause concerned him but little, yet public expediency, that and only that, was a thing of paramount importance in his eyes. And when all was said, this was certainly a plaguy ill matter, and it had given my lord a very anxious night.

It seemed that Pembroke, a man whom Cecil regarded as a person of weight, had expressed a very definite opinion in regard to the case. According to Pembroke, the man Shakespeare was widely known and esteemed not in London merely but also throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom. He had behaved with the

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gravest unwisdom, but Pembroke held staunchly to the view that his action was not of a character to incur the inclemency of the law. Moreover, the play-actor had the excuse that he sought an occasion to establish the innocence of a deeply wronged man.

Yet here was a very sore point with the statesmanlike soul of the Lord Treasurer. Heriot had been condemned by the Court of Star Chamber, and Cecil had not the least desire that the case should be re-heard. At the bottom the whole affair constituted one of those unsavory businesses which it is ever the aim of true statesmen to keep out of the light of day. To this point of view, however, Pembroke had made the cogent rejoinder that since the whole story had been given to the world, it was no longer possible to treat it as a mystery.

Doubtless it was this fact which rendered Shakespeare's action unpardonable in the sight of the Queen. She, too, had a faculty of statesmanship, and she was well able to appreciate the point involved; but also she had a woman's power of illogical resentment, and in her view not the least part of the player's crime was the inconvenience it caused.

Cecil, having duly taken all the circumstances into account, was already strongly in favor of mercy. It would be wise, in his view, to grant a pardon to the player. The pressure of public opinion was likely to be great, and in the opinion of Cecil that was a cardinal matter. But the Queen was obdurate. She was incensed by the audacity of the man. Great care had been used to keep the whole of this ugly business a close secret, but all this precaution had been rendered nugatory by this man's

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amazing indiscretion in regard to things that did not well bear the light of day.

"My lord," said the Queen, with an air of finality, "what I have said, I have said. This man shall make payment for his wicked folly."

"Be it so, your grace," said the minister, with a sad shake of the head.

He knew how vain it was to persist when once the Queen had made up her mind. She had all a Tudor's despotism. The statesman shrugged his shoulders disconsolately. The man Shakespeare had certainly behaved like a stark fool, and richly merited any fate that could overtake him, for my Lord Treasurer's was that practical order of mind that hates a fool quite as much as it hates a rogue. The one was intelligible, but the other was an affront to the human race. Still, the man Shakespeare had many highly placed friends. And if Cecil himself had little use for the order of things the man represented, he recognized, with that large grasp of mind in which none of his age excelled him, that this play-actor stood for human amenity. And that in itself was a thing that even the most cynical of statesmen cannot afford to neglect.

The Lord Treasurer was about to withdraw from the Queen's presence, when one of her gentlemen came into the room.

"Madam," he said, "under your good pleasure, one Richard Burbage, a tragedian, would speak with you upon a matter of great urgency."

"A pox take him," said the Queen, roughly. "A pox take all comedians and all tragedians, too. I would that I had never set eyes on any of the tribe. Send the rogue

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about his business with a flea in his ear. Or stay—send him to us and we will hear what he has to say. And God help the rogue, if he speaks amiss.”

The gentleman withdrew. A minute afterwards, he ushered into the room with great ceremony one Richard Burbage, a tragedian.

It happens continually, in the process of nature, that a man's calling is declared in his personality. The soldier, the clergyman, the lawyer and the horse-dealer are cases in point. But no man could have borne clearer evidence of the unhappy estate to which it had pleased providence to call him than Richard Burbage, the tragedian. His gaunt face was haggard, his bloodshot eyes were wild, his somber dress was muddy and in sad disorder.

“Well, my man, what is your pleasure?” said the Queen sourly enough, as soon as this odd figure appeared before her.

The tragedian showed no undue haste to reply to the question. There was a slow force in him for which the Queen and Cecil were not prepared. And when he spoke, it was with the calm precision of one secure of soul.

“Your grace,” said the tragedian, and for all his wild eyes he looked steadily at the Queen, “it is my desire to offer my life for the life of William Shakespeare.”

The mood of the Queen was by no means agreeable. Nevertheless, these simple and considered words struck home to the heart of the woman. They had no savor of vainglory. They were the fruit of a rare spirit, and she who was accustomed to judge men was quick, almost in her own despite, to recognize the source from which they sprang.

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"Tell me why you offer it, Master Burbage," said the Queen. "Tell me why life has so little savor for you, that you would yield it for that of a rival actor?"

"I offer my life, your grace, for that of one so far beyond myself that, although I enjoy my days as much as any man alive, there can be no higher privilege than to give them for such a one as he. And the day will surely come when the whole world will rise up and call me blessed."

These were wild words for prosaic ears. There was almost a core of madness in them, yet it was impossible to doubt the grim sincerity of this fanatic.

The Queen looked at the Lord Treasurer, and the Lord Treasurer looked at the Queen. One fact at once shone clear in the minds of both. It was no ordinary man who offered life itself on the altar of friendship.

"The truth is," said the Queen at last, "you mad players, who spend your days in mouthing bombast and in tearing passions to tatters, get a kind of swelling in your brains. The truth is, Master Burbage, you over-color all the facts of life. Your speech in consequence is high-flown, your behavior nonsensical, your appearance ridiculous."

"It may be so, your grace." The player spoke slowly and calmly, and yet without any great show of humility. "But I would entreat your grace not to overlook the fact that Richard Burbage would pay away his life for the boon he craves."

"Yes, sirrah, I appreciate that," said the Queen. "And to me, Master Burbage, I confess it makes you a subject for confinement in a mad-house. How say you, my lord?"

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But my lord was thinking so deeply that he failed to answer the question of his august mistress. It was the business of his life to estimate men and things; and perhaps the first time in his career, he was face to face with men and things with which his recondite knowledge and his remarkable faculty seemed powerless to deal.

"Yes, you bombastical players have an inflammation of the mind, there is no doubt about it," said the Queen. "In your opinion, Master Burbage, I do not doubt that the author of 'As You Like It' is the greatest man alive."

"Yes, your grace," said the tragedian, very simply, "it is undoubtedly that in his own province, and as, in my humble judgment his province is the highest of all, I cannot honestly claim less than that precedence for himself. But, of course, I speak, your grace, as but a strutter on the boards and a mouther of bombast. Yet in my humble opinion, a man must be what he is, and be that only, and with all his heart. Nature fashioned me for the theater. Therefore, my life is consecrated to the theater, which for me is the sum of all things, the highest good. And therefore I say to your grace, that never again will the theater look upon the like of William Shakespeare, with me, and to many another in this age and in ages yet to come, must ever remain the brightest jewel in Gloriana's crown. And if it be given to Richard Burbage to purchase with his own life the priceless things that lie as yet unborn in the womb of our immortal poet's invention, it will be a great end for a poor tragedian."

These singular words were spoken plainly and bluntly enough, but with an air of deference. And they were absolutely sincere. Whatever the Queen's view might be concerning the sanity of play-actors, she was

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compelled to recognize this speech, perhaps more by its manner than by its matter, as the product of a powerful and well-ordered mind. It was now the turn of the Queen to ponder deeply. In spite of herself, she could not help being affected by the demeanor of this man.

Now it almost seemed as if Providence had set itself to work on the poet's behalf, and was determined to make the most of a favorable turn. For that was the moment chosen by it for the announcement to be made to the Queen that two most distinguished persons, the Earl of Pembroke and Sir Walter Raleigh to wit, most humbly craved audience of her Grace.

"I will see them," said the Queen, peremptorily. "Let them be brought to me." She then added sourly to the Lord Treasurer. "They are upon this same plaguy business, I'll warrant."

Presently appeared these two distinguished gentlemen, true ornaments of their age. Each was a singularly handsome man, not yet in middle life; each had the marked ease of bearing of those who are very familiar with their surroundings. The Queen received them with the rough humor, caustic, witty and by no means unpleasant, which she inherited from her father and kept for her intimates.

"Well, my friends," she said, "I'll wager a tester I know already what is your good pleasure."

"Your grace were infinitely less in wisdom were the case otherwise," said Pembroke.

"You have come to plead the cause, I do not doubt, of a very foolish and wicked man."

The silence of Pembroke gave assent to the harsh words.

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"Well, my lord, I hope you are prepared as is Master Burbage here to yield your life for him."

"If it were our privilege, your grace, to do that, we should be greater men than we are like to be—with respect to Sir Walter here—in the eyes of posterity."

"A pox upon posterity! Who cares a fig for it? The hour in which we live alone matters to all of us. But to me, my lord, why do you choose to concern yourself with the matter of this foolish play-actor? And also I would have you make known your wishes in regard to him."

"Touching your grace's first question," said Pembroke, "I am honored by the friendship of one whom I esteem beyond all other men, and for whose deliverance I would gladly pay into the treasury as round a sum as I can well afford."

The Queen gave a grunt of disgust. The raddled favorite wore a very unpleasant look.

"Humph," said she. "That seems little enough, my lord. Master Burbage here offers his life."

Pembroke turned instantly to the tragedian, with his most courtier-like bow.

"Master Burbage does himself infinite honor," he said. "I offer the half of my estate and he offers the whole of his, therefore is he twice the man that I am in the sight of heaven."

"A well-turned speech, my lord," said the Queen. She then fixed her sour smile upon Raleigh. "Tell me, Sir Walter," she said, "what is the price you are prepared to pay for this foolish and wicked player's ransom?"

The point-blank question was answered readily enough.

"The half of my fortune, your grace," said Raleigh, "even as my Lord Pembroke."

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"But Master Burbage here," said the Queen, acidly, "is prepared to pay the whole of his life."

"Your grace," said Raleigh with shining eyes, "Master Burbage is indeed a man happy in his valor and noble in the scope and compass of his nature. Our poet is fortunate in such a friend, yet such high constancy is not less than his deserts."

This frank speech gave pause to the Queen. When the worst had been said of her, a robust commonsense remained the keystone of her character. These were men she was bound to respect. And to hear them express such unqualified opinions in regard to this play-actor had the effect in some degree of modifying her attitude. Besides, she herself believed the playwright to be a very remarkable man. But the combined testimony of such men as Pembroke and Raleigh made it clear that he was even more remarkable than she knew him to be.

"My Lord Burleigh," she said abruptly, addressing Cecil, "let this man Shakespeare be brought to us. We will hear what defence he will venture of his froward conduct."

The Lord Treasurer quitted the room at once, in obedience to this command. Burbage, Pembroke and Raleigh would have followed him, had not the Queen ordered them to remain where they were.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THERE was a long five minutes of most uncomfortable silence between the four curiously diversified persons in the Queen's morning chamber. Gloriana was not disposed to conversation just now. For one thing she was deeply offended. And at the best of times she was a difficult woman, and age and infirmity had made her morose. Her long life as a reigning sovereign had been neither more nor less than an orgy of despotic power. And such a condition does not make for human amenity, particularly in the case of one in whom a love of tyranny has become second nature.

The plain truth was, that Gloriana was hard and cruel. And these three men were only too well aware of the fact. Each of them felt a grave uneasiness in regard to the fate that was likely to overtake the man for whose life and liberty they were there to plead.

At last, the tapestried door of the chamber opened to admit the returning Cecil, who gravely ushered in the culprit.

The playwright entered the room with a serenity, an unconcern that could only have been exhibited in such circumstances by one who breathes an air which is not the common ether of mankind. The Queen, a close enough

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observer when it pleased her to be so, was impressed by the almost majestic simplicity of this man. His three friends, so jealous for his reputation, could only rejoice at it.

"Master Shakespeare," said the Queen, arrogantly, "it had not been our intention to hear you in your own defence. We had meant to leave the whole matter to those who know in what sort to deal with it. But three very good and true friends of yours have come forward to plead your cause: one, as I understand, an honest man who follows your own calling, has even gone to the length of offering his own life in exchange for yours; and my Lord Pembroke and Sir Walter Raleigh each offers the half of his fortune as the price of your ransom."

For the moment the self-possession of the poet forsook him, so deeply was he moved by the loyalty and the self-sacrificing devotion of his friends. He lowered his head in the manner of one completely overcome. The sensitive lips trembled, the deep-set eyes filled with tears.

"You have good friends, Master Shakespeare." The tone of the Queen was so matter-of-fact, that she might have been merely discussing a plain affair of business. "And no man can have friends so true as these and so honorable in reputation without having a character sufficiently worthy to entitle him to them. Therefore, it is for this reason, and for none other, that I have decided to hear you in your own behalf. But, pray understand, I hold out no prospect of leniency. You have been guilty of such wicked folly that I do not doubt that a charge of high treason will lie against you."

By this time, the playwright was once more completely

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master of himself. He stood to confront the Queen simply and without fear.

"Let us hear your defence, Master Shakespeare, if defence you will venture to make."

"Your grace," said the player, in his gentle voice, "on my own part, I offer no defence. Freely and fully I accept all responsibility for any hurt I have done to justice. But having done none that I know, I take my stand upon the innocence of my intention."

The light of anger flamed in the Queen's eyes.

"Don't use so many words, sirrah," she said, sharply. "Come to the issue. I am a plain woman, and I ask for plain words and few. For what reason, I will ask you, have you embraced these devious ways?"

The player met with calm eyes the harsh glance of the Sovereign.

"If it be treason, your grace, to befriend the innocent," he said, "I will gladly pay the penalty of my crime."

The eyes of the Queen sparkled ominously.

"The innocent, sirrah! Pray, what do you mean by the innocent? Is it the part of innocence, I ask you, to engage in a plot to take away my life?"

"No, your grace," said the player. "And may it never be permitted to one of your subjects to say otherwise."

"Then may I ask why you take the part of those who have done so?"

"I have but taken the part, your grace, of one accused wrongfully."

"Do not impugn the Queen's justice, sirrah?"

"God forbid! But, in this instance, I make so bold as to affirm that a grievous miscarriage has occurred."

"God's blood, sirrah!" cried the Queen, "I would have

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you be wary. If you dare to impugn the integrity of our courts, and you cannot make good your ill words in every particular, you shall make heavy payment for such a contumacy."

The player showed neither hesitation nor alarm, yet the hostility of the Queen's demeanor must have daunted all save the very stout of heart.

"Far be it from me, your grace," he said, "to impugn the integrity of that which no man in this realm should ever call in question. But no human assembly can be wholly free of error. And in this most grievous matter, I swear to your grace before God that there has been a truly terrible miscarriage of justice."

The eyes of the Queen grew dark with menace.

"Prove your words, sirrah. And if ye fail, God help you."

"Readily will I prove them," said the player, with a certain triumph in his voice. "I hold the proof in my hand."

As he spoke, he struck his hand into his doublet and produced the written confession of Simon Heriot. He gave the paper to the Queen.

With a cold fury sparkling in her eyes, Elizabeth handed the document to the Lord Treasurer. She commanded him to read it to her.

Surprise, excitement, incredulity were evoked in that tyrannical bosom by the minister's perusal of this document. But not for a moment did her native keenness of mind desert her.

"Tell me, my lord," she said, "is this an honest and genuine document?"

Cecil scrutinized the paper closely.

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"It bears no evidence, your grace, as far as one can at present see," said the Lord Treasurer, cautiously, "of its being a counterfeit. But it would be well, perhaps, to have further and more expert testimony upon the subject."

"Let this man, Simon Heriot, be at once summoned," said the Queen.

"Alas! your grace," said the player, "Simon Heriot has been ten days dead. This is his dying testimony."

The Queen shook her head suspiciously.

"I like not this matter," she said. "Who are the others named in this conspiracy?"

"One William Muir, your grace, and one Robert Grisewood."

"Let them be brought to me instantly."

"Unhappily, your grace, William Muir has fled the country."

"Has he so!" said the Queen, sternly. "Then what of this man Grisewood? So lately as yesterday, with my own eyes, I saw him here. My lord, let the man be brought to us immediately."

Cecil left the room in order to carry out these instructions. But in a few minutes, he had returned with the information that Grisewood was not to be seen anywhere within the precincts of the palace. Having regard, however, to the great urgency of the matter, the Lord Treasurer announced that he had already dispatched a troop of horse to fetch the man from his lodgings in the Strand.

"It is well," said the Queen, grimly.

With a curt nod, she dismissed all save Cecil from her presence, saying she would confer with them again presently.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE four men, Shakespeare, Burbage, Pembroke, Raleigh, waited in the Queen's ante-chamber, there to abide the issue. Long they waited. It was a far cry in those days from Richmond to the Strand and back again. Shakespeare alone was without concern. The others were gravely uneasy. The Queen's vengeful temper was much to be feared, and Cecil was by no means a person to be trusted.

The friends of the player were convinced that he had adduced a genuine proof of the innocence of Gervase Heriot. They were satisfied, moreover, that he had been inspired by no other motive than an overmastering desire to do justice, truth and mercy. Nevertheless, the turn things were taking made them painfully anxious in regard to the outcome of the whole affair.

The Queen, for all the native vigor of her understanding, was a mass of prejudice and caprice. She was bitterly resentful of the inconvenience that had been caused by the player's wanton interference. Again, a man like Grisewood, with his back to the wall, could be trusted to fight tooth and nail for his life. He would lie, that was certain. He was bound to deny the authenticity of the

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slender evidence that had been adduced in a manner so fortuitous.

The upshot was likely to be that the affair would resolve itself into a battle between a villain and an honest man. It would become a question in that event as to whose word the Queen would accept. Already the player was out of favor. And when it came to a question of holding the balance even between him and another, when it came to weighing judicially the words of each, it was most probable that the mind of a capricious woman would prove incapable of giving him fair play.

Yes, the friends of the player, as they sat silent in the Queen's antechamber to await the arrival of Grisewood were uneasy indeed. The man was known as a cunning plausible, unscrupulous adventurer. He was not likely to be over-nice as to the means he used to save his neck. And one and all felt that already the case was prejudged.

Presently Pembroke and Raleigh, who were officers of the Household, withdrew. The playwright and his friend the tragedian were left together. The hearts of both were too full for speech. The time passed very slowly. Each hour seemed interminable. The day wore on but still there came no summons to the Queen's presence. After a while, food was brought to them at the instance of a friendly official. But they were without appetite, and did not touch it. Their minds were wholly preoccupied with the subject of life and death.

In all that long time, which seemed interminable, not a word was exchanged between the playwright and the tragedian. Yet in the manner of a pair of children, they sat very close together, the hand of Burbage holding that of his friend. He was his elder brother, his protector; he

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felt an overmastering desire to shield that shy and delicate spirit from the harsh rebuffs of fate.

At last, about four o'clock of the afternoon, came the dread summons to the Queen. It was conveyed by the Lord Treasurer in person. There was nothing to learn from that lofty and formal mien. The measured deportment, the detached air told nothing. He who so often was called to be the arbiter of life and death in the daily routine of his high office betrayed not the least emotion. Indeed, the grim question now at issue appeared to touch him not at all.

The Queen was taking her ease on a gorgeous gilt couch. One of her ladies, who was working a sampler in silk, was seated on a low stool at her side. She was a dark and handsome young woman with restless, brilliant and piercing eyes. As soon as the playwright entered the room, they met his in a kind of challenge, half of cynical interest, half of mockery. A slow, rather insolent smile curled her lips. For a very brief instant, the poet was obviously disconcerted. But almost at once, he had exercised the whole force of his will and was able to attend that other woman who held his life in her hand.

The Queen sat up on her couch.

"Master Shakespeare," she said, "I have to inform you that the man, Grisewood, is dead."

"Dead!" gasped the player.

"Yes," said the Queen, "he is dead. He has been found at his lodging with his throat cut. And there can be little doubt, as I am given to understand, that he has died by his own hand."

The player stood in silence, looking straight in front of him. There came a violent surge and onrush of his

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thoughts. In the sensitive and generous mind, relief for the good riddance of a bad man was tempered with a emotion of pity for an end so ignoble.

"I have to say this, Master Shakespeare." The voice of the Queen, which sounded very far away, broke in upon the heavy tumult of his thoughts. "The death of this man, Grisewood, removed a most material witness. He alone could have proved or disproved your statement."

By now, however, the playwright had regained full command of himself. Calmly, he sustained the force of the Queen's gaze. The somber yet wonderful eyes were fixed on the raddled and rather peevish face.

"Under the favor of your grace," he said, speaking very slowly and in the manner of one who chooses his words with the utmost care, "Sir Robert Grisewood has already attested to the truth of the statement which I have made."

"In what way, sirrah? By what means?" said the Queen, sharply.

"By the taking of his own life," said the playwright. "It is a clear confession of the knowledge that he is un-
done."

"How should he have any such knowledge?"

"He was present yesterday, your grace, in the pavilion, when I rehearsed the story of his crime. I marked his livid face among the audience. It is one I shall never forget."

The Queen nodded her head, but did not speak.

"My eyes were fixed, your grace, upon that man's face when I said I held the proof of his guilt. I saw his cheeks turn to the color of his ruff. And by that I knew there

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was confirmation of my statement had confirmation been required."

"The man was an arrant coward," said the Queen, contemptuously. "But such evidence of his guilt does not convince me. How say you, my lord?" She turned to Cecil peremptorily.

The statesman did not answer the question immediately. For the moment, that powerful and deep-seeing mind was much preoccupied. And when answer he did, it was with the air of a man enfolded by a sense of profound and settled conviction.

"By leave of your grace," he said, "and under your good favor, I am bound to confess that I share the view of this matter which is held by Master Shakespeare. In my humble opinion, the death of this man in such circumstances is an irrefragable evidence of his guilt."

The Queen was now sitting very upright. The lean features had assumed a look of sharpest inquiry. A round oath fell from her lips.

"By God's body, my lord, I begin to think you are in the right!"

She was a woman of capricious temper. The milk of human kindness flowed an uncertain stream in that sterile heart. But her ears were never quite deaf to the voice of reason. Moreover, there were occasions when a sense of justice overtook her.

It began almost to seem that this occasion was likely to be one of them.

"Tell me, my lord," she demanded, "is this to say that you accept, as a matter of sober verity, that the handwriting of Simon Heriot is contained in this paper?"

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"Yes, your grace, I am of that opinion."

"You are satisfied that the man, Simon Heriot, wrote this confession with his own hand?"

"Yes, your grace, that is the view I hold. In the first place, I have taken the opportunity to compare the writing in the paper with that of another document in the same hand. And may it please your grace that I am fully satisfied that they are one and the same. And, further, I will add that the death in such circumstances of such a man convinces me that a grievous miscarriage of justice has been perpetrated in the case of the young man, George vase Heriot."

Another round oath rose to the lips of the Queen. She got up impulsively from her couch. The heart of a woman had begun to stir in that withered and grotesque frame.

"My lord, if that is your opinion, we must go further into this," she said. "Upon my life, we must not send to the ax those who have done nothing to deserve it."

"To that, your grace, I say amen with all my heart," said the Lord Treasurer, assuming an air of simple human kindness, which really became him very well indeed.

"Let this young man, Heriot, attend us here and now," said the Queen.

"Unfortunately, both Mr. Heriot and Mistress Feversham have already been removed to the Tower," said the Lord Treasurer, "until the pleasure of your Majesty be further known."

"Let the young man be brought to us at once," said the Queen. "And the girl also."

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"The commands of your Majesty shall be obeyed," said the Lord Treasurer. "Both prisoners shall be sent for immediately."

With a low bow, the minister quitted the room.

A subtle but marked change had suddenly taken place in the Queen's manner. She turned to the playwright with a certain kindness in the hard eyes.

"Belike, sirrah," she said, "your play may prove a comedy, after all."

The playwright stood before her in silence with bent head. In the strong frame, with its tense outlines, was a profound humility which the Queen was wholly at a loss to understand.

"How say you, sirrah? Would you not have it so?"

"Life is never a comedy, your grace," said the playwright, speaking very gently, almost as one who thinks aloud.

"A dark saying," said the Queen. "How say you, Mary?" She turned, with an ironical air, to the young woman who was working so busily upon the sampler. Perhaps Master Shakespeare will expound it for us out of the infinite store of his wisdom. You don't find life a very tragic matter, eh, my girl, you who have the whole world at your feet?"

The august lady gave her gentlewoman a light box on the ear.

Mistress Fytton, whose dark and brilliant beauty had its sinister aspect, rose from her stool with a sigh and a little laugh.

"It is the business of a poet, your grace, to be melancholy," said Mistress Mary.

"Yes, I had not thought of that," said the Queen.

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"But I suspect, Miss Malapert, you know more of poets than I do."

"God forbid, your grace," Mistress Mary made a deep but mocking curtesy.

"You impudent hussy!"

'And this time, the royal lady gave her gentlewoman so sound a box on the ear, that it rang through the room.

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CHAPTER XXXIX

GERVASE and Anne had been taken the previous evening from Richmond to the Tower. They were placed in a prison as dismal as on that occasion of their first meeting, which now seemed so far away in the past. But Gervase was better able now to prepare himself for the grim fate that too surely awaited him.

Both these children of destiny had had many weeks in which to make ready for that which was now to befall them. Their souls were numb. Long ago, they had given up all hope of life. Indeed, they had almost given up all desire of it, such had been their sufferings. The only boon they now craved of Providence was that they might be allowed to die together.

In the course of the afternoon of the first day of their imprisonment, word was brought to them that the Queen desired to see them at once, that they were to be carried before her immediately, and that she herself would there and then decide their fate.

They looked for no clemency. Unknown to each other, the prisoners were borne again to the palace at Richmond, each in a separate closed carriage, jealously guarded by soldiers with drawn swords. The gorgeous

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sunlight streamed in through the windows of their coaches, the dust of midsummer whirled around the wheels, but their minds were withdrawn from all outward and visible things. They felt they were going to their death. God grant that it be given to them to embrace it together!

On their arrival at the palace, shortly after six o'clock, they were taken at once to an antechamber, which was next the Queen's own apartment. Here they met again. And the solemn-faced, harsh-looking men who had them in their care had enough humanity to stand apart, while Anne yielded herself to the arms of Gervase.

"Have you the dagger?" she whispered, shaking convulsively.

"Alas! they have found it," said Gervase. "If only I had it now, I would plunge it into your heart . . . my life!"

"Oh, if only you had it!"

They had not long to wait for the dread summons to the Queen. All too soon appeared the Lord Treasurer. At once, he ushered them into the room where the Queen sat.

Gervase had cast off his disguise. No longer was he the aged and bearded Italian music master, but a trim and rather fine young man, dressed very soberly, to be sure, yet affecting a style not out of place at that Court, of which less than a year ago he had been an ornament.

Anne remained, however, in her charming boy's dress of the previous day. The lean grace of outline was rendered more poignant by the thin brown cheeks, the bright, grave eyes, the head of close-clipt curls. In the wistfulness of this frail figure, chastened by the long night

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of the soul, there was a pathos which struck at the hearts of all who beheld it.

Besides, the Queen and the Lord Treasurer, there was one other person in the room. Gervase and Anne, for all that they were passing through a nightmare of dull terror, were sensible of a presence in the background. It was their friend the play-actor, grave of look and yet unfearing; gentle, pitiful, and yet secure of soul. Somehow, the sight of him who had done so much, who had put his fortunes to the proof, nay, even life itself, that he might help them, moved these hapless lovers to new courage.

From the gentle face of this man, all compassion, all tenderness, their eyes sought that of the Queen. That was a very different countenance. And yet, as those hawklike eyes met theirs, a curious light ran in them. It was almost as if, in spite of herself, Elizabeth had been moved by the sight of this shadowy, yet dauntless thing, this *Rosalind* who yesterday had charmed her with her coquetry, her grace, her sorcery of voice and look.

"Mistress Feversham"—the harsh voice seemed to assault their ears, so sharp it was, so merciless—"I am given to understand you are a woman. But let me say that, in the moment I saw you first, I knew that you were that." Here the voice fell away with the oddest suddenness. A tense moment passed in which it seemed that the sovereign could hardly trust herself to speak. "And, by God, you are a brave woman! . . . a very brave woman, even if you are a very froward one."

The Queen turned abruptly to the Lord Treasurer. There was a sour and cruel smile on the thin lips.

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"Do we understand," she said, "that there is a boon Mistress Feversham would crave at our hands?"

A silence followed the question—a silence in which Elizabeth and her minister looked without pity upon the shrinking pair who stood before them.

In the next instant, Anne had cast herself on her knees at the Queen's feet.

But it was left to Gervase to speak. And he spoke as one who proudly asks a favor to which he feels he has clearly established a claim.

"Your grace." The young man sank to his knees. "We crave of your mercy that we be permitted to die together."

The Queen's answer was a swift glance at the Lord Treasurer. And then, perhaps, it may have been that she felt a sudden sting of remorse for the cruel nature of the play she was enacting. Yet the face of her adviser was as cold as stone. It bore no trace of feeling. And it may have been that such an impassiveness smote the heart of one who, after all, was a woman, with all a woman's emotions.

Involuntarily, as it seemed, the Queen turned her eyes from Cecil toward that other, that more human witness of the scene. Unconsciously, as if at the beck of an invisible power, her imperious gaze sought the mild one of him whose life was passed in the making of plays. His face, averted from a sight it could not endure, was melted with tears.

Of a sudden, something stirred in the Queen's heart. It was such a pang of nature as had not touched it for many a long year. The time was surely at hand in which to make an end of the cruel comedy. Upon a

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quick impulse in which the woman alone bore a part, and the tyrannical arbitress of life and death had no share, she raised the unhappy girl in her arms and gravely kissed her on the forehead.

"You are a brave thing," cried the harsh, rough voice. "By God, you are a brave thing. You shall suffer no more. Our pardon shall be granted to you, and also to this young man against whom as we are informed——"

But the sentence so fraught with destiny was never finished. The frail form had grown stiff and cold in the arms of the Queen.

CHAPTER XL

IT happened that one afternoon of early autumn, William Shakespeare rode out to Richmond, as he had done so many times of late, and sought poor Anne where she still lay in the house of a good friend. Her bed was in a charming chamber, from which she could see the sunlit Thames winding through its green valley. Gervase, thin and careworn, was kneeling by the bed, and his arms were holding its frail occupant.

For many days Anne had lain between life and death. But the fire of youth was in her veins. She had fine courage, moreover, pure strength of body, therefore Nature fought for her. And in the end Nature prevailed. Yet long after life itself had conquered, it was feared that reason, the sovereign goddess, would be dethroned forever in that finely tempered spirit.

Her friends never gave up hope. Many were the dark and cruel days in which she hovered upon the verge of that abyss, by comparison with which death itself is more than kind. And at last, very slowly, very fitfully, the wisdom, the patience, the devotion of those that watched over her met with their reward.

When at last it became known that the grimmest of all her perils was past, there were those of her friends who

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laid upon a certain famous man as being the foremost of their number, the happy task of bearing the tidings to the Queen that all was well with poor *Rosalind*.

The player, humble-minded as he was, would have been the last man in the world to arrogate to himself any such privilege. But the insistence of Anne's friends was strong. Well they knew the valiant part this man had played. Moreover, the Queen, it seemed, had caused many inquiries to be made of "the brave thing" who was fighting the sternest of all her battles. The heart of the woman had been moved by the gallant story. It may have been that Gloriana felt that honor had been done to the sex of which she herself was a foremost ornament. She may have felt that even in an heroic age here was a fitting mother for heroes.

Be that as it may, the heart of the woman had been melted. And that golden afternoon, William Shakespeare was the bearer of glad tidings from the Queen in her palace at Greenwich. She was graciously pleased to grant a full and free pardon to Gervase Heriot and Anne Feversham.

There was a look of joy in the face of the player as he entered her chamber with the high news. He found her propped up with pillows, thin as a ghost, but her eyes were no longer wild. By the side of the bed knelt Gervase. One arm clasped the frail form that now was all his life; and in one hand he held the newly printed and authentic version of the tragical history of "Romeo and Juliet" which he was reading to Anne in his gentle voice.

"Ah, here is the author himself."

Gervase laid the book down on the counterpane and

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rose with a shy smile. The lovers greeted their friend, to whom they owed everything, with shining eyes. The player's apology for so unseasonably disturbing them was humorously tender, but such news admitted no delay.

"I am the bearer of great tidings," the player cried. "All is forgiven."

There came a silence, and then "All!" gasped Anne.

"All," said the player. "All is forgiven you by Gloriana in her clemency."

Again a silence.

"But my father!"

The three simple words seemed almost to tear at the heart of the poet.

"All is forgiven him also."

That also was true.

"But why does he not come to me? Is it that he will not?"

Alas, that was a question the poet dare not answer. The plain truth was he knew not in what sort to answer it. As soon as the Queen had been apprised of Sir John Feversham's complete innocence, almost her first act had been to order his immediate release from the Tower. But even when a free pardon had been granted to him and he was once more at liberty and no longer in danger of losing his head, he was yet a very unhappy man. He was as one completely overborne by the sense of his daughter's crime. Even as she lay in her extremity, he could not be induced to visit her, nor even to speak of her. And now that the awful force of her suffering was past, and wan and spent, yet with mind at last clear and reasonable, poor Anne waited in vain for her father's coming. A powerful nature had been

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wounded to the depths. It was not the act of filial treachery that Sir John Feversham found unforgivable; it was the disloyalty to the august sovereign whom he had served all his days that he found impossible to overpass.

Now it chanced that one man, and he the most devoted among all the friends of Mistress Anne had had the wit to realize the why and wherefore of this. Shakespeare saw clearly that even if the outraged father had been able to forgive, the loyal and devoted subject yet found it impossible so to do. And no sooner did this tender-hearted maker of plays realize that such was the case than daring greatly he went to the Queen.

"That is a matter, Master Shakespeare, in which we may never be able to move," was the Queen's answer. "And yet perhaps. . . ."

For the present, the player felt he must rest content with that.

In the meantime, the author of the tragical history of "Romeo and Juliet" had to suffer the entreaties of this pair of young lovers that he should remain and read to them a portion of that wondrous tale of love which he had given to the world in the spring tide of his own youth.

The poet was not proof against the importunities of these children of destiny whom he had come to love with a father's tenderness. Therefore he took his book presently from the hands of Gervase and sat at the bed foot. In his low and clear voice he began to read the immortal story.

Hand in hand, their fingers intertwined, Anne and Gervase listened with strange rapture. That recital was

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ever afterwards to be a landmark in their lives. The romance which ravished their ears had its parallel in their own experience. They could live again their hours of supremest exaltation. Was it not all distilled in those magical pages? It has been the destiny of this story of ill-starred love to evoke the wide world over the tears of those who have known a great passion. But here were two who had greatly loved to whom even the author's own rendering of the exquisite story brought no tears.

To such a nadir of the spirit had these twin souls descended that it seemed to them then that they could never weep again. They could never weep again, yet were they very far from being unhappy. Still, even now they could hardly realize the nature of the miracle that had happened to them. Gervase was a free man; life and liberty had been granted to him; Anne had been given back her reason; and henceforward the only fetters they were to know were to be the silken one each imposed upon the other. Yet it was all very hard to realize!

While the poet continued to read his noble invention he was gravely preoccupied. His thoughts were forever straying from the creatures of his fancy to that wan and fragile thing propped up with pillows who looked as if she could never smile nor weep again. If only Sir John Feversham could come to his daughter now! If only the forgiveness of that just man could be granted to her! Even as he read, the words of the Queen were ever in his ears. "It is a matter, Master Shakespeare, in which we may never be able to move. And yet perhaps . . . !"

The poet, however, had wrought better than he knew.

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His plea to Gloriana had not fallen barren on those august ears. The girl had earned absolution by her courage, nor had the Queen been slow to make her pleasure known to Sir John Feversham.

And so it came to pass that the poet was still seated at the bed foot reading aloud to these children of destiny his entrancing tale of love when a servant entered the room. A few words were whispered into the poet's ear. And then with a sudden startled smile, William Shakespeare laid down the book on the bed and went hastily out of the room.

It seemed that a miracle had happened. Sir John Feversham had arrived at that house, was waiting below and was desirous of seeing his daughter.

Only a very little while was William Shakespeare gone from the room. He had soon returned, to usher into the sunlit chamber a man who looked strangely bent and old. His hair was perfectly white. Sir John Feversham had changed much in appearance. And the events of more than one lifetime had been crowded into poor Anne's experience since last she had seen her father.

At first she did not realize who the frail man was with the snow-white hair who had come into the room.

It was not indeed until this grave personage informed Anne that he was come from the Queen with a present and a message that she recognized her father. And even then it may have been the slow and deep melancholy of the voice that told her. She gave a little wild cry, and clutched Gervase with a sudden pang of terror. But there was nought in her father's voice nor in his bearing to inspire it now.

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With a gesture all humility, as one who knows that the will of man is little, and that man himself is hardly more than a puppet in the hands of fate, Sir John Feversham knelt by the bed and gave his daughter a kiss on the lips.

"It is the token of the Queen's forgiveness," he said, "which I am commanded to bring you."

Anne shivered. Dry-eyed and in silence, her arms were flung round her father's neck. It was as if she also had come to understand that she was no more than a plaything in the hands of fate.

The Queen's messenger rose from his knees. 'And now for all his look of frailty which was almost pitiful, he had the tense and vital air of a man of affairs who is proud to serve a great sovereign.

"Further I am bidden by the Queen's majesty," he said in his slow and melancholy speech which was yet like a fine and rare music, "to bestow upon you, Mistress Anne Feversham, in her name, this chaplet of pearls."

As Sir John spoke he took a small shagreen case out of the lining of his cloak. It contained a small necklace.

"At the Queen's behest, thus do I place it round your throat, Mistress Anne Feversham. Moreover, it is her Majesty's express command that you be well and strong again by Twelfth Night, since noon of that day is the hour her Majesty has appointed for the celebration of your nuptials with Mr. Gervase Heriot in the Chapel of her grandfather within the Abbey at Westminster. The Queen hopes herself to be present on the occasion. And I am further to inform you that on the eve of that day Mr. William Shakespeare, to whose efforts on your behalf the late signal acts of the Royal clemency are wholly

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duc, has undertaken to present a new interlude to the Queen and the ladies and gentlemen of her Court. His former ones, the Queen commands me to say,"—Sir John Feversham bowed to the playwright who with a grave smile bowed to him again—"have been much admired."

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