

CHAPTER XVII

IN WHICH MY LORD AND I PLAY AT BOWLS

THE Governor had brought with him from London, the year before, a set of boxwood bowls, and had made, between his house and the fort, a noble green. The generality must still use for the game that portion of the street that was not tobacco-planted; but the quality flocked to the Governor's green, and here, one holiday afternoon, a fortnight or more from the day in which I had drunk to the King from my lord's silver goblet, was gathered a very great company. The Governor's match was toward,—ten men to a side, a hogshead of sweet-scented to the victorious ten, and a keg of canary to the man whose bowl should hit the jack.

The season had been one of unusual mildness, and the sunshine was still warm and bright, gilding the velvet of the green, and making the red and yellow leaves swept into the trench to glow like a ribbon of flame. The sky was blue, the water bluer still, the leaves bright-colored, the wind blowing; only the enshrouding forest, wrapped in haze, seemed as dim, unreal, and far away as a last year's dream.

The Governor's gilt armchair had been brought from the church, and put for him upon the bank of turf at the upper end of the green. By his side sat my Lady Temperance, while the gayly dressed dames and the men who were to play and to watch were

accommodated with stools and settles or with seats on the green grass. All were dressed in holiday clothes, all tongues spoke, all eyes laughed; you might have thought there was not a heavy heart amongst them. Rolfe was there, gravely courteous, quiet and ready; and by his side, in otterskin mantle, beaded moccasins, and feathered headdress, the Indian chief, his brother-in-law,—the bravest, comeliest, and manliest savage with whom I have ever dealt. There, too, was Master Pory, red and jovial, with an eye to the sack the servants were bringing from the Governor's house; and the commander, with his wife; and Master Jeremy Sparrow, fresh from a most moving sermon on the vanities of this world. Captains, Councilors, and Burgesses aired their gold lace, and their wit or their lack of it; while a swarm of younger adventurers, youths of good blood and bad living, come from home for the weal of England and the woe of Virginia, went here and there through the crowd like gilded summer flies.

Rolfe and I were to play; he sat on the grass at the feet of Mistress Jocelyn Percy, making her now and then some courtly speech, and I stood beside her, my hand on the back of her chair.

The King's ward held court as though she were a king's daughter. In the brightness of her beauty she sat there, as gracious for the nonce as the sunshine, and as much of another world. All knew her story, and to the daring that is in men's hearts her own daring appealed,—and she was young and very beautiful. Some there had not been my friends, and now rejoiced in what seemed my inevitable ruin; some whom I had thought my friends were gone over to the stronger side; many who in secret wished me well still shook

their heads and shrugged their shoulders over what they were pleased to call my madness; but for her, I was glad to know, there were only good words. The Governor had left his gilt armchair to welcome her to the green, and had caused a chair to be set for her near his own, and here men came and bowed before her as if she had been a princess indeed.

A stir amongst the crowd, a murmur, and a craning of necks heralded the approach of that other at whom the town gaped with admiration. He came with his retinue of attendants, his pomp of dress, his arrogance of port, his splendid beauty. Men looked from the beauty of the King's ward to the beauty of the King's minion, from her costly silk to his velvet and miniver, from the air of the court that became her well to the towering pride and insolence which to the thoughtless seemed his fortune's proper mantle, and deemed them a pair well suited, and the King's will indeed the will of Heaven.

I was never one to value a man by his outward seeming, but suddenly I saw myself as in a mirror, — a soldier, scarred and bronzed, acquainted with the camp, but not with the court, roughened by a rude life, poor in this world's goods, the first flush of youth gone forever. For a moment my heart was bitter within me. The pang passed, and my hand tightened its grasp upon the chair in which sat the woman I had wed. She was my wife, and I would keep my own.

My lord had paused to speak to the Governor, who had risen to greet him. Now he came toward us, and the crowd pressed and whispered. He bowed low to Mistress Percy, made as if to pass on, then came to a stop before her, his hat in his hand, his handsome head bent, a smile upon his bearded lips.

"When was it that we last sat to see men bowl, lady?" he said. "I remember a gay match when I bowled against my Lord of Buckingham, and fair ladies sat and smiled upon us. The fairest laughed, and tied her colors around my arm."

The lady whom he addressed sat quietly, with hands folded in her silken lap and an untroubled face. "I did not know you then, my lord," she answered him, quite softly and sweetly. "Had I done so, be sure I would have cut my hand off ere it gave color of mine to" —

"To whom?" he demanded, as she paused.

"To a coward, my lord," she said clearly.

As if she had been a man, his hand went to his sword hilt. As for her, she leaned back in her chair and looked at him with a smile.

He spoke at last, slowly and with deliberate emphasis. "I won then," he said. "I shall win again, my lady, — my Lady Jocelyn Leigh."

I dropped my hand from her chair and stepped forward. "It is my wife to whom you speak, my Lord Carnal," I said sternly. "I wait to hear you name her rightly."

Rolfe rose from the grass and stood beside me, and Jeremy Sparrow, shouldering aside with scant ceremony Burgess and Councilor, came also. The Governor leaned forward out of his chair, and the crowd became suddenly very still.

"I am waiting, my lord," I repeated.

In an instant, from what he had been he became the frank and guileless nobleman. "A slip of the tongue, Captain Percy!" he cried, his white teeth showing and his hand raised in a gesture of deprecation. "A natural thing, seeing how often, how very

often, I have so addressed this lady in the days when we had not the pleasure of your acquaintance." He turned to her and bowed, until the feather in his hat swept the ground. "I won then," he said. "I shall win again — Mistress Percy," and passed on to the seat that had been reserved for him.

The game began. I was to lead one side, and young Clement the other. At the last moment he came over to me. "I am out of it, Captain Percy," he announced with a rueful face. "My lord there asks me to give him my place. When we were hunting yesterday, and the stag turned upon me, he came between and thrust his knife into the brute, which else might have put an end to my hunting forever and a day: so you see I can't refuse him. Plague take it all! and Dorothy Gookin sitting there watching!"

My lord and I stood forward, each with a bowl in his hand. We looked toward the Governor. "My lord first, as becometh his rank," he said. My lord stooped and threw, and his bowl went swiftly over the grass, turned, and rested not a hands'-breadth from the jack. I threw. "One is as near as the other!" cried Master Macocke for the judges. A murmur arose from the crowd, and my lord swore beneath his breath. He and I retreated to our several sides, and Rolfe and West took our places. While they and those that followed bowled, the crowd, attentive though it was, still talked and laughed, and laid wagers upon its favorites; but when my lord and I again stood forth, the noise was hushed, and men and women stared with all their eyes. He delivered, and his bowl touched the jack. He straightened himself, with a smile, and I heard Jeremy Sparrow behind me groan; but my bowl too kissed the jack. The crowd began to laugh

with sheer delight, but my lord turned red and his brows drew together. We had but one turn more. While we waited, I marked his black eyes studying every inch of the ground between him and that small white ball, to strike which, at that moment, I verily believe he would have given the King's favor. All men pray, though they pray not to the same god. As he stood there, when his time had come, weighing the bowl in his hand, I knew that he prayed to his dæmon, fate, star, whatever thing he raised an altar to and bent before. He threw, and I followed, while the throng held its breath. Master Macocke rose to his feet. "It's a tie, my masters!" he exclaimed.

The excited crowd surged forward, and a babel of voices arose. "Silence, all!" cried the Governor. "Let them play it out!"

My lord threw, and his bowl stopped perilously near the shining mark. As I stepped to my place a low and supplicating "O Lord!" came to my ears from the lips and the heart of the preacher, who had that morning thundered against the toys of this world. I drew back my arm and threw with all my force. A cry arose from the throng, and my lord ground his heel into the earth. The bowl, spurning the jack before it, rushed on, until both buried themselves in the red and yellow leaves that filled the trench.

I turned and bowed to my antagonist. "You bowl well, my lord," I said. "Had you had the forest training of eye and arm, our fortunes might have been reversed."

He looked me up and down. "You are kind, sir," he said thickly. "'To-day to thee, to-morrow to me.' I give you joy of your petty victory."

He turned squarely from me, and stood with his

face downstream. I was speaking to Rolfe and to the few — not even all of that side for which I had won — who pressed around me, when he wheeled.

“Your Honor,” he cried to the Governor, who had paused beside Mistress Percy, “is not the *Due Return* high-popped? Doth she not carry a blue pennant, and hath she not a gilt siren for figurehead?”

“Ay,” answered the Governor, lifting his head from the hand he had kissed with ponderous gallantry. “What then, my lord?”

“Then to-morrow has dawned, sir captain,” said my lord to me. “Sure, Dame Venus and her blind son have begged for me favorable winds; for the *Due Return* has come again.”

The game that had been played was forgotten for that day. The hogshead of sweet-scented, lying to one side, wreathed with bright vines, was unclaimed of either party; the servants who brought forward the keg of canary dropped their burden, and stared with the rest. All looked down the river, and all saw the *Due Return* coming up the broad, ruffled stream, the wind from the sea filling her sails, the tide with her, the gilt mermaid on her prow just rising from the rushing foam. She came as swiftly as a bird to its nest. None had thought to see her for at least ten days.

Upon all there fell a sudden realization that it was the word of the King, feathered by the command of the Company, that was hurrying, arrow-like, toward us. All knew what the Company’s orders would be, — must needs be, — and the Tudor sovereigns were not so long in the grave that men had forgot to fear the wrath of kings. The crowd drew back from me as from a man plague-spotted. Only Rolfe, Sparrow, and the Indian stood their ground.

The Governor turned from staring downstream. “The game is played, gentlemen,” he announced abruptly. “The wind grows colder, too, and clouds are gathering. This fair company will pardon me if I dismiss them somewhat sooner than is our wont. The next sunny day we will play again. Give you God den, gentles.”

The crowd stood not upon the order of its going, but streamed away to the river bank, whence it could best watch the oncoming ship. My lord, after a most triumphant bow, swept off with his train in the direction of the guest house. With him went Master Pory. The Governor drew nearer to me. “Captain Percy,” he said, lowering his voice, “I am going now to mine own house. The letters which yonder ship brings will be in my hands in less than an hour. When I have read them, I shall perforce obey their instructions. Before I have them I will see you, if you so wish.”

“I will be with your Honor in five minutes.”

He nodded, and strode off across the green to his garden. I turned to Rolfe. “Will you take her home?” I said briefly. She was so white and sat so still in her chair that I feared to see her swoon. But when I spoke to her she answered clearly and steadily enough, even with a smile, and she would not lean upon Rolfe’s arm. “I will walk alone,” she said. “None that see me shall think that I am stricken down.” I watched her move away, Rolfe beside her, and the Indian following with his noiseless step; then I went to the Governor’s house. Master Jeremy Sparrow had disappeared some minutes before, I knew not whither.

I found Yeardley in his great room, standing before

a fire and staring down into its hollows. "Captain Percy," he said, as I went up to him, "I am most heartily sorry for you and for the lady whom you so ignorantly married."

"I shall not plead ignorance," I told him.

"You married, not the Lady Jocelyn Leigh, but a waiting woman named Patience Worth. The Lady Jocelyn Leigh, a noble lady, and a ward of the King, could not marry without the King's consent. And you, Captain Percy, are but a mere private gentleman, a poor Virginia adventurer; and my Lord Carnal is — my Lord Carnal. The Court of High Commission will make short work of this fantastic marriage."

"Then they may do it without my aid," I said. "Come, Sir George, had you wed my Lady Temperance in such fashion, and found this hornets' nest about your ears, what would you have done?"

He gave his short, honest laugh. "It's beside the question, Ralph Percy, but I dare say you can guess what I would have done."

"I'll fight for my own to the last ditch," I continued. "I married her knowing her name, if not her quality. Had I known the latter, had I known she was the King's ward, all the same I should have married her, and she would have had me. She is my wife in the sight of God and honest men. Esteeming her honor, which is mine, at stake, Death may silence me, but men shall not bend me."

"Your best hope is in my Lord of Buckingham," he said. "They say it is out of sight, out of mind, with the King, and, thanks to this infatuation of my Lord Carnal's, Buckingham hath the field. That he strains every nerve to oust completely this his first rival since he himself distanced Somerset goes without

saying. That to thwart my lord in this passion would be honey to him is equally of course. I do not need to tell you that, if the Company so orders, I shall have no choice but to send you and the lady home to England. When you are in London, make your suit to my Lord of Buckingham, and I earnestly hope that you may find in him an ally powerful enough to bring you and the lady, to whose grace, beauty, and courage we all do homage, out of this coil."

"We give you thanks, sir," I said.

"As you know," he went on, "I have written to the Company, humbly petitioning that I be graciously relieved from a most thankless task, to wit, the governorship of Virginia. My health faileth, and I am, moreover, under my Lord Warwick's displeasure. He waxeth ever stronger in the Company, and if I put not myself out, he will do it for me. If I be relieved at once, and one of the Council appointed in my place, I shall go home to look after certain of my interests there. Then shall I be but a private gentleman, and if I can serve you, Ralph Percy, I shall be blithe to do so; but now, you understand" —

"I understand, and thank you, Sir George," I said. "May I ask one question?"

"What is it?"

"Will you obey to the letter the instructions the Company sends?"

"To the letter," he answered. "I am its sworn officer."

"One thing more," I went on: "the parole I gave you, sir, that morning behind the church, is mine own again when you shall have read those letters and know the King's will. I am free from that bond, at least."

He looked at me with a frown. "Make not bad worse, Captain Percy," he said sternly.

I laughed. "It is my aim to make bad better, Sir George. I see through the window that the Due Return hath come to anchor; I will no longer trespass on your Honor's time." I bowed myself out, leaving him still with the frown upon his face, staring at the fire.

Without, the world was bathed in the glow of a magnificent sunset. Clouds, dark purple and dark crimson, reared themselves in the west to dizzy heights, and hung threateningly over the darkening land beneath. In the east loomed more pallid masses, and from the bastions of the east to the bastions of the west went hurrying, wind-driven cloudlets, dark in the east, red in the west. There was a high wind, and the river, where it was not reddened by the sunset, was vividly green. "A storm, too!" I muttered.

As I passed the guest house, there came to me from within a burst of loud and vaunting laughter and a boisterous drinking catch sung by many voices; and I knew that my lord drank, and gave others to drink, to the orders which the Due Return should bring. The minister's house was in darkness. In the great room I struck a light and fired the fresh torches, and found I was not its sole occupant. On the hearth, the ashes of the dead fire touching her skirts, sat Mistress Jocelyn Percy, her arms resting upon a low stool, and her head pillowed upon them. Her face was not hidden: it was cold and pure and still, like carven marble. I stood and gazed at her a moment; then, as she did not offer to move, I brought wood to the fire and made the forlorn room bright again.

"Where is Rolfe?" I asked at last.

"He would have stayed," she answered, "but I made him go. I wished to be alone." She rose, and going to the window leaned her forehead against the bars, and looked out upon the wild sky and the hurrying river. "I would I were alone," she said in a low voice and with a catch of her breath. As she stood there in the twilight by the window, I knew that she was weeping, though her pride strove to keep that knowledge from me. My heart ached for her, and I knew not how to comfort her. At last she turned. A pasty and stoup of wine were upon the table.

"You are tired and shaken," I said, "and you may need all your strength. Come, eat and drink."

"For to-morrow we die," she added, and broke into tremulous laughter. Her lashes were still wet, but her pride and daring had returned. She drank the wine I poured for her, and we spoke of indifferent things,—of the game that afternoon, of the Indian Nantauquas, of the wild night that clouds and wind portended. Supper over, I called Angela to bear her company, and I myself went out into the night, and down the street toward the guest house.