

"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

of seeing that there was water in the pitcher beside my pallet, that the straw beneath the coverlet was fresh, that the bars of the window were firm, and ended by approaching the fire and heaping pine upon it. It flamed up brilliantly, and in the strong red light he half opened a clenched hand and showed me two gold pieces, and beneath them a folded paper. I looked at his furtive eyes and brutal, doltish face, but he kept them blank as a wall. The hand closed again over the treasure within it, and he turned away as if to leave the room. I drew a noble — one of a small store of gold pieces conveyed to me by Rolfe — from my pocket, and stooping made it spin upon the hearth in the red firelight. The gaoler looked at it askance, but continued his progress toward the door. I drew out its fellow, set it too to spinning, then leaned back against the table. "They hunt in couples," I said. "There will be no third one."

He had his foot upon them before they had done spinning. The next moment they had kissed the two pieces already in his possession, and he had transferred all four to his pocket. I held out my hand for the paper, and he gave it to me grudgingly, with a spiteful slowness of movement. He would have stayed beside me as I read it, but I sternly bade him keep his distance; then kneeling before the fire to get the light, I opened the paper. It was written upon in a delicate, woman's hand, and it ran thus: —

An you hold me dear, come to me at once. Come without tarrying to the deserted hut on the neck of land, nearest to the forest. As you love me, as you are my knight, keep this tryst.

In distress and peril,

THY WIFE.

Folded with it was a line in the commander's hand and with his signature: "The bearer may pass without the palisade at his pleasure."

I read the first paper again, refolded it, and rose to my feet. "Who brought this, sirrah?" I demanded.

His answer was glib enough: "One of the governor's servants. He said as how there was no harm in the letter, and the gold was good."

"When was this?"

"Just now. No, I did n't know the man."

I saw no way to discover whether or not he lied. Drawing out another gold piece, I laid it upon the table. He eyed it greedily, edging nearer and nearer.

"For leaving this door unlocked," I said.

His eyes narrowed and he moistened his lips, shifting from one foot to the other.

I put down a second piece. "For opening the outer door," I said.

He wet his lips again, made an inarticulate sound in his throat, and finally broke out with, "The commander will nail my ears to the pillory."

"You can lock the doors after me, and know as little as you choose in the morning. No gain without some risk."

"That's so," he agreed, and made a clutch at the gold.

I swept it out of his reach. "First earn it," I said dryly. "Look at the foot of the pillory an hour from now and you'll find it. I'll not pay you this side of the doors."

He bit his lips and studied the floor. "You're a gentleman," he growled at last. "I suppose I can trust ye."

"I suppose you can."

Taking up his lantern he turned toward the door. "It's growing late," he said, with a most uncouth attempt to feign a guileless drowsiness. "I'll to bed, captain, when I've locked up. Good-night to ye!"

He was gone, and the door was left unlocked. I could walk out of that gaol as I could have walked out of my house at Weyanoke. I was free, but should I take my freedom? Going back to the light of the fire I unfolded the paper and stared at it, turning its contents this way and that in my mind. The hand — but once had I seen her writing, and then it had been wrought with a shell upon firm sand. I could not judge if this were the same. Had the paper indeed come from her? Had it not? If in truth it was a message from my wife, what had befallen in a few hours since our parting? If it was a forger's lie, what trap was set, what toils were laid? I walked up and down, and tried to think it out. The strangeness of it all, the choice of a lonely and distant hut for trysting place, that pass coming from a sworn officer of the Company, certain things I had heard that day . . . A trap . . . and to walk into it with my eyes open. . . . *An you hold me dear. As you are my knight, keep this tryst. In distress and peril. . . .* Come what might, there was a risk I could not run.

I had no weapons to assume, no preparations to make. Gathering up the gaoler's gold I started toward the door, opened it, and going out would have closed it softly behind me but that a booted leg thrust across the jamb prevented me. "I am going with you," said Diccon in a guarded voice. "If you try to prevent me, I will rouse the house." His head was thrown back in the old way; the old daredevil look was upon his face. "I don't know why you are

going," he declared, "but there'll be danger, anyhow."

"To the best of my belief I am walking into a trap," I said.

"Then it will shut on two instead of one," he answered doggedly.

By this he was through the door, and there was no shadow of turning on his dark, determined face. I knew my man, and wasted no more words. Long ago it had grown to seem the thing most in nature that the hour of danger should find us side by side.

When the door of the firelit room was shut, the gaol was in darkness that might be felt. It was very still: the few other inmates were fast asleep; the gaoler was somewhere out of sight, dreaming with open eyes. We groped our way through the passage to the stairs, noiselessly descended them, and found the outer door unchained, unbarred, and slightly ajar.

When I had laid the gold beneath the pillory, we struck swiftly across the square, being in fear lest the watch should come upon us, and took the first lane that led toward the palisade. Beneath the burning stars the town lay stark in sleep. So bright in the wintry air were those far-away lights that the darkness below them was not great. We could see the low houses, the shadowy pines, the naked oaks, the sandy lane glimmering away to the river, star-strewn to match the heavens. The air was cold, but exceedingly clear and still. Now and then a dog barked, or wolves howled in the forest across the river. We kept in the shadow of the houses and the trees, and went with the swiftness, silence, and caution of Indians.

The last house we must pass before reaching the palisade was one that Rolfe owned, and in which he

lodged when business brought him to Jamestown. It and some low outbuildings beyond it were as dark as the cedars in which they were set, and as silent as the grave. Rolfe and his Indian brother were sleeping there now, while I stood without. Or did they sleep? Were they there at all? Might it not have been Rolfe who had bribed the gaoler and procured the pass from West? Might I not find him at that strange trysting place? Might not all be well, after all? I was sorely tempted to rouse that silent house and demand if its master were within. I did it not. Servants were there, and noise would be made, and time that might be more precious than life-blood was flying fast. I went on, and Diccon with me.

There was a cabin built almost against the palisade, and here one man was supposed to watch, whilst another slept. To-night we found both asleep. I shook the younger to his feet, and heartily cursed him for his negligence. He listened stupidly, and read as stupidly, by the light of his lantern, the pass which I thrust beneath his nose. Staggering to his feet, and drunk with his unlawful slumber, he fumbled at the fastenings of the gate for full three minutes before the ponderous wood finally swung open and showed the road beyond. "It's all right," he muttered thickly. "The commander's pass. Good-night, the three of ye!"

"Are you drunk or drugged?" I demanded. "There are only two. It's not sleep that is the matter with you. What is it?"

He made no answer, but stood holding the gate open and blinking at us with dull, unseeing eyes. Something ailed him besides sleep; he may have been drugged, for aught I know. When we had gone some yards from the gate, we heard him say again, in pre-

cisely the same tone, "Good-night, the three of ye!" Then the gate creaked to, and we heard the bars drawn across it.

Without the palisade was a space of waste land, marsh and thicket, tapering to the narrow strip of sand and scrub joining the peninsula to the forest, and here and there upon this waste ground rose a mean house, dwelt in by the poorer sort. All were dark. We left them behind, and found ourselves upon the neck, with the desolate murmur of the river on either hand, and before us the deep blackness of the forest. Suddenly Diccon stopped in his tracks and turned his head. "I did hear something then," he muttered. "Look, sir!"

The stars faintly lit the road that had been trodden hard and bare by the feet of all who came and went. Down this road something was coming toward us, something low and dark, that moved not fast, and not slow, but with a measured and relentless pace. "A panther!" said Diccon.

We watched the creature with more of curiosity than alarm. Unless brought to bay, or hungry, or wantonly irritated, these great cats were cowardly enough. It would hardly attack the two of us. Nearer and nearer it came, showing no signs of anger and none of fear, and paying no attention to the withered branch with which Diccon tried to scare it off. When it was so close that we could see the white of its breast it stopped, looking at us with large unfaltering eyes, and slightly moving its tail to and fro.

"A tame panther!" ejaculated Diccon. "It must be the one Nantauquas tamed, sir. He would have kept it somewhere near Master Rolfe's house."

"And it heard us, and followed us through the gate," I said. "It was the *third* the warder talked of."

We walked on, and the beast, addressing itself to motion, followed at our heels. Now and then we looked back at it, but we feared it not.

As for me, I had begun to think that a panther might be the least formidable thing I should meet that night. By this I had scarcely any hope—or fear—that I should find her at our journey's end. The lonesome path that led only to the night-time forest, the deep and dark river with its mournful voice, the hard, bright, pitiless stars, the cold, the loneliness, the distance,—how should she be there? And if not she, who then?

The hut to which I had been directed stood in an angle made by the neck and the main bank of the river. On one side of it was the water, on the other a deep wood. The place had an evil name, and no man had lived there since the planter who had built it hanged himself upon its threshold. The hut was ruinous: in the summer tall weeds grew up around it, and venomous snakes harbored beneath its rotted and broken floor; in the winter the snow whitened it, and the wild fowl flew screaming in and out of the open door and the windows that needed no barring. To-night the door was shut and the windows in some way obscured. But the interstices between the logs showed red; the hut was lighted within, and some one was keeping tryst.

The stillness was deadly. It was not silence, for the river murmured in the stiff reeds, and far off in the midnight forest some beast of the night uttered its cry, but a hush, a holding of the breath, an expectant horror. The door, warped and shrunken, was drawn to, but was not fastened, as I could tell by the unbroken line of red light down one side from top to

bottom. Making no sound, I laid my hand upon it, pushed it open a little way, and looked within the hut.

I had thought to find it empty or to find it crowded. It was neither. A torch lit it, and on the hearth burned a fire. Drawn in front of the blaze was an old rude chair, and in it sat a slight figure draped from head to foot in a black cloak. The head was bowed and hidden, the whole attitude one of listlessness and dejection. As I looked, there came a long tremulous sigh, and the head drooped lower and lower, as if in a growing hopelessness.

The revulsion of feeling was so great that for the moment I was dazed as by a sudden blow. There had been time during the walk from the gaol for enough of wild and whirling thoughts as to what should greet me in that hut; and now the slight figure by the fire, the exquisite melancholy of its posture, its bent head, the weeping I could divine,—I had but one thought, to comfort her as quickly as I might. Diccon's hand was upon my arm, but I shook it off, and pushing the door open crossed the uneven and noisy floor to the fire, and bent over the lonely figure beside it. "Jocelyn," I said, "I have kept tryst."

As I spoke, I laid my hand upon the bowed and covered head. It was raised, the cloak was drawn aside, and there looked me in the eyes the Italian.

As if it had been the Gorgon's gaze, I was turned to stone. The filmy eyes, the smile that would have been mocking had it not been so very faint, the pallor, the malignance,—I stared and stared, and my heart grew cold and sick.

It was but for a minute; then a warning cry from Diccon roused me. I sprang backward until the width

of the hearth was between me and the Italian, then wheeled and found myself face to face with the King's late favorite. Behind him was an open door, and beyond it a small inner room, dimly lighted. He stood and looked at me with an insolence and a triumph most intolerable. His drawn sword was in his hand, the jeweled hilt blazing in the firelight, and on his dark, superb face a taunting smile. I met it with one as bold, at least, but I said no word, good or bad. In the cabin of the *George* I had sworn to myself that thenceforward my sword should speak for me to this gentleman.

"You came," he said. "I thought you would."

I glanced around the hut, seeking for a weapon. Seeing nothing more promising than the thick, half-consumed torch, I sprang to it and wrested it from the socket. Diccon caught up a piece of rusted iron from the hearth, and together we faced my lord's drawn sword and a small, sharp, and strangely shaped dagger that the Italian drew from a velvet sheath.

My lord laughed, reading my thoughts. "You are mistaken," he declared coolly. "I am content that Captain Percy knows I do not fear to fight him. This time I play to win." Turning toward the outer door, he raised his hand with a gesture of command.

In an instant the room was filled. The red-brown figures, naked save for the loincloth and the headdress, the impassive faces dashed with black, the ruthless eyes,—I knew now why Master Edward Sharpless had gone to the forest, and what service had been bought with that silver cup. The Paspaheghs and I were old enemies; doubtless they would find their task a pleasant one.

"My own knaves, unfortunately, were out of the

way; sent home on the *Santa Teresa*," said my lord, still smiling. "I am not yet so poor that I cannot hire others. True, Nicolo might have done the work just now, when you bent over him so lovingly and spoke so softly; but the river might give up your body to tell strange tales. I have heard that the Indians are more ingenious, and leave no such witness anywhere."

Before the words were out of his mouth I had sprung upon him, and had caught him by the sword wrist and the throat. He strove to free his hand, to withdraw himself from my grasp. Locked together, we struggled backward and forward in what seemed a blaze of lights and a roaring as of mighty waters. Red hands caught at me, sharp knives panted to drink my blood; but so fast we turned and writhed, now he uppermost, now I, that for very fear of striking the wrong man hands and knives could not be bold. I heard Diccon fighting, and knew that there would be howling tomorrow among the squaws of the Paspaheghs. With all his might my lord strove to bend the sword against me, and at last did cut me across the arm, causing the blood to flow freely. It made a pool upon the floor, and once my foot slipped in it, and I stumbled and almost fall.

Two of the Paspaheghs were silent for evermore. Diccon had the knife of the first to fall, and it ran red. The Italian, quick and sinuous as a serpent, kept beside my lord and me, striving to bring his dagger to his master's aid. We two panted hard; before our eyes blood, within our ears the sea. The noise of the other combatants suddenly fell. The hush could only mean that Diccon was dead or taken. I could not look behind to see. With an access of fury I drove

my antagonist toward a corner of the hut, — the corner, so it chanced, in which the panther had taken up its quarters. With his heel he struck the beast out of his way, then made a last desperate effort to throw me. I let him think he was about to succeed, gathered my forces and brought him crashing to the ground. The sword was in my hand and shortened, the point was at his throat, when my arm was jerked backwards. A moment, and half a dozen hands had dragged me from the man beneath me, and a supple savage had passed a thong of deerskin around my arms and pinioned them to my sides. The game was up; there remained only to pay the forfeit without a grimace.

Diccon was not dead; pinioned, like myself, and breathing hard, he leaned sullenly against the wall, they that he had slain at his feet. My lord rose, and stood over against me. His rich doublet was torn and dragged away at the neck, and my blood stained his hand and arm. A smile was upon the face that had made him master of a kingdom's master.

"The game was long," he said, "but I have won at last. A long good-night to you, Captain Percy, and a dreamless sleep!"

There was a swift backward movement of the Indians, and a loud "The panther, sir! Have a care!" from Diccon. I turned. The panther, maddened by the noise and light, the shifting figures, the blocked doors, the sight and smell of blood, the blow that had been dealt it, was crouching for a spring. The red-brown hair was bristling, the eyes were terrible. I was before it, but those glaring eyes had marked me not. It passed me like a bar from a catapult, and the man whose heel it had felt was full in its path. One of its forefeet sank in the velvet of the doublet; the

claws of the other entered the flesh below the temple, and tore downwards and across. With a cry as awful as the panther's scream the Italian threw himself upon the beast and buried his poniard in its neck. The panther and the man it had attacked went down together.

When the Indians had unlocked that dread embrace and had thrust aside the dead brute, there emerged from the dimness of the inner room Master Edward Sharpless, gray with fear, trembling in every limb, to take the reins that had fallen from my lord's hands. The King's minion lay in his blood, a ghastly spectacle; unconscious now, but with life before him, — life through which to pass a nightmare vision. The face out of which had looked that sullen, proud, and wicked spirit had been one of great beauty; it had brought him exceeding wealth and power beyond measure; the King had loved to look upon it; and it had come to this. He lived, and I was to die: better my death than his life. In every heart there are dark depths, whence at times ugly things creep into the daylight; but at least I could drive back that unmanly triumph, and bid it never come again. I would have killed him, but I would not have had him thus.

The Italian was upon his knees beside his master: even such a creature could love. From his skeleton throat came a low, prolonged, croaking sound, and his bony hands strove to wipe away the blood. The Paspahghs drew around us closer and closer, and the werowance clutched me by the shoulder. I shook him off. "Give the word, Sharpless," I said, "or nod, if thou art too frightened to speak. Murder is too stern a stuff for such a base kitchen knave as thou to deal in."

White and shaking, he would not meet my eyes, but beckoned the werowance to him, and began to whisper vehemently; pointing now to the man upon the floor, now to the town, now to the forest. The Indian listened, nodded, and glided back to his fellows.

"The white men upon the Powhatan are many," he said in his own tongue, "but they build not their wigwams upon the banks of the Pamunkey.<sup>1</sup> The singing birds of the Pamunkey tell no tales. The pine splinters will burn as brightly there, and the white men will smell them not. We will build a fire at Uttamusac, between the red hills, before the temple and the graves of the kings." There was a murmur of assent from his braves.

Uttamussac! They would probably make a two days' journey of it. We had that long, then, to live.

Captors and captives, we presently left the hut. On the threshold I looked back, past the poltroon whom I had flung into the river one midsummer day, to that prone and bleeding figure. As I looked, it groaned and moved. The Indians behind me forced me on; a moment, and we were out beneath the stars. They shone so very brightly; there was one — large, steadfast, golden — just over the dark town behind us, over the Governor's house. Did she sleep or did she wake? Sleeping or waking, I prayed God to keep her safe and give her comfort. The stars now shone through naked branches, black tree trunks hemmed us round, and under our feet was the dreary rustling of dead leaves. The leafless trees gave way to pines and cedars, and the closely woven, scented roof hid the heavens, and made a darkness of the world beneath.

<sup>1</sup> The modern York.

## CHAPTER XXX

### IN WHICH WE START UPON A JOURNEY

WHEN the dawn broke, it found us traveling through a narrow valley, beside a stream of some width. Upon its banks grew trees of extraordinary height and girth; cypress and oak and walnut, they towered into the air, their topmost branches stark and black against the roseate heavens. Below that iron tracery glowed the firebrands of the maples, and here and there a willow leaned a pale green cloud above the stream. Mist closed the distances; we could hear, but not see, the deer where they stood to drink in the shallow places, or couched in the gray and dreamlike recesses of the forest.

Spectral, unreal, and hollow seems the world at dawn. Then, if ever, the heart sickens and the will flags, and life becomes a pageant that hath ceased to entertain. As I moved through the mist and the silence, and felt the tug of the thong that bound me to the wrist of the savage who stalked before me, I cared not how soon they made an end, seeing how stale and unprofitable were all things under the sun.

Diccon, walking behind me, stumbled over a root and fell upon his knees, dragging down with him the Indian to whom he was tied. In a sudden access of fury, aggravated by the jeers with which his fellows greeted his mishap, the savage turned upon his prisoner and would have stuck a knife into him, bound