



CHAPTER XXVI

IN WHICH I AM BROUGHT TO TRIAL

My lord came not again into the hold, and the untied cords and the broken chain were not replaced. Morning and evening we were brought a niggard allowance of bread and water; but the man who carried it bore no light, and may not even have observed their absence. We saw no one in authority. Hour by hour my wounds healed and my strength returned. If it was a dark and noisome prison, if there were hunger and thirst and inaction to be endured, if we knew not how near to us might be a death of ignominy, yet the minister and I found the jewel in the head of the toad; for in that time of pain and heaviness we became as David and Jonathan.

At last some one came beside the brute who brought us food. A quiet gentleman, with whitening hair and bright dark eyes, stood before us. He had ordered the two men with him to leave open the hatch, and he held in his hand a sponge soaked with vinegar. "Which of you is — or rather was — Captain Ralph Percy?" he asked, in a grave but pleasant voice.

"I am Captain Percy," I answered.

He looked at me with attention. "I have heard of you before," he said. "I read the letter you wrote to Sir Edwyn Sandys, and thought it an excellently conceived and manly epistle. What magic transformed a gentleman and a soldier into a pirate?"

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As he waited for me to speak, I gave him for answer, "Necessity."

"A sad metamorphosis," he said. "I had rather read of nymphs changed into laurel and gushing springs. I am come to take you, sir, before the officers of the Company aboard this ship, when, if you have aught to say for yourself, you may say it. I need not tell you, who saw so clearly some time ago the danger in which you then stood, that your plight is now a thousandfold worse."

"I am perfectly aware of it," I said. "Am I to go in fetters?"

"No," he replied, with a smile. "I have no instructions on the subject, but I will take it upon myself to free you from them, — even for the sake of that excellently writ letter."

"Is not this gentleman to go too?" I asked.

He shook his head. "I have no orders to that effect."

While the men who were with him removed the irons from my wrists and ankles he stood in silence, regarding me with a scrutiny so close that it would have been offensive had I been in a position to take offense. When they had finished I turned and held Jeremy's hand in mine for an instant, then followed the new-comer to the ladder and out of the hold; the two men coming after us, and resolving themselves above into a guard. As we traversed the main deck we came upon Diccon, busy with two or three others about the ports. He saw me, and, dropping the bar that he held, started forward, to be plucked back by an angry arm. The men who guarded me pushed in between us, and there was no word spoken by either. I walked on, the gentleman at my side, and presently

came to an open port, and saw, with an intake of my breath, the sunshine, a dark blue heaven flecked with white, and a quiet ocean. My companion glanced at me keenly.

"Doubtless it seems fair enough, after that Cimmerian darkness below," he remarked. "Would you like to rest here a moment?"

"Yes," I said, and, leaning against the side of the port, looked out at the beauty of the light.

"We are off Hatteras," he informed me, "but we have not met with the stormy seas that vex poor mariners hereabouts. Those sails you see on our quarter belong to our consort. We were separated by the hurricane that nigh sunk us, and finally drove us, helpless as we were, toward the Florida coast and across your path. For us that was a fortunate reef upon which you dashed. The gods must have made your helmsman blind, for he ran you into a destruction that gaped not for you. Why did every wretch that we hung next morning curse you before he died?"

"If I told you, you would not believe me," I replied.

I was dizzy with the bliss of the air and the light, and it seemed a small thing that he would not believe me. The wind sounded in my ears like a harp, and the sea beckoned. A white bird flashed down into the crystal hollow between two waves, hung there a second, then rose, a silver radiance against the blue. Suddenly I saw a river, dark and ridged beneath thunderclouds, a boat, and in it, her head pillowed upon her arm, a woman, who pretended that she slept. With a shock my senses steadied, and I became myself again. The sea was but the sea, the wind the wind; in the hold below me lay my friend; some-

where in that ship was my wife; and awaiting me in the state cabin were men who perhaps had the will, as they had the right and the might, to hang me at the yardarm that same hour.

"I have had my fill of rest," I said. "Whom am I to stand before?"

"The newly appointed officers of the Company, bound in this ship for Virginia," he answered. "The ship carries Sir Francis Wyatt, the new Governor; Master Davison, the Secretary; young Clayborne, the surveyor general; the knight marshal, the physician general, and the Treasurer, with other gentlemen, and with fair ladies, their wives and sisters. I am George Sandys, the Treasurer."

The blood rushed to my face, for it hurt me that the brother of Sir Edwyn Sandys should believe that the firing of those guns had been my act. His was the trained observation of the traveler and writer, and he probably read the color aright. "I pity you, if I can no longer esteem you," he said, after a pause. "I know no sorrier sight than a brave man's shield reversed."

I bit my lip and kept back the angry word. The next minute saw us at the door of the state cabin. It opened, and my companion entered, and I after him, with my two guards at my back. Around a large table were gathered a number of gentlemen, some seated, some standing. There were but two among them whom I had seen before,—the physician who had dressed my wound and my Lord Carnal. The latter was seated in a great chair, beside a gentleman with a pleasant active face and light brown curling hair,—the new Governor, as I guessed. The Treasurer, nodding to the two men to fall back to the win-

dow, glided to a seat upon my lord's other hand, and I went and stood before the Governor of Virginia.

For some moments there was silence in the cabin, every man being engaged in staring at me with all his eyes; then the Governor spoke: "It should be upon your knees, sir."

"I am neither petitioner nor penitent," I said. "I know no reason why I should kneel, your Honor."

"There's reason, God wot, why you should be both!" he exclaimed. "Did you not, now some months ago, defy the writ of the King and Company, refusing to stand when called upon to do so in the King's name?"

"Yes."

"Did you not, when he would have stayed your lawless flight, lay violent hands upon a nobleman high in the King's favor, and, overpowering him with numbers, carry him out of the King's realm?"

"Yes."

"Did you not seduce from her duty to the King, and force to fly with you, his Majesty's ward, the Lady Jocelyn Leigh?"

"No," I said. "There was with me only my wife, who chose to follow the fortunes of her husband."

He frowned, and my lord swore beneath his breath. "Did you not, falling in with a pirate ship, cast in your lot with the scoundrels upon it, and yourself turn pirate?"

"In some sort."

"And become their chief?"

"Since there was no other situation open, — yes."

"Taking with you as captives upon the pirate ship that lady and that nobleman?"

"Yes."

"You proceeded to ravage the dominions of the King of Spain, with whom his Majesty is at peace" —

"Like Drake and Raleigh, — yes," I said.

He smiled, then frowned. "Tempora mutantur," he said dryly. "And I have never heard that Drake or Raleigh attacked an English ship."

"Nor have I attacked one," I said.

He leaned back in his chair and stared at me. "We saw the flame and heard the thunder of your guns, and our rigging was cut by the shot. Did you expect me to believe that last assertion?"

"No."

"Then you might have spared yourself — and us — that lie," he said coldly.

The Treasurer moved restlessly in his seat, and began to whisper to his neighbor the Secretary. A young man, with the eyes of a hawk and an iron jaw, — Clayborne, the surveyor general, — who sat at the end of the table beside the window, turned and gazed out upon the clouds and the sea, as if, contempt having taken the place of curiosity, he had no further interest in the proceedings. As for me, I set my face like a flint, and looked past the man who might have saved me that last speech of the Governor's as if he had never been.

There was a closed door in the cabin, opposite the one by which I had entered. Suddenly from behind it came the sound of a short struggle, followed by the quick turn of a key in the lock. The door was flung open, and two women entered the cabin. One, a fair young gentlewoman, with tears in her brown eyes, came forward hurriedly with outspread hands.

"I did what I could, Frank!" she cried. "When she would not listen to reason, I e'en locked the door;"

but she is strong, for all that she has been ill, and she forced the key out of my hand!" She looked at the red mark upon the white hand, and two tears fell from her long lashes upon her wild-rose cheeks.

With a smile the Governor put out an arm and drew her down upon a stool beside him, then rose and bowed low to the King's ward. "You are not yet well enough to leave your cabin, as our worthy physician general will assure you, lady," he said courteously, but firmly. "Permit me to lead you back to it."

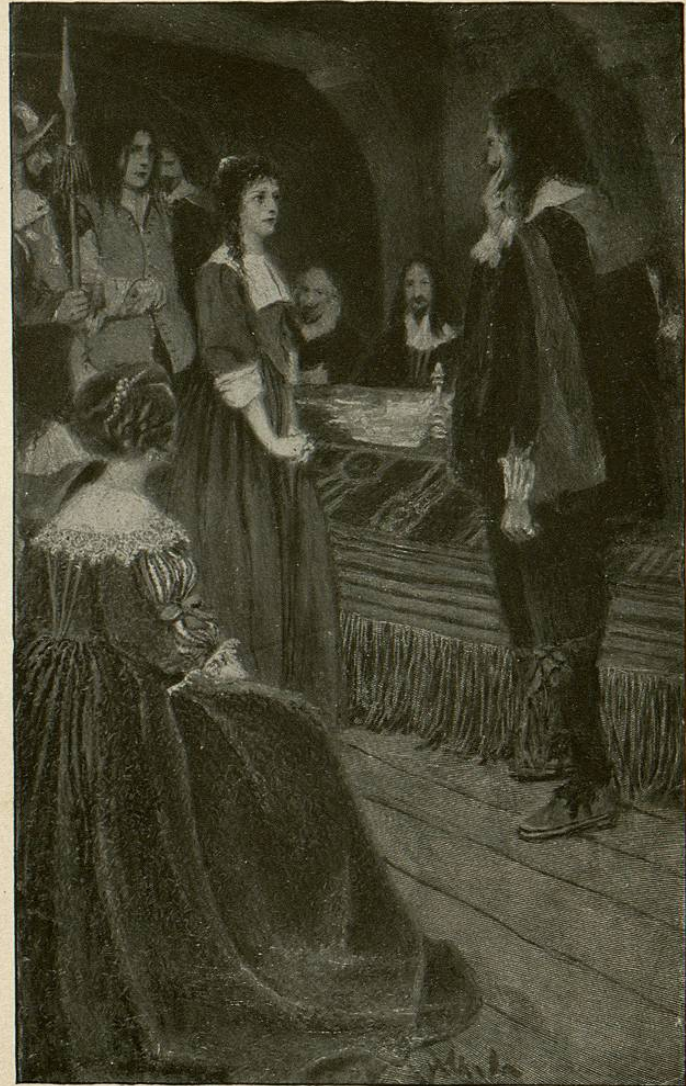
Still smiling he made as if to advance, when she stayed him with a gesture of her raised hand, at once so majestic and so pleading that it was as though a strain of music had passed through the stillness of the cabin.

"Sir Francis Wyatt, as you are a gentleman, let me speak," she said. It was the voice of that first night at Weyanoke, all pathos, all sweetness, all entreating.

The Governor stopped short, the smile still upon his lips, his hand still outstretched, — stood thus for a moment, then sat down. Around the half circle of gentlemen went a little rustling sound, like wind in dead leaves. My lord half rose from his seat. "She is bewitched," he said, with dry lips. "She will say what she has been told to say. Lest she speak to her shame, we should refuse to hear her."

She had been standing in the centre of the floor, her hands clasped, her body bowed toward the Governor, but at my lord's words she straightened like a bow unbent. "I may speak, your Honor?" she asked clearly.

The Governor, who had looked askance at the working face of the man beside him, slightly bent his



"SIT DOWN, MY LORD"

head and leaned back in his great armchair. The King's favorite started to his feet. The King's ward turned her eyes upon him. "Sit down, my lord," she said. "Surely these gentlemen will think that you are afraid of what I, a poor erring woman, rebellious to the King, traitress to mine own honor, late the plaything of a pirate ship, may say or do. Truth, my lord, should be more courageous." Her voice was gentle, even plaintive, but it had in it the quality that lurks in the eyes of the crouching panther.

My lord sat down, one hand hiding his working mouth, the other clenched on the arm of his chair as if it had been an arm of flesh.