

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.

"I am not hungry," she said coldly. "Take them away."

I bit my lip, and returned to my place at the tiller. This rose was set with thorns, and already I felt their sting. Presently she leaned back in the nest I had made for her. "I wish to sleep," she said haughtily, and, turning her face from me, pillowed her head upon her arms.

I sat, bent forward, the tiller in my hand, and stared at my wife in some consternation. This was not the tame pigeon, the rosy, humble, domestic creature who was to make me a home and rear me children. A sea bird with broad white wings swooped down upon the water, now dark and ridged, rested there a moment, then swept away into the heart of the gathering storm. She was liker such an one. Such birds were caught at times, but never tamed and never kept.

The lightning, which had played incessantly in pale flashes across the low clouds in the south, now leaped to higher peaks and became more vivid, and the muttering of the thunder changed to long, booming peals. Thirteen years before, the Virginia storms had struck us with terror. Compared with those of the Old World we had left, they were as cannon to the whistling of arrows, as breakers on an iron coast to the dull wash of level seas. Now they were nothing to me, but as the peals changed to great crashes as of falling cities, I marveled to see my wife sleeping so quietly. The rain began to fall, slowly, in large sullen drops, and I rose to cover her with my cloak. Then I saw that the sleep was feigned, for she was gazing at the storm with wide eyes, though with no fear in their dark depths. When I moved they closed,

and when I reached her the lashes still swept her cheeks, and she breathed evenly through parted lips. But, against her will, she shrank from my touch as I put the cloak about her; and when I had returned to my seat, I bent to one side and saw, as I had expected to see, that her eyes were wide open again. If she had been one whit less beautiful, I would have wished her back at Jamestown, back on the Atlantic, back at whatever outlandish place, where manners were unknown, that had owned her and cast her out. Pride and temper! I set my lips, and vowed that she should find her match.

The storm did not last. Ere we had reached Piersey's the rain had ceased and the clouds were breaking; above Chaplain's Choice hung a great rainbow; we passed Tants Weyanoke in the glory of the sunset, all shattered gold and crimson. Not a word had been spoken. I sat in a humor grim enough, and she lay there before me, wide awake, staring at the shifting banks and running water, and thinking that I thought she slept.

At last my own wharf rose before me through the gathering dusk, and beyond it shone out a light; for I had told Diccon to set my house in order, and to provide fire and torches, that my wife might see I wished to do her honor. I looked at that wife, and of a sudden the anger in my heart melted away. It was a wilderness vast and dreadful to which she had come. The mighty stream, the towering forests, the black skies and deafening thunder, the wild cries of bird and beast, the savages, uncouth and terrible,—for a moment I saw my world as the woman at my feet must see it, strange, wild, and menacing, an evil land, the other side of the moon. A thing that I had

forgotten came to my mind: how that, after our landing at Jamestown, years before, a boy whom we had with us did each night fill with cries and lamentations the hut where he lay with my cousin Percy, Gosnold, and myself, nor would cease though we tried both crying shame and a rope's end. It was not for homesickness, for he had no mother or kin or home; and at length Master Hunt brought him to confess that it was but pure panic terror of the land itself, — not of the Indians or of our hardships, both of which he faced bravely enough, but of the strange trees and the high and long roofs of vine, of the black sliding earth and the white mist, of the fireflies and the whip-poorwills, — a sick fear of primeval Nature and her tragic mask.

This was a woman, young, alone, and friendless, unless I, who had sworn to cherish and protect her, should prove myself her friend. Wherefore, when, a few minutes later, I bent over her, it was with all gentleness that I touched and spoke to her.

"Our journey is over," I said. "This is home, my dear."

She let me help her to her feet, and up the wet and slippery steps to the level of the wharf. It was now quite dark, there being no moon, and thin clouds obscuring the stars. The touch of her hand, which I perforce held since I must guide her over the long, narrow, and unrailed trestle, chilled me, and her breathing was hurried, but she moved by my side through the gross darkness unflinching enough. Arrived at the gate of the palisade, I beat upon it with the hilt of my sword, and shouted to my men to open to us. A moment, and a dozen torches came flaring down the bank. Diccon shot back the bolts,

and we entered. The men drew up and saluted; for I held my manor a camp, my servants soldiers, and myself their captain.

I have seen worse favored companies, but doubtless the woman beside me had not. Perhaps, too, the red light of the torches, now flaring brightly, now sunk before the wind, gave their countenances a more villainous cast than usual. They were not all bad. Diccon had the virtue of fidelity, if none other; there were a brace of Puritans, and a handful of honest fools, who, if they drilled badly, yet abhorred mutiny. But the half dozen I had taken off Argall's hands; the Dutchmen who might have been own brothers to those two Judases, Adam and Francis; the thief and the highwayman I had bought from the precious crew sent us by the King the year before; the negro and the Indians — small wonder that she shrank and cowered. It was but for a moment. I was yet seeking for words sufficiently reassuring when she was herself again. She did not deign to notice the men's awkward salute, and when Diccon, a handsome rogue enough, advancing to light us up the bank, brushed by her something too closely, she drew away her skirts as though he had been a lazar. At my own door I turned and spoke to the men, who had followed us up the ascent.

"This lady," I said, taking her hand as she stood beside me, "is my true and lawful wife, your mistress, to be honored and obeyed as such. Who fails in reverence to her I hold as mutinous to myself, and will deal with him accordingly. She gives you to-morrow for holiday, with double rations, and to each a measure of rum. Now thank her properly."

They cheered lustily, of course, and Diccon, step-

ping forward, gave us thanks in the name of them all, and wished us joy. After which, with another cheer, they backed from out our presence, then turned and made for their quarters, while I led my wife within the house and closed the door.

Diccon was an ingenious scoundrel. I had told him to banish the dogs, to have the house cleaned and lit, and supper upon the table; but I had not ordered the floor to be strewn with rushes, the walls draped with flowering vines, a great jar filled with sunflowers, and an illumination of a dozen torches. Nevertheless, it looked well, and I highly approved the capon and maize cakes, the venison pasty and ale, with which the table was set. Through the open doors of the two other rooms were to be seen more rushes, more flowers, and more lights.

To the larger of these rooms I now led the way, deposited her bundle upon the settle, and saw that Diccon had provided fair water for her face and hands; which done, I told her that supper waited upon her convenience, and went back to the great room.

She was long in coming, so long that I grew impatient and went to call her. The door was ajar, and so I saw her, kneeling in the middle of the floor, her head thrown back, her hands raised and clasped, on her face terror and anguish of spirit written so large that I started to see it. I stared in amazement, and, had I followed my first impulse, would have gone to her, as I would have gone to any other creature in so dire distress. On second thoughts, I went noiselessly back to my station in the great room. She had not seen me, I was sure. Nor had I long to wait. Presently she appeared, and I could have doubted the testimony of my eyes, so changed were the agonized

face and figure of a few moments before. Beautiful and disdainful, she moved to the table, and took the great chair drawn before it with the air of an empress mounting a throne. I contented myself with the stool.

She ate nothing, and scarcely touched the canary I poured for her. I pressed upon her wine and viands, — in vain; I strove to make conversation, — equally in vain. Finally, tired of “yes” and “no” uttered as though she were reluctantly casting pearls before swine, I desisted, and applied myself to my supper in a silence as sullen as her own. At last we rose from table, and I went to look to the fastenings of door and windows, and returning found her standing in the centre of the room, her head up and her hands clenched at her sides. I saw that we were to have it out then and there, and I was glad of it.

“You have something to say,” I said. “I am quite at your command,” and I went and leaned against the chimney-piece.

The low fire upon the hearth burnt lower still before she broke the silence. When she did speak it was slowly, and with a voice which was evidently controlled only by a strong effort of a strong will. She said: —

“When — yesterday, to-day, ten thousand years ago — you went from this horrible forest down to that wretched village yonder, to those huts that make your London, you went to buy you a wife?”

“Yes, madam,” I answered. “I went with that intention.”

“You had made your calculation? In your mind you had pitched upon such and such an article, with such and such qualities, as desirable? Doubtless you meant to get your money’s worth?”

"Doubtless," I said dryly.

"Will you tell me what you were inclined to consider its equivalent?"

I stared at her, much inclined to laugh. The interview promised to be interesting.

"I went to Jamestown to get me a wife," I said at length, "because I had pledged my word that I would do so. I was not over-anxious. I did not run all the way. But, as you say, I intended to do the best I could for myself; one hundred and twenty pounds of tobacco being a considerable sum, and not to be lightly thrown away. I went to look for a mistress for my house, a companion for my idle hours, a rosy, humble, docile lass, with no aspirations beyond cleanliness and good temper, who was to order my household and make me a home. I was to be her head and her law, but also her sword and shield. That is what I went to look for."

"And you found — me!" she said, and broke into strange laughter.

I bowed.

"In God's name, why did you not go further?"

I suppose she saw in my face why I went no further, for into her own the color came flaming.

"I am not what I seem!" she cried out. "I was not in that company of choice!"

I bowed again. "You have no need to tell me that, madam," I said. "I have eyes. I desire to know why you were there at all, and why you married me."

She turned from me, until I could see nothing but the coiled wealth of her hair and the bit of white neck between it and the ruff. We stood so in silence, she with bent head and fingers clasping and unclasping, I leaning against the wall and staring at her, for

what seemed a long time. At least I had time to grow impatient, when she faced me again, and all my irritation vanished in a gasp of admiration.

Oh, she was beautiful, and of a sweetness most alluring and fatal! Had Medea worn such a look, sure Jason had quite forgot the fleece, and with those eyes Circe had needed no other charm to make men what she would. Her voice, when she spoke, was no longer imperious; it was low pleading music. And she held out entreating hands.

"Have pity on me," she said. "Listen kindly, and have pity on me. You are a strong man and wear a sword. You can cut your way through trouble and peril. I am a woman, weak, friendless, helpless. I was in distress and peril, and I had no arm to save, no knight to fight my battle. I do not love deceit. Ah, do not think that I have not hated myself for the lie I have been. But these forest creatures that you take, — will they not bite against springe and snare? Are they scrupulous as to how they free themselves? I too was in the toils of the hunter, and I too was not scrupulous. There was a thing of which I stood in danger that would have been bitterer to me, a thousand times, than death. I had but one thought, to escape; how, I did not care, — only to escape. I had a waiting woman named Patience Worth. One night she came to me, weeping. She had wearied of service, and had signed to go to Virginia as one of Sir Edwyn Sandys' maids, and at the last moment her heart had failed her. There had been pressure brought to bear upon me that day, — I had been angered to the very soul. I sent her away with a heavy bribe, and in her dress and under her name I fled from — I went aboard that ship. No one guessed that I was

not the Patience Worth to whose name I answered. No one knows now, — none but you, none but you.”

“And why am I so far honored, madam?” I said bluntly.

She crimsoned, then went white again. She was trembling now through her whole frame. At last she broke out: “I am not of that crew that came to marry! To me you are the veriest stranger, — you are but the hand at which I caught to draw myself from a pit that had been digged for me. It was my hope that this hour would never come. When I fled, mad for escape, willing to dare anything but that which I left behind, I thought, ‘I may die before that ship with its shameless cargo sets sail.’ When the ship set sail, and we met with stormy weather, and there was much sickness aboard, I thought, ‘I may drown or I may die of the fever.’ When, this afternoon, I lay there in the boat, coming up this dreadful river through the glare of the lightning, and you thought I slept, I was thinking, ‘The bolts may strike me yet, and all will be well.’ I prayed for that death, but the storm passed. I am not without shame. I know that you must think all ill of me, that you must feel yourself gulled and cheated. I am sorry — that is all I can say — I am sorry. I am your wife — I was married to you to-day — but I know you not and love you not. I ask you to hold me as I hold myself, a guest in your house, nothing more. I am quite at your mercy. I am entirely friendless, entirely alone. I appeal to your generosity, to your honor” —

Before I could prevent her she was kneeling to me, and she would not rise, though I bade her do so.

I went to the door, unbarred it, and looked out into the night, for the air within the room stifled me. It

was not much better outside. The clouds had gathered again, and were now hanging thick and low. From the distance came a rumble of thunder, and the whole night was dull, heavy, and breathless. Hot anger possessed me: anger against Rolfe for suggesting this thing to me; anger against myself for that unlucky throw; anger, most of all, against the woman who had so cozened me. In the servants’ huts, a hundred yards away, lights were still burning, against rule, for the hour was late. Glad that there was something I could rail out against, I strode down upon the men, and caught them assembled in Diccon’s cabin, dicing for to-morrow’s rum. When I had struck out the light with my rapier, and had rated the rogues to their several quarters, I went back through the gathering storm to the brightly-lit, flower-decked room, and to Mistress Percy.

She was still kneeling, her hands at her breast, and her eyes, wide and dark, fixed upon the blackness without the open door. I went up to her and took her by the hand.

“I am a gentleman, madam,” I said. “You need have no fear of me. I pray you to rise.”

She stood up at that, and her breath came hurriedly through her parted lips, but she did not speak.

“It grows late, and you must be weary,” I continued. “Your room is yonder. I trust that you will sleep well. Good-night.”

I bowed low, and she curtsied to me. “Good-night,” she said.

On her way to the door, she brushed against the rack wherein hung my weapons. Among them was a small dagger. Her quick eye caught its gleam, and I saw her press closer to the wall, and with her right

hand strive stealthily to detach the blade from its fastening. She did not understand the trick. Her hand dropped to her side, and she was passing on, when I crossed the room, loosened the dagger, and offered it to her, with a smile and a bow. She flushed scarlet and bit her lips, but she took it.

"There are bars to the door within," I said. "Again, good-night."

"Good-night," she answered, and, entering the room, she shut the door. A moment more, and I heard the heavy bars drop into place.

CHAPTER V

IN WHICH A WOMAN HAS HER WAY

TEN days later, Rolfe, going down river in his barge, touched at my wharf, and finding me there walked with me toward the house.

"I have not seen you since you laughed my advice to scorn — and took it," he said. "Where's the farthingale, Benedick the married man?"

"In the house."

"Oh, ay!" he commented. "It's near to supper time. I trust she's a good cook?"

"She does not cook," I said dryly. "I have hired old Goody Cotton to do that."

He eyed me closely. "By all the gods! a new doublet! She is skillful with her needle, then?"

"She may be," I answered. "Having never seen her with one, I am no judge. The doublet was made by the tailor at Flowerdieu Hundred."

By this we had reached the level sward at the top of the bank. "Roses!" he exclaimed, — "a long row of them new planted! An arbor, too, and a seat beneath the big walnut! Since when hast thou turned gardner, Ralph?"

"It's Diccon's doing. He is anxious to please his mistress."

"Who neither sews, nor cooks, nor plants! What does she do?"

"She pulls the roses," I said. "Come in."