

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."

A very courtly company it was. You were laughing with my Lord Rich. You wore pearls in your hair" —

She met his gaze fully and boldly. "Memory plays us strange tricks at times," she told him in a clear, slightly raised voice, "and it hath been three years since Master Rolfe and his Indian princess were in London. His memory hath played him false."

She took her seat in the great chair which stood in the centre of the room, bathed in the sunlight, and the negress brought a cushion for her feet. It was not until this was done, and until she had resigned her fan to the slave, who stood behind her slowly waving the plumed toy to and fro, that she turned her lovely face upon us and bade us be seated.

An hour later a whippoorwill uttered its cry close to the window, through which now shone the crescent moon. Rolfe started up. "Beshrew me! but I had forgot that I am to sleep at Chaplain's to-night. I must hurry on."

I rose, also. "You have had no supper!" I cried. "I too have forgotten."

He shook his head. "I cannot wait. Moreover, I have feasted, — yea, and drunk deep."

His eyes were very bright, with an exaltation in them as of wine. Mine, I felt, had the same light. Indeed, we were both drunk with her laughter, her beauty, and her wit. When he had kissed her hand, and I had followed him out of the house and down the bank, he broke the silence.

"Why she came to Virginia I do not know" —

"Nor care to ask," I said.

"Nor care to ask," he repeated, meeting my gaze.

"And I know neither her name nor her rank. But

as I stand here, Ralph, I saw her, a guest, at that feast of which I spoke; and Edwyn Sandys picked not his maids from such assemblies."

I stopped him with my hand upon his shoulder. "She is one of Sandys' maids," I asserted, with deliberation, "a waiting damsel who wearied of service and came to Virginia to better herself. She was landed with her mates at Jamestown a week or more ago, went with them to church and thence to the courting meadow, where she and Captain Ralph Percy, a gentleman adventurer, so pleased each other that they were married forthwith. That same day he brought her to his house, where she now abides, his wife, and as such to be honored by those who call themselves his friends. And she is not to be lightly spoken of, nor comment passed upon her grace, beauty, and bearing (something too great for her station, I admit), lest idle tales should get abroad."

"Am I not thy friend, Ralph?" he asked with smiling eyes.

"I have thought so at times," I answered.

"My friend's honor is my honor," he went on. "Where his lips are sealed mine open not. Art content?"

"Content," I said, and pressed the hand he held out to me.

We reached the steps of the wharf, and descending them he entered his barge, rocking lazily with the advancing tide. His rowers cast loose from the piles, and the black water slowly widened between us. From over my shoulder came a sudden bright gleam of light from the house above, and I knew that Mistress Percy was as usual wasting good pine knots. I had a vision of the many lights within, and of the

beauty whom the world called my wife, sitting erect, bathed in that rosy glow, in the great armchair, with the turbaned negress behind her. I suppose Rolfe saw the same thing, for he looked from the light to me, and I heard him draw his breath.

"Ralph Percy, thou art the very button upon the cap of Fortune," he said.

To myself my laugh sounded something of the bitterest, but to him, I presume, it vaunted my return through the darkness to the lit room and its resplendent pearl. He waved farewell, and the dusk swallowed up him and his boat. I went back to the house and to her.

She was sitting as we had left her, with her small feet crossed upon the cushion beneath them, her hands folded in her silken lap, the air from the waving fan blowing tendrils of her dark hair against her delicate standing ruff. I went and leaned against the window, facing her.

"I have been chosen Burgess for this hundred," I said abruptly. "The Assembly meets next week. I must be in Jamestown then and for some time to come."

She took the fan from the negress, and waved it lazily to and fro. "When do we go?" she asked at last.

"We!" I answered. "I had thought to go alone."

The fan dropped to the floor, and her eyes opened wide. "And leave me here!" she exclaimed. "Leave me in these woods, at the mercy of Indians, wolves, and your rabble of servants!"

I smiled. "We are at peace with the Indians; it would be a stout wolf that could leap this palisade; and the servants know their master too well to care

to offend their mistress. Moreover, I would leave Diccon in charge."

"Diccon!" she cried. "The old woman in the kitchen hath told me tales of Diccon! Diccon Bravo! Diccon Gamester! Diccon Cutthroat!"

"Granted," I said. "But Diccon Faithful as well. I can trust him."

"But I do not trust him!" she retorted. "And I wish to go to Jamestown. This forest wearies me." Her tone was imperious.

"I must think it over," I said coolly. "I may take you, or I may not. I cannot tell yet."

"But I desire to go, sir!"

"And I may desire you to stay."

"You are a churl!"

I bowed. "I am the man of your choice, madam."

She rose with a stamp of her foot, and, turning her back upon me, took a flower from the table and commenced to pull from it its petals. I unsheathed my sword, and, seating myself, began to polish away a speck of rust upon the blade. Ten minutes later I looked up from the task, to receive full in my face a red rose tossed from the other side of the room. The missile was followed by an enchanting burst of laughter.

"We cannot afford to quarrel, can we?" cried Mistress Jocelyn Percy. "Life is sad enough in this solitude without that. Nothing but trees and water all day long, and not a soul to speak to! And I am horribly afraid of the Indians! What if they were to kill me while you were away? You know you swore before the minister to protect me. You won't leave me to the mercies of the savages, will you? And I may go to Jamestown, may n't I? I want to

go to church. I want to go to the Governor's house. I want to buy a many things. I have gold in plenty, and but this one decent dress. You'll take me with you, won't you?"

"There's not your like in Virginia," I told her. "If you go to town clad like that and with that bearing, there will be talk enough. And ships come and go, and there are those besides Rolfe who have been to London."

For a moment the laughter died from her eyes and lips, but it returned. "Let them talk," she said. "What care I? And I do not think your ship captains, your traders and adventurers, do often dine with my lord bishop. This barbarous forest world and another world that I wot of are so far apart that the inhabitants of the one do not trouble those of the other. In that petty village down there I am safe enough. Besides, sir, you wear a sword."

"My sword is ever at your service, madam."

"Then I may go to Jamestown?"

"If you will it so."

With her bright eyes upon me, and with one hand softly striking a rose against her laughing lips, she extended the other hand.

"You may kiss it, if you wish, sir," she said demurely.

I knelt and kissed the white fingers, and four days later we went to Jamestown.

## CHAPTER VI

### IN WHICH WE GO TO JAMESTOWN

It was early morning when we set out on horseback for Jamestown. I rode in front, with Mistress Percy upon a pillion behind me, and Diccon on the brown mare brought up the rear. The negress and the mails I had sent by boat.

Now, a ride through the green wood with a noble horse beneath you, and around you the freshness of the morn, is pleasant enough. Each twig had its row of diamonds, and the wet leaves that we pushed aside spilled gems upon us. The horses set their hoofs daintily upon fern and moss and lush grass. In the purple distances deer stood at gaze, the air rang with innumerable bird notes, clear and sweet, squirrels chattered, bees hummed, and through the thick leafy roof of the forest the sun showered gold dust. And Mistress Jocelyn Percy was as merry as the morning. It was now fourteen days since she and I had first met, and in that time I had found in her thrice that number of moods. She could be as gay and sweet as the morning, as dark and vengeful as the storms that came up of afternoons, pensive as the twilight, stately as the night, — in her there met a hundred minds. Also she could be childishly frank — and tell you nothing.

To-day she chose to be gracious. Ten times in an hour Diccon was off his horse to pluck this or that

When we had entered the house he stared about him; then cried out, "Acrasia's bower! Oh, thou sometime Guyon!" and began to laugh.

It was late afternoon, and the slant sunshine streaming in at door and window striped wall and floor with gold. Floor and wall were no longer logs gnarled and stained: upon the one lay a carpet of delicate ferns and aromatic leaves, and glossy vines, purple-berried, tapestried the other. Flowers — purple and red and yellow — were everywhere. As we entered, a figure started up from the hearth.

"St. George!" exclaimed Rolfe. "You have never married a blackamoor?"

"It is the negress, Angela," I said. "I bought her from William Pierce the other day. Mistress Percy wished a waiting damsel."

The creature, one of the five females of her kind then in Virginia, looked at us with large, rolling eyes. She knew a little Spanish, and I spoke to her in that tongue, bidding her find her mistress and tell her that company waited. When she was gone I placed a jack of ale upon the table, and Rolfe and I sat down to discuss it. Had I been in a mood for laughter, I could have found reason in his puzzled face. There were flowers upon the table, and beside them a litter of small objects, one of which he now took up.

"A white glove," he said, "perfumed and silver-fringed, and of a size to fit Titania."

I spread its mate out upon my palm. "A woman's hand. Too white, too soft, and too small."

He touched lightly, one by one, the slender fingers of the glove he held. "A woman's hand, — strength in weakness, veiled power, the star in the mist, guiding, beckoning, drawing upward!"

I laughed and threw the glove from me. "The star, a will-of-the-wisp; the goal, a slough," I said.

As he sat opposite me a change came over his face, — a change so great that I knew before I turned that she was in the room.

The bundle which I had carried for her from Jamestown was neither small nor light. Why, when she fled, she chose to burden herself with such toys, or whether she gave a thought to the suspicions that might be raised in Virginia if one of Sir Edwyn's maids bedecked herself in silk and lace and jewels, I do not know, but she had brought to the forest and the tobacco fields the gauds of a maid of honor. The Puritan dress in which I first saw her was a thing of the past; she clothed herself now like the parrakeets in the forest, — or liker the lilies of the field, for verily she toiled not, neither did she spin.

Rolfe and I rose from our seats. "Mistress Percy," I said, "let me present to you a right worthy gentleman and my very good friend, Master John Rolfe."

She curtsied, and he bowed low. He was a man of quick wit and had been at court, but for a time he could find no words. Then: "Mistress Percy's face is not one to be forgotten. I have surely seen it before, though where" —

Her color mounted, but she answered him indifferently enough. "Probably in London, amongst the spectators of some pageant arranged in honor of the princess, your wife, sir," she said carelessly. "I had twice the fortune to see the Lady Rebekah passing through the streets."

"Not in the streets only," he said courteously. "I remember now: 't was at my lord bishop's dinner."