

weariness. Every sense was sharpened ; my feet were light ; the keen air was like wine in the drinking ; there was a star low in the south that shone and beckoned. The leagues between my wife and me were few. I saw her standing beneath the star, with a little purple flower in her hand.

Suddenly, a bend in the stream hiding the star, I became aware that Diccon was no longer keeping step with me, but had fallen somewhat to the rear. I turned, and he was leaning heavily, with drooping head, against the trunk of a tree.

"Art so worn as that?" I exclaimed. "Put more heart into thy heels, man!"

He straightened himself and strode on beside me. "I don't know what came over me for a minute," he answered. "The wolves are loud to-night. I hope they'll keep to their side of the water."

A stone's throw farther on, the stream curving to the west, we left it, and found ourselves in a sparsely wooded glade, with a bare and sandy soil beneath our feet, and above, in the western sky, a crescent moon. Again Diccon lagged behind, and presently I heard him groan in the darkness.

I wheeled. "Diccon!" I cried. "What is the matter?"

Before I could reach him he had sunk to his knees. When I put my hand upon his arm and again demanded what ailed him, he tried to laugh, then tried to swear, and ended with another groan. "The ball did graze my arm," he said, "but it went on into my side. I'll just lie here and die, and wish you well at Jamestown. When the red imps come against you there, and you open fire on them, name a bullet for me."

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH I COME TO THE GOVERNOR'S HOUSE

I LAID him down upon the earth, and, cutting away his doublet and the shirt beneath, saw the wound, and knew that there was a journey indeed that he would shortly make. "The world is turning round," he muttered, "and the stars are falling thicker than the hailstones yesterday. Go on, and I will stay behind, — I and the wolves."

I took him in my arms and carried him back to the bank of the stream, for I knew that he would want water until he died. My head was bare, but he had worn his cap from the gaol at Jamestown that night. I filled it with water and gave him to drink ; then washed the wound and did what I could to stanch the bleeding. He turned from side to side, and presently his mind began to wander, and he talked of the tobacco in the fields at Weyanoke. Soon he was raving of old things, old camp fires and night-time marches and wild skirmishes, perils by land and by sea ; then of dice and wine and women. Once he cried out that Dale had bound him upon the wheel, and that his arms and legs were broken, and the woods rang to his screams. Why, in that wakeful forest, they were unheard, or why, if heard, they went unheeded, God only knows.

The moon went down, and it was very cold. How black were the shadows around us, what foes might

steal from that darkness upon us, it was not worth while to consider. I do not know what I thought of on that night, or even that I thought at all. Between my journeys for the water that he called for I sat beside the dying man with my hand upon his breast, for he was quieter so. Now and then I spoke to him, but he answered not.

Hours before we had heard the howling of wolves, and knew that some ravenous pack was abroad. With the setting of the moon the noise had ceased, and I thought that the brutes had pulled down the deer they hunted, or else had gone with their hunger and their dismal voices out of earshot. Suddenly the howling recommenced, at first faint and far away, then nearer and nearer yet. Earlier in the evening the stream had been between us, but now the wolves had crossed and were coming down our side of the water, and were coming fast.

All the ground was strewn with dead wood, and near by was a growth of low and brittle bushes. I gathered the withered branches, and broke fagots from the bushes; then into the press of dark and stealthy forms I threw a great crooked stick, shouting as I did so, and threatening with my arms. They turned and fled, but presently they were back again. Again I frightened them away, and again they returned. I had flint and steel and tinder box; when I had scared them from us a third time, and they had gone only a little way, I lit a splinter of pine, and with it fired my heap of wood; then dragged Diccon into the light and sat down beside him, with no longer any fear of the wolves, but with absolute confidence in the quick appearance of less cowardly foes. There was wood enough and to spare; when the fire sank low and the

hungry eyes gleamed nearer, I fed it again, and the flame leaped up and mocked the eyes.

No human enemy came upon us. The fire blazed and roared, and the man who lay in its rosy glare raved on, crying out now and then at the top of his voice; but on that night of all nights, of all years, light and voice drew no savage band to put out the one and silence the other forever.

Hours passed, and as it drew toward midnight Diccon sank into a stupor. I knew that the end was not far away. The wolves were gone at last, and my fire was dying down. He needed my touch upon his breast no longer, and I went to the stream and bathed my hands and forehead, and then threw myself face downward upon the bank. In a little while the desolate murmur of the water became intolerable, and I rose and went back to the fire, and to the man whom, as God lives, I loved as a brother.

He was conscious. Pale and cold and nigh gone as he was, there came a light to his eyes and a smile to his lips when I knelt beside him. "You did not go?" he breathed.

"No," I answered, "I did not go."

For a few minutes he lay with closed eyes; when he again opened them upon my face, there were in their depths a question and an appeal. I bent over him, and asked him what he would have.

"You know," he whispered. "If you can . . . I would not go without it."

"Is it that?" I asked. "I forgave you long ago."

"I meant to kill you. I was mad because you struck me before the lady, and because I had betrayed my trust. An you had not caught my hand, I should be your murderer." He spoke with long intervals

between the words, and the death dew was on his forehead.

"Remember it not, Diccon," I entreated. "I too was to blame. And I see not that night for other nights, — for other nights and days, Diccon."

He smiled, but there was still in his face a shadowy eagerness. "You said you would never strike me again," he went on, "and that I was man of yours no more forever — and you gave me my freedom in the paper which I tore." He spoke in gasps, with his eyes upon mine. "I'll be gone in a few minutes now. If I might go as your man still, and could tell the Lord Jesus Christ that my master on earth forgave, and took back, it would be a hand in the dark. I have spent my life in gathering darkness for myself at the last."

I bent lower over him, and took his hand in mine. "Diccon, my man," I said.

A brightness came into his face, and he faintly pressed my hand. I slipped my arm beneath him and raised him a little higher to meet his death. He was smiling now, and his mind was not quite clear. "Do you mind, sir," he asked, "how green and strong and sweet smelled the pines that May day, when we found Virginia, so many years ago?"

"Ay, Diccon," I answered. "Before we saw the land, the fragrance told us we were near it."

"I smell it now," he went on, "and the bloom of the grape, and the May-time flowers. And can you not hear, sir, the whistling and the laughter and the sound of the falling trees, that merry time when Smith made axemen of all our fine gentlemen?"

"Ay, Diccon," I said. "And the sound of the water that was dashed down the sleeve of any that were caught in an oath."

He laughed like a little child. "It is well that I was n't a gentleman, and had not those trees to fell, or I should have been as wet as any merman. . . . And Pocahontas, the little maid . . . and how blue the sky was, and how glad we were what time the Patience and Deliverance came in!"

His voice failed, and for a minute I thought he was gone; but he had been a strong man, and life slipped not easily from him. When his eyes opened again he knew me not, but thought he was in some tavern, and struck with his hand upon the ground as upon a table, and called for the drawer.

Around him were only the stillness and the shadows of the night, but to his vision men sat and drank with him, diced and swore and told wild tales of this or that. For a time he talked loudly and at random of the vile quality of the drink, and his viler luck at the dice; then he began to tell a story. As he told it, his senses seemed to steady, and he spoke with coherence and like a shadow of himself.

"And you call that a great thing, William Host?" he demanded. "I can tell a true tale worth two such lies, my masters. (Robin tapster, more ale! And move less like a slug, or my tankard and your ear will cry, 'Well met!') It was between Ypres and Courtrai, friends, and it's nigh fifteen years ago. There were fields in which nothing was sowed because they were ploughed with the hoofs of war horses, and ditches in which dead men were thrown, and dismal marshes, and roads that were no roads at all, but only sloughs. And there was a great stone house, old and ruinous, with tall poplars shivering in the rain and mist. Into this house there threw themselves a band of Dutch and English, and hard on their heels came

two hundred Spaniards. All day they besieged that house, — smoke and flame and thunder and shouting and the crash of masonry, — and when eventide was come we, the Dutch and the English, thought that Death was not an hour behind.”

He paused, and made a gesture of raising a tankard to his lips. His eyes were bright, his voice was firm. The memory of that old day and its mortal strife had wrought upon him like wine.

“There was one amongst us,” he said, “he was our captain, and it’s of him I am going to tell the story. Robin tapster, bring me no more ale, but good mulled wine! It’s cold and getting dark, and I have to drink to a brave man besides” —

With the old bold laugh in his eyes, he raised himself, for the moment as strong as I that held him. “Drink to that Englishman, all of ye!” he cried, “and not in filthy ale, but in good, gentlemanly sack! I’ll pay the score. Here’s to him, brave hearts! Here’s to my master!”

With his hand at his mouth, and his story untold, he fell back. I held him in my arms until the brief struggle was over, and then laid his body down upon the earth.

It might have been one of the clock. For a little while I sat beside him, with my head bowed in my hands. Then I straightened his limbs and crossed his hands upon his breast, and kissed him upon the brow, and left him lying dead in the forest.

It was hard going through the blackness of the night-time woods. Once I was nigh sucked under in a great swamp, and once I stumbled into some hole or pit in the earth, and for a time thought that I had broken my leg. The night was very dark, and some-

times when I could not see the stars, I lost my way, and went to the right or the left, or even back upon my track. Though I heard the wolves, they did not come nigh me. Just before daybreak, I crouched behind a log, and watched a party of savages file past like shadows of the night.

At last the dawn came, and I could press on more rapidly. For two days and two nights I had not slept; for a day and a night I had not tasted food. As the sun climbed the heavens, a thousand black spots, like summer gnats, danced between his face and my weary eyes. The forest laid stumbling-blocks before me, and drove me back, and made me wind in and out when I would have had my path straighter than an arrow. When the ground allowed I ran; when I must break my way, panting, through undergrowth so dense and stubborn that it seemed some enchanted thicket, where each twig snapped but to be on the instant stiff in place again, I broke it with what patience I might; when I must turn aside for this or that obstacle I made the detour, though my heart cried out at the necessity. Once I saw reason to believe that two or more Indians were upon my trail, and lost time in outwitting them; and once I must go a mile out of my way to avoid an Indian village.

As the day wore on, I began to go as in a dream. It had come to seem the gigantic wood of some fantastic tale through which I was traveling. The fallen trees ranged themselves into an abatis hard to surmount; the thickets withstood one like iron; the streamlets were like rivers, the marshes leagues wide, the treetops miles away. Little things, twisted roots, trailing vines, dead and rotten wood, made me stumble. A wind was blowing that had blown just so

since time began, and the forest was filled with the sound of the sea.

Afternoon came, and the shadows began to lengthen. They were lines of black paint spilt in a thousand places, and stealing swiftly and surely across the brightness of the land. Torn and bleeding and breathless, I hastened on; for it was drawing toward night, and I should have been at Jamestown hours before. My head pained me, and as I ran I saw men and women stealing in and out among the trees before me: Pocahontas with her wistful eyes and braided hair and finger on her lips; Nantauquas; Dale, the knight-marshal, and Argall with his fierce, unscrupulous face; my cousin George Percy, and my mother with her stately figure, her embroidery in her hands. I knew that they were but phantoms of my brain, but their presence confused and troubled me.

The shadows ran together, and the sunshine died out of the forest. Stumbling on, I saw through the thinning trees a long gleam of red, and thought it was blood, but presently knew that it was the river, crimson from the sunset. A minute more and I stood upon the shore of the mighty stream, between the two brightnesses of flood and heavens. There was a silver crescent in the sky with one white star above it, and fair in sight, down the James, with lights springing up through the twilight, was the town,—the English town that we had built and named for our King, and had held in the teeth of Spain, in the teeth of the wilderness and its terrors. It was not a mile away; a little longer,—a little longer and I could rest, with my tidings told.

The dusk had quite fallen when I reached the neck of land. The hut to which I had been enticed that

night stood dark and ghastly, with its door swinging in the wind. I ran past it and across the neck, and, arriving at the palisade, beat upon the gate with my hands, and called to the warder to open. When I had told him my name and tidings, he did so, with shaking knees and starting eyes. Cautioning him to raise no alarm in the town, I hurried by him into the street, and down it toward the house that was set aside for the Governor of Virginia. I should find there now, not Yeardley, but Sir Francis Wyatt.

The torches were lighted, and the folk were indoors, for the night was cold. One or two figures that I met or passed would have accosted me, not knowing who I was, but I brushed by them, and hastened on. Only when I passed the guest house I looked up, and saw that mine host's chief rooms were yet in use.

The Governor's door was open, and in the hall servingmen were moving to and fro. When I came in upon them, they cried out as it had been a ghost, and one fellow let a silver dish that he carried fall clattering to the floor. They shook and stood back, as I passed them without a word, and went on to the Governor's great room. The door was ajar, and I pushed it open and stood for a minute upon the threshold, unobserved by the occupants of the room.

After the darkness outside the lights dazzled me; the room, too, seemed crowded with men, though when I counted them there were not so many, after all. Supper had been put upon the table, but they were not eating. Before the fire, his head thoughtfully bent, and his fingers tapping upon the arm of his chair, sat the Governor; over against him, and as serious of aspect, was the Treasurer. West stood by the mantel, tugging at his long mustaches and softly swearing.

Clayborne was in the room, Piersey the Cape Merchant, and one or two besides. And Rolfe was there, walking up and down with hasty steps, and a flushed and haggard face. His suit of buff was torn and stained, and his great-boots were spattered with mud.

The Governor let his fingers rest upon the arm of his chair, and raised his head.

"He is dead, Master Rolfe," he said. "There can be no other conclusion, — a brave man lost to you and to the colony. We mourn with you, sir."

"We too have searched, Jack," put in West. "We have not been idle, though well-nigh all men believe that the Indians, who we know had a grudge against him, murdered him and his man that night, then threw their bodies into the river, and themselves made off out of our reach. But we hoped against hope that when your party returned he would be in your midst."

"As for this latest loss," continued the Governor, "within an hour of its discovery this morning search parties were out; yea, if I had allowed it, the whole town would have betaken itself to the woods. The searchers have not returned, and we are gravely anxious. Yet we are not utterly cast down. This trail can hardly be missed, and the Indians are friendly. There were a number in town overnight, and they went with the searchers, volunteering to act as their guides. We cannot but think that of this load, our hearts will soon be eased."

"God grant it!" groaned Rolfe. "I will drink but a cup of wine, sir, and then will be gone upon this new quest."

There was a movement in the room. "You are worn and spent with your fruitless travel, sir," said the Governor kindly. "I give you my word that all

that can be done is doing. Wait at least for the morning, and the good news it may bring."

The other shook his head. "I will go now. I could not look my friend in the face else — God in heaven!"

The Governor sprang to his feet; through the Treasurer's lips came a long, sighing breath; West's dark face was ashen. I came forward to the table, and leaned my weight upon it; for all the waves of the sea were roaring in my ears, and the lights were going up and down.

"Are you man or spirit?" cried Rolfe through white lips. "Are you Ralph Percy?"

"Yes, I am Percy," I said. "I have not well understood what quest you would go upon, Rolfe, but you cannot go to-night. And those parties that your Honor talked of, that have gone with Indians to guide them to look for some lost person, — I think that you will never see them again."

With an effort I drew myself erect, and standing so told my tidings, quietly and with circumstance, so as to leave no room for doubt as to their verity, or as to the sanity of him who brought them. They listened, as the warder had listened, with shaking limbs and gasping breath; for this was the fall and wiping out of a people of which I brought warning.

When all was told, and they stood there before me, white and shaken, seeking in their minds the thing to say or do first, I thought to ask a question myself; but before my tongue could frame it, the roaring of the sea became so loud that I could hear naught else, and the lights all ran together into a wheel of fire. Then in a moment all sounds ceased, and to the lights succeeded the blackness of outer darkness.