

CHAPTER III

IN WHICH I MARRY IN HASTE

THE long service of praise and thanksgiving was well-nigh over when I first saw her.

She sat some ten feet from me, in the corner, and so in the shadow of a tall pew. Beyond her was a row of milkmaid beauties, red of cheek, free of eye, deep-bosomed, and beribboned like Maypoles. I looked again, and saw — and see — a rose amongst blowzed poppies and peonies, a pearl amidst glass beads, a Perdita in a ring of rustics, a nonparella of all grace and beauty! As I gazed with all my eyes, I found more than grace and beauty in that wonderful face, — found pride, wit, fire, determination, finally shame and anger. For, feeling my eyes upon her, she looked up and met what she must have thought the impudent stare of an appraiser. Her face, which had been without color, pale and clear like the sky about the evening star, went crimson in a moment. She bit her lip and shot at me one withering glance, then dropped her eyelids and hid the lightning. When I looked at her again, covertly, and from under my hand raised as though to push back my hair, she was pale once more, and her dark eyes were fixed upon the water and the green trees without the window.

The congregation rose, and she stood up with the other maids. Her dress of dark woolen, severe and unadorned, her close ruff and prim white coif, would

have cried "Puritan," had ever Puritan looked like this woman, upon whom the poor apparel had the seeming of purple and ermine.

Anon came the benediction. Governor, Councilors, commanders, and ministers left the choir and paced solemnly down the aisle; the maids closed in behind; and we who had lined the walls, shifting from one heel to the other for a long two hours, brought up the rear; and so passed from the church to a fair green meadow adjacent thereto. Here the company disbanded; the wearers of gold lace betaking themselves to seats erected in the shadow of a mighty oak, and the ministers, of whom there were four, bestowing themselves within pulpits of turf. For one altar and one clergyman could not hope to dispatch that day's business.

As for the maids, for a minute or more they made one cluster; then, shyly or with laughter, they drifted apart like the petals of a wind-blown rose, and silk doublet and hose gave chase. Five minutes saw the goodly company of damsels errant and would-be bridegrooms scattered far and near over the smiling meadow. For the most part they went man and maid, but the fairer of the feminine cohort had rings of clamorous suitors from whom to choose. As for me, I walked alone; for if by chance I neared a maid, she looked (womanlike) at my apparel first, and never reached my face, but squarely turned her back. So disengaged, I felt like a guest at a mask, and in some measure enjoyed the show, though with an uneasy consciousness that I was pledged to become, sooner or later, a part of the spectacle. I saw a shepherdess fresh from Arcadia wave back a dozen importunate gallants, then throw a knot of blue ribbon into their

midst, laugh with glee at the scramble that ensued, and finally march off with the wearer of the favor. I saw a neighbor of mine, tall Jack Pride, who lived twelve miles above me, blush and stammer, and bow again and again to a milliner's apprentice of a girl, not five feet high and all eyes, who dropped a curtsy at each bow. When I had passed them fifty yards or more, and looked back, they were still bobbing and bowing. And I heard a dialogue between Phyllis and Corydon. Says Phyllis, "Any poultry?"

Corydon. "A matter of twalve hens and twa cocks."

Phyllis. "A cow?"

Corydon. "Twa."

Phyllis. "How much tobacco?"

Corydon. "Three acres, hinny, though I dinna drink the weed mysel'. I'm a Stewart, woman, an' the King's puir cousin."

Phyllis. "What household plenishing?"

Corydon. "Ane large bed, ane flock bed, ane trundle bed, ane chest, ane trunk, ane leather cairpet, sax cawfskin chairs an' twa-three rush, five pair o' sheets an' auchteen dowlas napkins, sax alchemy spunes" —

Phyllis. "I'll take you."

At the far end of the meadow, near to the fort, I met young Hamor, alone, flushed, and hurrying back to the more populous part of the field.

"Not yet mated?" I asked. "Where are the maids' eyes?"

"By —!" he answered, with an angry laugh. "If they're all like the sample I've just left, I'll buy me a squaw from the Paspahghs!"

I smiled. "So your wooing has not prospered?"

His vanity took fire. "I have not wooed in earnest," he said carelessly, and hitched forward his cloak of sky-blue tuftaffeta with an air. "I sheered off quickly enough, I warrant you, when I found the nature of the commodity I had to deal with."

"Ah!" I said. "When I left the crowd they were going very fast. You had best hurry, if you wish to secure a bargain."

"I'm off," he answered; then, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "If you keep on to the river and that clump of cedars, you will find Termagaunt in ruff and farthingale."

When he was gone, I stood still for a while and watched the slow sweep of a buzzard high in the blue, after which I unsheathed my dagger, and with it tried to scrape the dried mud from my boots. Succeeding but indifferently, I put the blade up, stared again at the sky, drew a long breath, and marched upon the covert of cedars indicated by Hamor.

As I neared it, I heard at first only the wash of the river; but presently there came to my ears the sound of a man's voice, and then a woman's angry "Begone, sir!"

"Kiss and be friends," said the man.

The sound that followed being something of the loudest for even the most hearty salutation, I was not surprised, on parting the bushes, to find the man nursing his cheek, and the maid her hand.

"You shall pay well for that, you sweet vixen!" he cried, and caught her by both wrists.

She struggled fiercely, bending her head this way and that, but his hot lips had touched her face before I could come between.

When I had knocked him down he lay where he

fell, dazed by the blow, and blinking up at me with his small ferret eyes. I knew him to be one Edward Sharpless, and I knew no good of him. He had been a lawyer in England. He lay on the very brink of the stream, with one arm touching the water. Flesh and blood could not resist it, so, assisted by the toe of my boot, he took a cold bath to cool his hot blood.

When he had clambered out and had gone away, cursing, I turned to face her. She stood against the trunk of a great cedar, her head thrown back, a spot of angry crimson in each cheek, one small hand clenched at her throat. I had heard her laugh as Sharpless touched the water, but now there was only defiance in her face. As we gazed at each other, a burst of laughter came to us from the meadow behind. I looked over my shoulder, and beheld young Hamor, — probably disappointed of a wife, — with Giles Allen and Wynne, returning to his abandoned quarry. She saw, too, for the crimson spread and deepened and her bosom heaved. Her dark eyes, glancing here and there like those of a hunted creature, met my own.

“Madam,” I said, “will you marry me?”

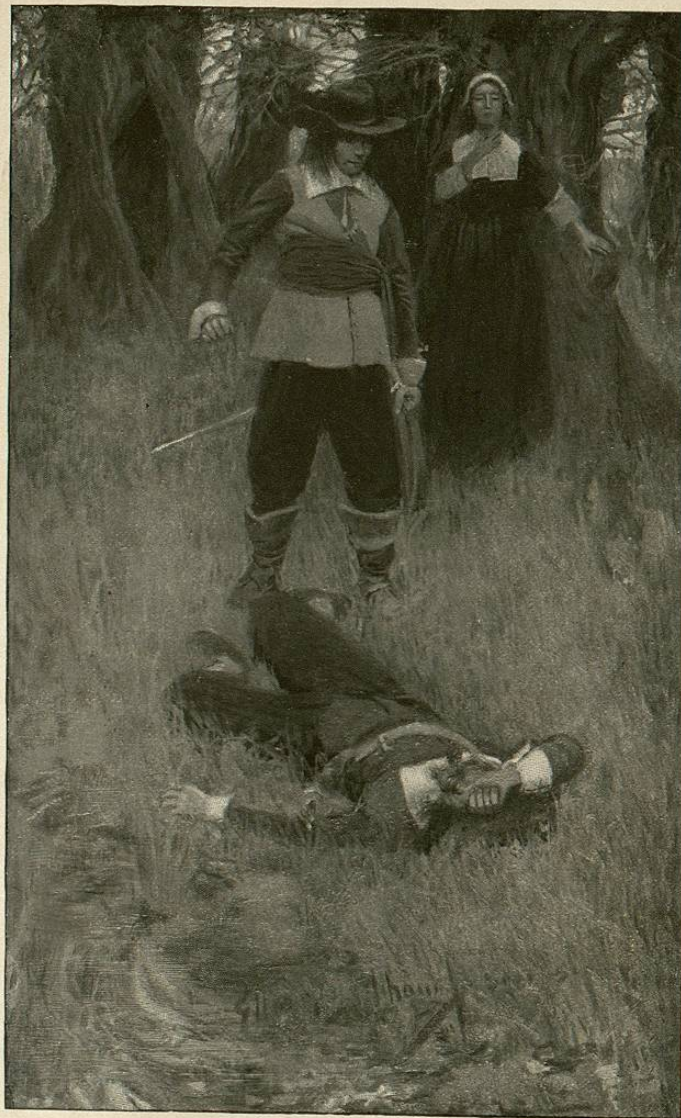
She looked at me strangely. “Do you live here?” she asked at last, with a disdainful wave of her hand toward the town.

“No, madam,” I answered. “I live up river, in Weyanoke Hundred, some miles from here.”

“Then, in God’s name, let us be gone!” she cried, with sudden passion.

I bowed low, and advanced to kiss her hand.

The finger tips which she slowly and reluctantly resigned to me were icy, and the look with which she favored me was not such an one as poets feign for like



HE LAY WHERE HE FELL, DAZED BY THE BLOW

occasions. I shrugged the shoulders of my spirit, but said nothing. So, hand in hand, though at arms' length, we passed from the shade of the cedars into the open meadow, where we presently met Hamor and his party. They would have barred the way, laughing and making unsavory jests, but I drew her closer to me and laid my hand upon my sword. They stood aside, for I was the best swordsman in Virginia.

The meadow was now less thronged. The river, up and down, was white with sailboats, and across the neck of the peninsula went a line of horsemen, each with his purchase upon a pillion behind him. The Governor, the Councilors, and the commanders had betaken themselves to the Governor's house, where a great dinner was to be given. But Master Piersey, the Cape Merchant, remained to see the Company reimbursed to the last leaf, and the four ministers still found occupation, though one couple trod not upon the heels of another, as they had done an hour ago.

"I must first satisfy the treasurer," I said, coming to a halt within fifty feet of the now deserted high places.

She drew her hand from mine, and looked me up and down.

"How much is it?" she asked at last. "I will pay it."

I stared at her.

"Can't you speak?" she cried, with a stamp of her foot. "At what am I valued? Ten pounds—fifty pounds"—

"At one hundred and twenty pounds of tobacco, madam," I said dryly. "I will pay it myself. To what name upon the ship's list do you answer?"

"Patience Worth," she replied.

I left her standing there, and went upon my errand with a whirling brain. Her enrollment in that company proclaimed her meanly born, and she bore herself as of blood royal; of her own free will she had crossed an ocean to meet this day, and she held in passionate hatred this day and all that it contained; she was come to Virginia to better her condition, and the purse which she had drawn from her bosom was filled with gold pieces. To another I would have advised caution, delay, application to the Governor, inquiry; for myself I cared not to make inquiries.

The treasurer gave me my receipt, and I procured, from the crowd around him, Humfrey Kent, a good man and true, and old Belfield, the perfumer, for witnesses. With them at my heels I went back to her, and, giving her my hand, was making for the nearest minister, when a voice at a little distance hailed me, crying out, "This way, Captain Percy!"

I turned toward the voice, and beheld the great figure of Master Jeremy Sparrow sitting, cross-legged like the Grand Turk, upon a grassy hillock, and beckoning to me from that elevation.

"Our acquaintance hath been of the shortest," he said genially, when the maid, the witnesses, and I had reached the foot of the hillock, "but I have taken a liking to you and would fain do you a service. Moreover, I lack employment. The maids take me for a hedge parson, and sheer off to my brethren, who truly are of a more clerical appearance. Whereas if they could only look upon the inner man! You have been long in choosing, but have doubtless chosen"— He glanced from me to the woman beside me, and broke off with open mouth and staring eyes. There was

excuse, for her beauty was amazing. "A paragon," he ended, recovering himself.

"Marry us quickly, friend," I said. "Clouds are gathering, and we have far to go."

He came down from his mound, and we went and stood before him. I had around my neck the gold chain given me upon a certain occasion by Prince Maurice, and in lieu of other ring I now twisted off the smallest link and gave it to her.

"Your name?" asked Master Sparrow, opening his book.

"Ralph Percy, Gentleman."

"And yours?" he demanded, staring at her with a somewhat too apparent delight in her beauty.

She flushed richly and bit her lip.

He repeated the question.

She stood a minute in silence, her eyes upon the darkening sky. Then she said in a low voice, "Jocelyn Leigh."

It was not the name I had watched the Cape Merchant strike off his list. I turned upon her and made her meet my eyes. "What is your name?" I demanded. "Tell me the truth!"

"I have told it," she answered proudly. "It is Jocelyn Leigh."

I faced the minister again. "Go on," I said briefly.

"The Company commands that no constraint be put upon its poor maids. Wherefore, do you marry this man of your own free will and choice?"

"Ay," she said, "of my own free will."

Well, we were married, and Master Jeremy Sparrow wished us joy, and Kent would have kissed the bride had I not frowned him off. He and Belfield strode

away, and I left her there, and went to get her bundle from the house that had sheltered her overnight. Returning, I found her seated on the turf, her chin in her hand and her dark eyes watching the distant play of lightning. Master Sparrow had left his post, and was nowhere to be seen.

I gave her my hand and led her to the shore; then loosed my boat and helped her aboard. I was pushing off when a voice hailed us from the bank, and the next instant a great bunch of red roses whirled past me and fell into her lap. "Sweets to the sweet, you know," said Master Jeremy Sparrow genially. "Good-wife Allen will never miss them."

I was in two minds whether to laugh or to swear, — for I had never given her flowers, — when she settled the question for me by raising the crimson mass and bestowing it upon the flood.

A sudden puff of wind brought the sail around, hiding his fallen countenance. The wind freshened, coming from the bay, and the boat was off like a startled deer. When I next saw him he had recovered his equanimity, and, with a smile upon his rugged features, was waving us a farewell. I looked at the beauty opposite me, and, with a sudden movement of pity for him, mateless, stood up and waved to him vigorously in turn.

CHAPTER IV

IN WHICH I AM LIKE TO REPENT AT LEISURE

WHEN we had passed the mouth of the Chickahominy, I broke the silence, now prolonged beyond reason, by pointing to the village upon its bank, and telling her something of Smith's expedition up that river, ending by asking her if she feared the savages.

When at length she succeeded in abstracting her attention from the clouds, it was to answer in the negative, in a tone of the supremest indifference, after which she relapsed into her contemplation of the weather.

Further on I tried again. "That is Kent's, yonder. He brought his wife from home last year. What a hedge of sunflowers she has planted! If you love flowers, you will find those of paradise in these woods."

No answer.

Below Martin-Brandon we met a canoe full of Paspahghs, bound upon a friendly visit to some one of the down-river tribes; for in the bottom of the boat reposed a fat buck, and at the feet of the young men lay trenchers of maize cakes and of late mulberries. I hailed them, and when we were alongside held up the brooch from my hat, then pointed to the purple fruit. The exchange was soon made; they sped away, and I placed the mulberries upon the thwart beside her.