

## CHAPTER XXV

### IN WHICH MY LORD HATH HIS DAY

I AND Black Lamoral were leading a forlorn hope. With all my old company behind us, we were thundering upon an enemy as thick as ants, covering the face of the earth. Down came Black Lamoral, and the hoofs of every mad charger went over me. For a time I was dead; then I lived again, and was walking with the forester's daughter in the green chace at home. The oaks stretched broad sheltering arms above the young fern and the little wild flowers, and the deer turned and looked at us. In the open spaces, starring the lush grass, were all the yellow primroses that ever bloomed. I gathered them for her, but when I would have given them to her she was no longer the forester's daughter, but a proud lady, heiress to lands and gold, the ward of the King. She would not take the primroses from a poor gentleman, but shook her head and laughed sweetly, and faded into a waterfall that leaped from a pink hill into a waveless sea. Another darkness, and I was captive to the Chickahominies, tied to the stake. My arm and shoulder were on fire, and Opechancanough came and looked at me, with his dark, still face and his burning eyes. The fierce pain died, and I with it, and I lay in a grave and listened to the loud and deep murmur of the forest above. I lay there for ages on ages before I awoke to the fact that the darkness about me was the dark-

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ness of a ship's hold, and the murmur of the forest the wash of the water alongside. I put out an arm and touched, not the side of a grave, but a ship's timbers. I stretched forth the other arm, then dropped it with a groan. Some one bent over me and held water to my lips. I drank, and my senses came fully to me. "Diccon!" I said.

"It's not Diccon," replied the figure, setting down a pitcher. "It is Jeremy Sparrow. Thank God, you are yourself again!"

"Where are we?" I asked, when I had lain and listened to the water a little longer.

"In the hold of the George," he answered. "The ship sank by the bows, and well-nigh all were drowned. But when they upon the George saw that there was a woman amongst us who clung to the poop deck, they sent their longboat to take us off."

The light was too dim for me to read his face, so I touched his arm.

"She was saved," he said. "She is safe now. There are gentlewomen aboard, and she is in their care."

I put my unhurt arm across my eyes.

"You are weak yet," said the minister gently. "The Spaniard's ball, you know, went through your shoulder, and in some way your arm was badly torn from shoulder to wrist. You have been out of your head ever since we were brought here, three days ago. The chirurgeon came and dressed your wound, and it is healing well. Don't try to speak, — I'll tell you all. Diccon has been pressed into service, as the ship is short of hands, having lost some by fever and some overboard. Four of the pirates were picked up, and hung at the yardarm next morning."

He moved as he spoke, and something clanked in the stillness. "You are ironed!" I exclaimed.

"Only my ankles. My lord would have had me bound hand and foot; but you were raving for water, and, taking you for a dying man, they were so humane as to leave my hands free to attend you."

"My lord would have had you bound," I said slowly. "Then it's my lord's day."

"High noon and blazing sunshine," he answered, with a rueful laugh. "It seems that half the folk on board had gaped at him at court. Lord! when he put his foot over the side of the ship, how the women screeched and the men stared! He's cock of the walk now, my Lord Carnal, the King's favorite!"

"And we are pirates."

"That's the case in a nutshell," he answered cheerfully.

"Do they know how the ship came to strike upon that reef?" I asked.

"Probably not, unless madam has enlightened them. I did n't take the trouble, — they would n't have believed me, — and I can take my oath my lord has n't. He was only our helpless prisoner, you know; and they would think madam mistaken or bewitched."

"It's not a likely tale," I said grimly, "seeing that we had already opened fire upon them."

"I trust in heaven the sharks got the men who fired the culverins!" he cried, and then laughed at his own savagery.

I lay still and tried to think. "Who are they on board?" I asked at last.

"I don't know," he replied. "I was only on deck until my lord had had his say in the poop cabin with the master and a gentleman who appeared most in

authority. Then the pirates were strung up, and we were bundled down here in quick order. But there seems to be more of quality than usual aboard."

"You do not know where we are?"

"We lay at anchor for a day, — whilst they patched her up, I suppose, — and since then there has been rough weather. We must be still off Florida, and that is all I know. Now go to sleep. You'll get your strength best so, and there's nothing to be gotten by waking."

He began to croon a many-versed psalm. I slept and waked, and slept again, and was waked by the light of a torch against my eyes. The torch was held by a much-betarred seaman, and by its light a gentleman of a very meagre aspect, with a weazen face and small black eyes, was busily examining my wounded shoulder and arm.

"It passeth belief," he said in a sing-song voice, "how often wounds, with naught in the world done for them outside of fair water and a clean rag, do turn to and heal out of sheer perversity. Now, if I had been allowed to treat this one properly with scalding oil and melted lead, and to have bled the patient as he should have been bled, it is ten to one that by this time there would have been a pirate the less in the world." He rose to his feet with a highly injured countenance.

"Then he's doing well?" asked Sparrow.

"So well that he could n't do better," replied the other. "The arm was a trifling matter, though no doubt exquisitely painful. The wound in the shoulder is miraculously healing, without either blood-letting or cauteries. You'll have to hang after all, my friend." He looked at me with his little beady eyes. "It must

have been a grand life," he said regretfully. "I never expected to see a pirate chief in the flesh. When I was a boy, I used to dream of the black ships and the gold and the fighting. By the serpent of Esculapius, in my heart of hearts I would rather be such a world's thief, uncaught, than Governor of Virginia!" He gathered up the tools of his trade, and motioned to his torchbearer to go before. "I'll have to report you rapidly recovering," he said warningly, as he turned to follow the light.

"Very well," I made answer. "To whom am I indebted for so much kindness?"

"I am Dr. John Pott, newly appointed physician general to the colony of Virginia. It is little of my skill I could give you, but that little I gladly bestow upon a real pirate. What a life it must have been! And to have to part with it when you are yet young! And the good red gold and the rich gems all at the bottom of the sea!"

He sighed heavily and went his way. The hatches were closed after him, and the minister and I were left in darkness while the slow hours dragged themselves past us. Through the chinks of the hatches a very faint light streamed down, and made the darkness gray instead of black. The minister and I saw each other dimly, as spectres. Some one brought us mouldy biscuit that I wanted not, and water for which I thirsted. Sparrow put the small pitcher to his lips, kept it there a moment, then held it to mine. I drank, and with that generous draught tasted pure bliss. It was not until five minutes later that I raised myself upon my elbow and turned on him.

"The pitcher felt full to my lips!" I exclaimed. "Did you drink when you said you did?"

He put out his great hand and pushed me gently down. "I have no wound," he said, "and there was not enough for two."

The light that trembled through the cracks above died away, and the darkness became gross. The air in the hold was stifling; our souls panted for the wind and the stars outside. At the worst, when the fetid blackness lay upon our chests like a nightmare, the hatch was suddenly lifted, a rush of pure air came to us, and with it the sound of men's voices speaking on the deck above. Said one, "True the doctor pronounces him out of all danger, yet he is a wounded man."

"He is a desperate and dangerous man," broke in another harshly. "I know not how you will answer to your Company for leaving him unironed so long."

"I and the Company understand each other, my lord," rejoined the first speaker, with some haughtiness. "I can keep my prisoner without advice. If I now order irons to be put upon him and his accomplice, it is because I see fit to do so, and not because of your suggestion, my lord. You wish to take this opportunity to have speech with him, — to that I can have no objection."

The speaker moved away. As his footsteps died in the distance my lord laughed, and his merriment was echoed by three or four harsh voices. Some one struck flint against steel, and there was a sudden flare of torches and the steadier light of a lantern. A man with a brutal, weather-beaten face — the master of the ship, we guessed — came down the ladder, lantern in hand, turned when he had reached the foot, and held up the lantern to light my lord down. I lay and watched the King's favorite as he descended.

The torches held slantingly above cast a fiery light over his stately figure and the face which had raised him from the low estate of a doubtful birth and a most lean purse to a pinnacle too near the sun for men to gaze at with undazzled eyes. In his rich dress and the splendor of his beauty, with the red glow enveloping him, he lit the darkness like a baleful star.

The two torchbearers and a third man descended, closing the hatch after them. When all were down, my lord, the master at his heels, came and stood over me. I raised myself, though with difficulty, for the fever had left me weak as a babe, and met his gaze. His was a cruel look; if I had expected, as assuredly I did not expect, mercy or generosity from this my dearest foe, his look would have struck such a hope dead. Presently he beckoned to the men behind him. "Put the manacles upon him first," he said, with a jerk of his thumb toward Sparrow.

The man who had come down last, and who carried irons enough to fetter six pirates, started forward to do my lord's bidding. The master glanced at Sparrow's great frame, and pulled out a pistol. The minister laughed. "You'll not need it, friend. I know when the odds are too great." He held out his arms, and the men fettered them wrist to wrist. When they had finished he said calmly: "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found."

My lord turned from him, and pointed to me. He kept his eyes upon my face while they shackled me hand and foot; then said abruptly, "You have cords there: bind his arms to his sides." The men wound

the cords around me many times. "Draw them tight," commanded my lord.

There came a wrathful clank of the minister's chains. "The arm is torn and inflamed from shoulder to wrist, as I make no doubt you have been told!" he cried. "For very shame, man!"

"Draw them tighter," said my lord, between his teeth.

The men knotted the cords, and rose to their feet, to be dismissed by my lord with a curt "You may go." They drew back to the foot of the ladder, while the master of the ship went and perched himself upon one of the rungs. "The air is fresher here beneath the hatch," he remarked.

As for me, though I lay at my enemy's feet, I could yet set my teeth and look him in the eyes. The cup was bitter, but I could drink it with an unmoved face.

"Art paid?" he demanded. "Art paid for the tree in the red forest without the haunted wood? Art paid, thou bridegroom?"

"No," I answered. "Bring her here to laugh at me as she laughed in the twilight beneath the guest-house window."

I thought he would murder me with the poniard he drew, but presently he put it up.

"She is come to her senses," he said. "Up in the state cabin are bright lights, and wine and laughter. There are gentlewomen aboard, and I have been singing to the lute, to them — and to her. She is saved from the peril into which you plunged her; she knows that the King's Court of High Commission, to say nothing of the hangman, will soon snap the fetters which she now shudders to think of; that the King and one besides will condone her past short madness.

Her cheeks are roses, her eyes are stars. But now, when I pressed her hand between the verses of my song, she smiled and sighed and blushed. She is again the dutiful ward of the King, the Lady Jocelyn Leigh — she hath asked to be so called” —

“You lie,” I said. “She is my true and noble wife. She may sit in the state cabin, in the air and warmth and light, she may even laugh with her lips, but her heart is here with me in the hold.”

As I spoke, I knew, and knew not how I knew, that the thing which I had said was true. With that knowledge came a happiness so deep and strong that it swept aside like straw the torment of those cords, and the deeper hurt that I lay at his feet. I suppose my face altered, and mirrored that blessed glow about my heart, for into his own came a white fury, changing its beauty into something inhuman and terrifying. He looked a devil baffled. For a minute he stood there rigid, with hands clenched. “Embrace her heart, if thou canst,” he said, in a voice so low that it came like a whisper from the realm he might have left. “I shall press my face against her bosom.”

Another minute of a silence that I disdained to break; then he turned and went up the ladder. The seamen and the master followed. The hatch was clapped to and fastened, and we were left to the darkness and the heavy air, and to a grim endurance of what could not be cured.

During those hours of thirst and torment I came indeed to know the man who sat beside me. His hands were so fastened that he could not loosen the cords, and there was no water for him to give me; but he could and did bestow a higher alms, — the tenderness of a brother, the manly sympathy of a soldier, the balm

of the priest of God. I lay in silence, and he spoke not often; but when he did so, there was that in the tone of his voice — Another cycle of pain, and I awoke from a half swoon, in which there was water to drink and no anguish, to hear him praying beside me. He ceased to speak, and in the darkness I heard him draw his breath hard and his great muscles crack. Suddenly there came a sharp sound of breaking iron, and a low “Thank Thee, Lord!” Another moment, and I felt his hands busy at the knotted cords. “I will have them off thee in a twinkling, Ralph,” he said, “thanks to Him who taught my hands to war, and my arms to break in two a bow of steel.” As he spoke, the cords loosened beneath his fingers.

I raised my head and laid it on his knee, and he put his great arm, with the broken chain dangling from it, around me, and, like a mother with a babe, crooned me to sleep with the twenty-third psalm.