

CHAPTER XXVIII

IN WHICH THE SPRINGTIME IS AT HAND

TIRED of dicing against myself, and of the books that Rolfe had sent me, I betook myself to the gaol window, and, leaning against the bars, looked out in search of entertainment. The nearest if not the merriest thing the prospect had to offer was the pillory. It was built so tall that it was but little lower than the low upper story of the gaol, and it faced my window at so short a distance that I could hear the long, whistling breath of the wretch who happened to occupy it. It was not a pleasant sound; neither was a livid face, new branded on the cheek with a great R, and with a trickle of dark blood from the mutilated ears staining the board in which the head was immovably fixed, a pleasant sight. A little to one side was the whipping post: a woman had been whipped that morning, and her cries had tainted the air even more effectually than had the decayed matter with which certain small devils had pelted the runaway in the pillory. I looked away from the poor rogue below me into the clear, hard brightness of the March day, and was most heartily weary of the bars between me and it. The wind blew keenly; the sky was blue as blue could be, and the river a great ribbon of azure sewn with diamonds. All colors were vivid and all distances near. There was no haze over the forest; brown and bare it struck the cloudless blue. The marsh was emerald, the green

of the pines deep and rich, the budding maples redder than coral. The church, with the low green graves around it, appeared not a stone's throw away, and the voices of the children up and down the street sounded clearly, as though they played in the brown square below me. When the drum beat for the nooning the roll was close in my ears. The world looked so bright and keen that it seemed new made, and the brilliant sunshine and the cold wind stirred the blood like wine.

Now and then men and women passed through the square below. Well-nigh all glanced up at the window, and their eyes were friendly. It was known now that Buckingham was paramount at home, and my Lord Carnal's following in Virginia was much decayed. Young Hamor strode by, bravely dressed and whistling cheerily, and doffed a hat with a most noble broken feather. "We're going to bait a bear below the fort!" he called. "Sorry you'll miss the sport! There will be all the world — and my Lord Carnal." He whistled himself away, and presently there came along Master Edward Sharpless. He stopped and stared at the rogue in the pillory, — with no prescience, I suppose, of a day when he was to stand there himself; then looked up at me with as much malevolence as his small soul could write upon his mean features, and passed on. He had a jaded look; moreover, his clothes were swamp-stained and his cloak had been torn by briars. "What did you go to the forest for?" I muttered.

The key grated in the door behind me, and it opened to admit the gaoler and Diccon with my dinner, — which I was not sorry to see. "Sir George sent the venison, sir," said the gaoler, grinning, "and Master Piersey the wild fowl, and Madam West the pasty

and the marchpane, and Master Pory the sack. Be there anything you lack, sir?"

"Nothing that you can supply," I answered curtly.

The fellow grinned again, straightened the things upon the table, and started for the door. "You can stay until I come for the platters," he said to Diccon, and went out, locking the door after him with ostentation.

I applied myself to the dinner, and Diccon went to the window, and stood there looking out at the blue sky and at the man in the pillory. He had the freedom of the gaol. I was somewhat more straitly confined, though my friends had easy access to me. As for Jeremy Sparrow, he had spent twenty-four hours in gaol, at the end of which time Madam West had a fit of the spleen, declared she was dying, and insisted upon Master Sparrow's being sent for to administer consolation; Master Bucke, unfortunately, having gone up to Henricus on business connected with the college. From the bedside of that despotic lady Sparrow was called to bury a man on the other side of the river, and from the grave to marry a couple at Mulberry Island. And the next day being Sunday, and no minister at hand, he preached again in Master Bucke's pulpit,—and preached a sermon so powerful and moving that its like had never been heard in Virginia. They marched him not back from the pulpit to gaol. There were but five ministers in Virginia, and there were a many more sick to visit and dead to bury. Master Bucke, still feeble in body, tarried up river discussing with Thorpe the latter's darling project of converting every imp of an Indian this side the South Sea, and Jeremy slipped into his old place. There had been some talk of a public censure, but it died away.

The pasty and sack disposed of, I turned in my seat and spoke to Diccon: "I looked for Master Rolfe to-day. Have you heard aught of him?"

"No," he answered. As he spoke, the door was opened and the gaoler put in his head. "A messenger from Master Rolfe, captain." He drew back, and the Indian Nantauquas entered the room.

Rolfe I had seen twice since the arrival of the George at Jamestown, but the Indian had not been with him. The young chief now came forward and touched the hand I held out to him. "My brother will be here before the sun touches the tallest pine," he announced in his grave, calm voice. "He asks Captain Percy to deny himself to any other that may come. He wishes to see him alone."

"I shall hardly be troubled with company," I said. "There's a bear-baiting toward."

Nantauquas smiled. "My brother asked me to find a bear for to-day. I bought one from the Paspahags for a piece of copper, and took him to the ring below the fort."

"Where all the town will presently be gone," I said. "I wonder what Rolfe did that for!"

Filling a cup with sack, I pushed it to the Indian across the table. "You are little in the woods now-days, Nantauquas."

His fine dark face clouded ever so slightly. "Opechancanough has dreamt that I am Indian no longer. Singing birds have lied to him, telling him that I love the white man, and hate my own color. He calls me no more his brave, his brother Powhatan's dear son. I do not sit by his council fire now, nor do I lead his war bands. When I went last to his lodge and stood before him, his eyes burned me like the coals the

Monacans once closed my hands upon. He would not speak to me."

"It would not fret me if he never spoke again," I said. "You have been to the forest to-day?"

"Yes," he replied, glancing at the smear of leaf mould upon his beaded moccasins. "Captain Percy's eyes are quick; he should have been an Indian. I went to the Paspaheghs to take them the piece of copper. I could tell Captain Percy a curious thing" —

"Well?" I demanded, as he paused.

"I went to the lodge of the werowance with the copper, and found him not there. The old men declared that he had gone to the weirs for fish, — he and ten of his braves. The old men lied. I had passed the weirs of the Paspaheghs, and no man was there. I sat and smoked before the lodge, and the maidens brought me chinquapin cakes and pohickory; for Nantauquas is a prince and a welcome guest to all save Opechancanough. The old men smoked, with their eyes upon the ground, each seeing only the days when he was even as Nantauquas. They never knew when a wife of the werowance, turned child by pride, unfolded a doeskin and showed Nantauquas a silver cup carved all over and set with colored stones."

"Humph!"

"The cup was a heavy price to pay," continued the Indian. "I do not know what great thing it bought."

"Humph!" I said again. "Did you happen to meet Master Edward Sharpless in the forest?"

He shook his head. "The forest is wide, and there are many trails through it. Nantatquas looked for that of the werowance of the Paspaheghs, but found it not. He had no time to waste upon a white man."

He gathered his otterskin mantle about him and prepared to depart. I rose and gave him my hand, for I thoroughly liked him, and in the past he had made me his debtor. "Tell Rolfe he will find me alone," I said, "and take my thanks for your pains, Nantauquas. If ever we hunt together again, may I have the chance to serve you! I bear the scars of the wolf's teeth yet; you came in the nick of time, that day."

The Indian smiled. "It was a fierce old wolf. I wish Captain Percy free with all my heart, and then we will hunt more wolves, he and I."

When he was gone, and the gaoler and Diccon with him, I returned to the window. The runaway in the pillory was released, and went away homewards, staggering beside his master's stirrup. Passers-by grew more and more infrequent, and up the street came faint sounds of laughter and hurraing, — the bear must be making good sport. I could see the half-moon, and the guns, and the flag that streamed in the wind, and on the river a sail or two, white in the sunlight as the gulls that swooped past. Beyond rose the bare masts of the George. The Santa Teresa rode no more forever in the James. The King's ship was gone home to the King without the freight he looked for. Three days, and the George would spread her white wings and go down the wide river, and I with her, and the King's ward, and the King's sometime favorite. I looked down the wind-ruffled stream, and saw the great bay into which it emptied, and beyond the bay the heaving ocean, dark and light, league on league, league on league; then green England, and London, and the Tower. The vision disturbed me less than once it would have done. Men

that I knew and trusted were to be passengers on that ship, as well as one I knew and did not trust. And if, at the journey's end, I saw the Tower, I saw also his Grace of Buckingham. Where I hated he hated, and was now powerful enough to strike.

The wind blew from the west, from the unknown. I turned my head, and it beat against my forehead, cold and fragrant with the essence of the forest, — pine and cedar, dead leaves and black mould, fen and hollow and hill, — all the world of woods over which it had passed. The ghost of things long dead, which face or voice could never conjure up, will sometimes start across our path at the beckoning of an odor. A day in the Starving Time came back to me: how I had dragged myself from our broken palisade and crazy huts, and the groans of the famished and the plague-stricken, and the presence of the unburied dead, across the neck and into the woods, and had lain down there to die, being taken with a sick fear and horror of the place of cannibals behind me; and how weak I was! — too weak to care any more. I had been a strong man, and it had come to that, and I was content to let it be. The smell of the woods that day, the chill brown earth beneath me, the blowing wind, the long stretch of the river gleaming between the pines, . . . *and fair in sight the white sails of the Patience and the Deliverance.*

I had been too nigh gone then to greatly care that I was saved; now I cared, and thanked God for my life. Come what might in the future, the past was mine. Though I should never see my wife again, I had that hour in the state cabin of the George. I loved, and was loved again.

There was a noise outside the door, and Rolfe's

voice speaking to the gaoler. Impatient for his entrance I started toward the door, but when it opened he made no move to cross the threshold. "I am not coming in," he said, with a face that he strove to keep grave. "I only came to bring some one else." With that he stepped back, and a second figure, coming forward out of the dimness behind him, crossed the threshold. It was a woman, cloaked and hooded. The door was drawn to behind her, and we were alone together.

Beside the cloak and hood she wore a riding mask. "Do you know who it is?" she asked, when she had stood, so shrouded, for a long minute, during which I had found no words with which to welcome her.

"Yea," I answered: "the princess in the fairy tale."

She freed her dark hair from its covering, and unclasping her cloak let it drop to the floor. "Shall I unmask?" she asked, with a sigh. "Faith! I should keep the bit of silk between your eyes, sir, and my blushes. Am I ever to be the forward one? Do you not think me too bold a lady?" As she spoke, her white hands were busy about the fastening of her mask. "The knot is too hard," she murmured, with a little tremulous laugh and a catch of her breath.

I untied the ribbons.

"May I not sit down?" she said plaintively, but with soft merriment in her eyes. "I am not quite strong yet. My heart — you do not know what pain I have in my heart sometimes. It makes me weep of nights and when none are by, indeed it does!"

There was a settle beneath the window. I led her to it, and she sat down.

"You must know that I am walking in the Govern-

or's garden, that hath only a lane between it and the gaol." Her eyes were downcast, her cheeks pure rose.

"When did you first love me?" I demanded.

"Lady Wyatt must have guessed why Master Rolfe alone went not to the bear-baiting, but joined us in the garden. She said the air was keen, and fetched me her mask, and then herself went indoors to embroider Samson in the arms of Delilah."

"Was it here at Jamestown, or was it when we were first wrecked, or on the island with the pink hill when you wrote my name in the sand, or" —

"The George will sail in three days, and we are to be taken back to England after all. It does not scare me now."

"In all my life I have kissed you only once," I said.

The rose deepened, and in her eyes there was laughter, with tears behind. "You are a gentleman of determination," she said. "If you are bent upon having your way, I do not know that I—that I—can help myself. I do not even know that I want to help myself."

Outside the wind blew and the sun shone, and the laughter from below the fort was too far away and elfin to jar upon us. The world forgot us, and we were well content. There seemed not much to say: I suppose we were too happy for words. I knelt beside her, and she laid her hands in mine, and now and then we spoke. In her short and lonely life, and in my longer stern and crowded one, there had been little tenderness, little happiness. In her past, to those about her, she had seemed bright and gay; I had been a comrade whom men liked because I could jest as well as fight. Now we were happy, but we were not gay. Each felt for the other a great compassion;

each knew that though we smiled to-day, the groan and the tear might be to-morrow's due; the sunshine around us was pure gold, but that the clouds were mounting we knew full well.

"I must soon be gone," she said at last. "It is a stolen meeting. I do not know when we shall meet again."

She rose from the settle, and I rose with her, and we stood together beside the barred window. There was no danger of her being seen; street and square were left to the wind and the sunshine. My arm was around her, and she leaned her head against my breast. "Perhaps we shall never meet again," she said.

"The winter is over," I answered. "Soon the trees will be green and the flowers in bloom. I will not believe that our spring can have no summer."

She took from her bosom a little flower that had been pinned there. It lay, a purple star, in the hollow of her hand. "It grew in the sun. It is the first flower of spring." She put it to her lips, then laid it upon the window ledge beside my hand. "I have brought you evil gifts,—foes and strife and peril. Will you take this little purple flower—and all my heart beside?"

I bent and kissed first the tiny blossom, and then the lips that had proffered it. "I am very rich," I said.

The sun was now low, and the pines in the square and the upright of the pillory cast long shadows. The wind had fallen and the sounds had died away. It seemed very still. Nothing moved but the creeping shadows until a flight of small white-breasted birds went past the window. "The snow is gone," I said. "The snowbirds are flying north."

"The woods will soon be green," she murmured wistfully. "Ah, if we could ride through them once more, back to Weyanoke" —

"To home," I said.

"Home," she echoed softly.

There was a low knocking at the door behind us. "It is Master Rolfe's signal," she said. "I must not stay. Tell me that you love me, and let me go."

I drew her closer to me and pressed my lips upon her bowed head. "Do you not know that I love you?" I asked.

"Yea," she answered. "I have been taught it. Tell me that you believe that God will be good to us. Tell me that we shall be happy yet; for oh, I have a boding heart this day!"

Her voice broke, and she lay trembling in my arms, her face hidden. "If the summer never comes for us" — she whispered. "Good-by, my lover and my husband. If I have brought you ruin and death, I have brought you, too, a love that is very great. Forgive me and kiss me, and let me go."

"Thou art my dearly loved and honored wife," I said. "My heart forebodes summer, and joy, and peace, and home."

We kissed each other solemnly, as those who part for a journey and a warfare. I spoke no word to Rolfe when the door was opened and she had passed out with her cloak drawn about her face, but we clasped hands, and each knew the other for his friend indeed. They were gone, the gaoler closing and locking the door behind them. As for me, I went back to the settle beneath the window, and, falling on my knees beside it, buried my face in my arms.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH I KEEP TRYST

THE sun dropped below the forest, blood red, dyeing the river its own color. There were no clouds in the sky, — only a great suffusion of crimson climbing to the zenith; against it the woods were as black as war paint. The color faded and the night set in, a night of no wind and of numberless stars. On the hearth burned a fire. I left the window and sat beside it, and in the hollows between the red embers made pictures, as I used to make them when I was a boy.

I sat there long. It grew late, and all sounds in the town were hushed; only now and then the "All's well!" of the watch came faintly to my ears. Diccon lodged with me; he lay in his clothes upon a pallet in the far corner of the room, but whether he slept or not I did not ask. He and I had never wasted words; since chance had thrown us together again we spoke only when occasion required.

The fire was nigh out, and it must have been ten of the clock when, with somewhat more of caution and less of noise than usual, the key grated in the lock; the door opened, and the gaoler entered, closing it noiselessly behind him. There was no reason why he should intrude himself upon me after nightfall, and I regarded him with a frown and an impatience that presently turned to curiosity.

He began to move about the room, making pretense