

## CHAPTER X

### IN WHICH MASTER PORY GAINS TIME TO SOME PURPOSE

ROLFE, coming down by boat from Varina, had reached the town in the dusk of that day which had seen the arrival of the Santa Teresa, and I had gone to him before I slept that night. Early morning found us together again in the field behind the church. We had not long to wait in the chill air and dew-drenched grass. When the red rim of the sun showed like a fire between the trunks of the pines came my Lord Carnal, and with him Master Pory and Dr. Lawrence Bohun.

My lord and I bowed to each other profoundly. Rolfe with my sword and Master Pory with my lord's stepped aside to measure the blades. Dr. Bohun, muttering something about the feverishness of the early air, wrapped his cloak about him, and huddled in among the roots of a gigantic cedar. I stood with my back to the church, and my face to the red water between us and the illimitable forest; my lord opposite me, six feet away. He was dressed again splendidly in black and scarlet, colors he much affected, and, with the dark beauty of his face and the arrogant grace with which he stood there waiting for his sword, made a picture worth looking upon.

Rolfe and the Secretary came back to us. "If you kill him, Ralph," said the former in a low voice, as

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he took my doublet from me, "you are to put yourself in my hands and do as you are bid."

"Which means that you will try to smuggle me north to the Dutch. Thanks, friend, but I'll see the play out here."

"You were ever obstinate, self-willed, reckless — and the man most to my heart," he continued. "Have your way, in God's name, but I wish not to see what will come of it! All's ready, Master Secretary."

Very slowly that worthy stooped down and examined the ground, narrowly and quite at his leisure. "I like it not, Master Rolfe," he declared at length. "Here is a molehill, and there a fairy ring."

"I see neither," said Rolfe. "It looks as smooth as a table. But we can easily shift under the cedars where there is no grass."

"Here's a projecting root," announced the Secretary, when the new ground had been reached.

Rolfe shrugged his shoulders, but we moved again.

"The light comes jaggedly through the branches," objected my lord's second. "Better try the open again."

Rolfe uttered an exclamation of impatience, and my lord stamped his foot on the ground. "What is this foolery, sir?" the latter cried fiercely. "The ground's well enough, and there's sufficient light to die by."

"Let the light pass, then," said his second resignedly. "Gentlemen, are you read — Ods blood! my lord, I had not noticed the roses upon your lordship's shoes! They are so large and have such a fall that they sweep the ground on either side your foot; you might stumble in all that dangling ribbon and lace. Allow me to remove them."

what you are, I will prevent any renewal of this duel, by fair means if I may, by foul if I must."

He left my lord, and came over to me. "Since when have you been upon my Lord Warwick's side, Ralph Percy?" he demanded, lowering his voice.

"I am not so," I said.

"Then appearances are mightily deceitful," he retorted.

"I know what you mean, Sir George," I answered. "I know that if the King's darling should meet death or maiming in this fashion, upon Virginian soil, the Company, already so out of favor, might find some difficulty in explaining things to his Majesty's satisfaction. But I think my Lord Southampton and Sir Edwyn Sandys and Sir George Yeardley equal to the task, especially if they are able to deliver to his Majesty the man whom his Majesty will doubtless consider the true and only rebel and murderer. Let us fight it out, sir. You can all retire to a distance and remain in profound ignorance of any such affair. If I fall, you have nothing to fear. If he falls, — why, I shall not run away, and the *Due Return* sails to-morrow."

He eyed me closely from under frowning brows.

"And when your wife's a widow, what then?" he asked abruptly.

I have not known many better men than this simple, straightforward, soldierly Governor. The manliness of his character begot trust, invited confidence. Men told him of their hidden troubles almost against their will, and afterward felt neither shame nor fear, knowing the simplicity of his thoughts and the reticence of his speech. I looked him in the eyes, and let him read what I would have shown to no other, and felt no

shame. "The Lord may raise her up a helper," I said. "At least she won't have to marry *him*."

He turned on his heel and moved back to his former station between us two. "My Lord Carnal," he said, "and you, Captain Percy, heed what I say; for what I say I will do. You may take your choice: either you will sheathe your swords here in my presence, giving me your word of honor that you will not draw them upon each other before his Majesty shall have made known his will in this matter to the Company, and the Company shall have transmitted it to me, in token of which truce between you you shall touch each other's hands; or you will pass the time between this and the return of the ship with the King's and the Company's will in strict confinement, — you, Captain Percy, in gaol, and you, my Lord Carnal, in my own poor house, where I will use my best endeavors to make the days pass as pleasantly as possible for your lordship. I have spoken, gentlemen."

There was no protest. For my own part, I knew Yeardley too well to attempt any; moreover, had I been in his place, his course should have been mine. For my Lord Carnal, — what black thoughts visited that fierce and sullen brain I know not, but there was acquiescence in his face, haughty, dark, and vengeful though it was. Slowly and as with one motion we sheathed our swords, and more slowly still repeated the few words after the Governor. His Honor's countenance shone with relief. "Take each other by the hand, gentlemen, and then let's all to breakfast at my own house, where there shall be no feud save with good capon pasty and jolly good ale." In dead silence my lord and I touched each other's finger tips.

The world was now a flood of sunshine, the mist on

the river vanishing, the birds singing, the trees waving in the pleasant morning air. From the town came the roll of the drum summoning all to the week-day service. The bells too began to ring, sounding sweetly through the clear air. The Governor took off his hat. "Let's all to church, gentlemen," he said gravely. "Our cheeks are flushed as with a fever and our pulses run high this morning. There be some among us, perhaps, that have in their hearts discontent, anger, and hatred. I know no better place to take such passions, provided we bring them not forth again."

We went in and sat down. Jeremy Sparrow was in the pulpit. Singly or in groups the town folk entered. Down the aisle strode bearded men, old soldiers, adventurers, sailors, scarred body and soul; young men followed, younger sons and younger brothers, prodigals whose portion had been spent, whose souls now ate of the husks; to the servants' benches came dull laborers, dimly comprehending, groping in the twilight; women entered softly and slowly, some with children clinging to their skirts. One came alone and knelt alone, her face shadowed by her mantle. Amongst the servants stood a slave or two, blindly staring, and behind them all one of that felon crew sent us by the King.

Through the open windows streamed the summer sunshine, soft and fragrant, impartial and unquestioning, caressing alike the uplifted face of the minister, the head of the convict, and all between. The minister's voice was grave and tender when he read and prayed, but in the hymn it rose above the people's like the voice of some mighty archangel. That triumphant singing shook the air, and still rang in the heart while we said the Creed.

When the service was over, the congregation waited for the Governor to pass out first. At the door he pressed me to go with him and his party to his own house, and I gave him thanks, but made excuse to stay away. When he and the nobleman who was his guest had left the churchyard, and the townspeople too were gone, I and my wife and the minister walked home together through the dewy meadow, with the splendor of the morning about us, and the birds caroling from every tree and thicket.

He unsheathed his knife, and, sinking upon his knees, began leisurely to sever the threads that held the roses to the leather. As he worked, he looked neither at the roses nor at my lord's angry face, but beneath his own bent arm toward the church and the town beyond.

How long he would have sawed away at the threads there is no telling; for my lord, amongst whose virtues patience was not one, broke from him, and with an oath stooped and tore away the offending roses with his own hand, then straightened himself and gripped his sword more closely. "I've learned one thing in this d—d land," he snarled, "and that is where not to choose a second. You, sir," to Rolfe, "give the word."

Master Pory rose from his knees, unruffled and unabashed, and still with a curiously absent expression upon his fat face and with his ears cocked in the direction of the church. "One moment, gentlemen," he said. "I have just bethought me" —

"On guard!" cried Rolfe, and cut him short.

The King's favorite was no mean antagonist. Once or twice the thought crossed my mind that here, where I least desired it, I had met my match. The apprehension passed. He fought as he lived, with a fierce intensity, a headlong passion, a brute force, bearing down and overwhelming most obstacles. But that I could tire him out I soon knew.

The incessant flash and clash of steel, the quick changes in position, the need to bring all powers of body and mind to aid of eye and wrist, the will to win, the shame of loss, the rage and lust of blood, — there was no sight or sound outside that trampled circle that could force itself upon our brain or make

us glance aside. If there was a sudden commotion amongst the three witnesses, if an expression of immense relief and childlike satisfaction reigned in Master Pory's face, we knew it not. We were both bleeding, — I from a pin prick on the shoulder, he from a touch beneath the arm. He made a desperate thrust, which I parried, and the blades clashed. A third came down upon them with such force that the sparks flew.

"In the King's name!" commanded the Governor.

We fell apart, panting, white with rage, staring at the unexpected disturbers of our peace. They were the Governor, the commander, the Cape Merchant, and the watch.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace!" exclaimed Master Pory, and retired to the cedar and Dr. Bohun.

"This ends here, gentlemen," said the Governor firmly. "You are both bleeding. It is enough."

"Out of my way, sir!" cried my lord, foaming at the mouth. He made a mad thrust over the Governor's extended arm at me, who was ready enough to meet him. "Have at thee, thou bridegroom!" he said between his teeth.

The Governor caught him by the wrist. "Put up your sword, my lord, or, as I stand here, you shall give it into the commander's hands!"

"Hell and furies!" ejaculated my lord. "Do you know who I am, sir?"

"Ay," replied the Governor sturdily, "I do know. It is because of that knowledge, my Lord Carnal, that I interfere in this affair. Were you other than you are, you and this gentleman might fight until doomsday, and meet with no hindrance from me. Being