

VARIOUS

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A GENTLEMAN OF THE HIGHWAYS

By Kathryn Jarboe

Since early morning nothing but sunshine had entered the hospitable doorway of The Jolly Grig, a tavern not a dozen miles from the outer edge of London town. Across the white, sanded floor golden patches of light had moved with measured tread, and merry motes had danced in the golden beams, but nothing else had stirred. On the deep hearth were piled huge logs, ready to spring into a flashing evanescent life at the whim of some chance guest, for October was drawing in his breath preparatory to blowing it out over the land.

In front of the logs, sunk deep in his chair, dozed old Marmaduke Bass, the landlord of The Jolly Grig, granting himself the joy of serving drams to dream guests, since guests in the flesh would not come to him. Round-bellied as one of his own wine casks, he slept heavily, nor was he disturbed when a slight figure was framed for a second in the doorway. A slender, girlish figure it was, and the shadow of a heavily plumed riding hat danced with the motes in the sunbeams while the young woman stood, warily, peering into the room. Empty she knew it was, for she had been full ten minutes reconnoitering to discover the fact.

How sound did old Marmaduke sleep, was the question she was asking herself. She could see that the large hands folded across his stomach rose and fell with steady rhythmic ease. Then she saw a fly – a huge, buzzing, bluebottle fly – settle for a moment on the round, bald pate of the innkeeper, and still the sleeper did not stir. Surely if a fly could not waken him, she would not.

Hurriedly, stealthily, lightly, she scurried across the floor, her lifted riding skirt displaying quite needlessly the heavy boots she wore. The skirts were held to her side by her elbows, for she had need of both her hands. In one of them she held a long silken scarf, and not until this had been dexterously twisted and tied over old Marmaduke's eyes did that worthy awake.

"Help! Murder!" he sputtered through the gauntleted fingers that covered his mouth, struggling in vain to free himself from the detaining hands.

"Quiet, quiet now, good Marmaduke," cried the young woman, in a deep, full, contralto voice. "You know well enough who I am."

"Ay, sir, now you speak, I do know you," the innkeeper answered, settling back into his chair once more; "but it's what mischief you're up to that I'd *like* to know."

"No mischief this time, Marmaduke. On my honor as a gentleman in his majesty's service, I swear it." Laughter was bubbling out of the girl's eyes, but her voice was deeper, gruffer, even than before. "But it happens to be my whim of the moment that you should sit there just as you are for five full minutes. I want you not to touch the scarf that's about your eyes for that long time. Promise me that, Mr. Tavern-keeper, and promise me, too, not to shout again for help. I want a room for the night. And I'll have a cup of wine with you. Ah! not so quick, good Marmaduke. At the end of the five minutes, I mean. And yet I'm thirsting, too. You'll not believe it, but I've not tasted wine for a fortnight or more. It matters not which room I take, I suppose?"

"Ay, matter it does, sir," answered Marmaduke. "In fact, it's but poor accommodation I can give you. Lord Farquhart has the whole house engaged for the night. He's stopping here with a party of friends to meet his lady, who's coming in from the north somewheres. I've only the small closet back of the wine room for my own use."

“Then the small closet back of the wine room will have to serve me,” she answered, “and you’ll have to spend the night in this chair ruminating on this Lord What’s-his-name’s greediness in claiming the whole house. Or, perchance, I’ll go when these young lords arrive, and leave you your room to yourself. Now, remember, your life or mine is forfeit if you raise that silken band ere I return. And I’m watching you every minute; mind that, too.”

She backed away from him, keeping a wary eye on him, but there was, in reality, no need for this. He sat quite still, his hands peacefully crossed on his stomach. Through the small doorway she slipped, her trailing skirts still held high, but her heavy boots now seemed to swagger across the wooden floor.

“And who may this Lord Farquhart be that he should require a whole house and an empty house?” she asked, from the threshold, and even as she spoke she was hurriedly removing the heavily plumed riding hat and replacing it with a jaunty cap fringed with black, curling locks of hair.

“Why, Lord Farquhart is – why, he’s just the new Lord Farquhart that was Mr. Percy Gordon not so long ago, before he came into a title that carried no wealth with it,” the innkeeper’s fat voice answered. “You’ve surely not been deaf to the gossip that’s going about! How my Lord Farquhart’s going to marry his cousin, old Gordon’s daughter, the Lady Barbara Gordon, and with her, old Gordon’s gold. The whole of London’s ringing with it.”

“Ay, perhaps, my good Marmaduke, but I’m not in London much of the time, so London’s stalest gossip is news to me.” The end of this sentence was muffled in the folds of her riding skirt that she was drawing off over her head, and the landlord of The Jolly Grig took occasion to soliloquize:

“Indeed, if it’s not mischief the lad’s bent on, it’s nothing good, I’ll be bound. Whatever he swears, he’s good for naught save mischief. And I’ll swear, too, that it’s less than a fortnight since he was drinking wine here, in this very place. Though, I must say, to his credit, he’s a temperate fellow, and drinks less than any man of his size that comes here.”

“That’s just it! It’s a man of my own size that I’m after.”

Marmaduke’s guest, now a youth in riding coat and breeches, was seated in the deep chair that faced his host. “A man of my own size, and that’s not so far under six feet high, and with a good girth about the chest, and but small paunch under it, and muscles like iron, as you’ve occasion to know; a man of my own size, to drink with me and sup with me and love with me and fight with me, if we happen to love the same girl. Put off your blindman’s kerchief and fetch the wine I spoke for. What’s the best your house affords, my jolly grig? What wine will you offer this Lord Farquhart? What wine have you fit to serve to his lady?”

“I’ faith, I know not my Lord Farquhart’s taste,” answered Marmaduke. “But I’ve a royal port, lately brought over from France. I’ve a Canary Malmsey that his majesty himself’d find hard to despise. And then, why, I’ve a few bottles of Geldino’s sherris that – that I’ll not open save on the rarest occasion. I’ll bring you the port, if you say so, though, to my seeming, port is a heady wine for a lad like you.”

“Well, then, the port let it be,” answered the youth. “I judge my wines by the taste, not by the name.” When the wine was brought, he raised his cup with a swaggering laugh. “To the girls you *have* loved. To the girls I *will* love.” He emptied the cup at a single draught. “There are two times when a long throat is a good throat; when you’re wetting it, and when you’re cutting it. I’d have another, but I’m – I’m sleepy, Marmaduke. I’ll – I’ll – I guess I’ll sleep on that one. By your leave, I’ll sleep here until my lord – was it Lord Farquhart – you said was coming?”

The stranger’s booted feet were stretched far in front of him; his relaxed hands lay under the folds of his riding coat, and his head was nodding now this way, now that, in search of a resting place.

“Yes, my Lord Farquhart,” answered Marmaduke. “But, sir, you told me, the last time you were here, that you’d tell me your own name soon, that I’d know your name before so very long.”

“Ah, in that last you are doubtless right. You’ll know it some day, but I’m not so sure that I’ll do the telling, and, God on my side, that day’ll not be near.” The last words drooled out in a sleepy

undertone. Then the voice roused once more. “But who comes with Lord Farquhart? He’s surely not taken the whole house for himself, has he? And he waits here, you say, for the Lady Barbara Gordon, his cousin and his sweetheart?”

“She’s his cousin, right enough,” answered the old gossip. “But if she’s his sweetheart, she knows more of that than the rest of the world. They’re going to be married, though, in less than a fortnight, and – and – But you asked who comes with Lord Farquhart? Well, Mr. Clarence Treadway, for one. They’re never twenty-four hours apart, so London says. Then there is Mr. Ashley, an old suitor of the Lady Barbara, to whom her father forced her to give a refusal willy-nilly. London knows all about that. And – and there’s one other. I’ve forgotten his name. It matters not. And the gentlemen travel with a servant apiece. Oh, the other’s Mr. Lindley, Mr. Cecil Lindley. Why, lad, what’s the matter with you?”

This query was in response to a sharp “*Aie, aie,*” that had shot from the stranger’s lips.

“I – I was dreaming that I was caught in a trap, a – a mousetrap, I think it was. Your – your voice is most soothing, Marmaduke. Wake me in time for me to retire to my own room before my Lord Farquhart arrives with his company.” The weary head had finally lopped to rest. The sleepy voice had trailed off into silence.

“Ay, ay, I’ll wake you, never fear!” old Marmaduke answered the lad, standing over him. Then he murmured: “He’s a pretty boy! I’ll warrant I’d be earning the thanks of some worthy family by ferreting out his name and telling tales on him. But I’ll not. Not just yet, anyway.”

The lad’s short, black curls fell over the upper part of his face, and as he sat, slouched deep in the big chair, he seemed quite lost in its shadows.

II

It was not ten minutes thereafter that the kindly innkeeper was thrown into such a flutter by the arrival of his expected guests, that he quite forgot to rouse the stranger sleeping in the deep chair by the hearth.

“We’ve the house to ourselves, as I commanded, good Marmaduke?” demanded Lord Farquhart.

“Quite to ourselves, your honor,” answered Marmaduke, “save, oh, bless my heart! save for this idler asleep by the chimney. I meant to send him about his business ere you came!”

“Send him now, then,” said Farquhart, indifferently, “and, gentlemen, I can welcome you as to my own house.”

“Why waken the lad if he sleeps?” demanded young Lindley, who had seated himself astride of the arm of the chair that the innkeeper had deserted. The young man’s Irish blue eyes rested carelessly on the sleeping lad. “Why throw him out, Percy? Is he only a chance patron or a friend, Marmaduke?”

“A friend,” answered that worthy – “leastwise a friend of a year’s standing, and he’s slept like that since his last draught of wine.”

“Why not let him sleep, Percy?” It was still young Lindley who was interceding in the boy’s behalf. “Only two things can induce sleep like that – one’s good wine, the other’s a good conscience. Why interfere with either? Sure, we’re lacking in both ourselves.”

“Well, let him sleep for aught of me,” answered Farquhart, nonchalantly. “In truth, it’s so long since I’ve even seen sleep like that, that it rests me somewhat to be in the room with it.”

“If Marmaduke’ll vouch for the wine the boy’s had, I’ll vouch for the conscience,” asserted Lindley, again taking sides with the unknown. He laid a careless hand on the boy’s head. “He’s a likely lad, and it seems to me that neither wine alone nor conscience alone could induce sleep so deep. What’s his name?”

“That’s what I wish I could tell you, gentlemen,” Marmaduke answered, with some hesitation. “As I said, I’ve known him for a year or more, and he’s always promising me that next time, or some time, he’ll tell me who he is. But he’s only a lad, and I was thinking just before your honors came that perhaps I was doing wrong to let him drink away his fortunes here – that I ought to be telling his family, if I could but find out where and what it is.”

“But does he drink so heavily, then?” demanded Ashley, crossing over and looking down upon the lad. “A boy of his age and girth could not carry much, I should say.”

“No, not much, sir,” Marmaduke answered, hastily; “leastwise not here, but – ”

“Oh, don’t bother your conscience with a thing like that, my good man,” cried Treadway. “Bring us another round of wine, and charge me up a cup or two for the lad when he wakes. Then his bibulous fortune will not be all on your head. And” – he turned to Farquhart – “if the roads to Camberwell be as good – God save the mark! – as the roads from London here, Mistress Babs will not be calling for our escort until midnight. Gad! I never traversed such mire. I thought my horse was down a dozen times.”

“And, of course, the Lady Barbara’s coach must move more heavily than we did,” agreed Lindley. “As I remember them, the old Gordon hackneys move as deliberately as old Gordon himself – that is, if horse flesh can move as slowly as human flesh. Has your lady a large escort from Camberwell, Percy?”

“Only her servants, I believe.” Percy Farquhart’s tone was quite lacking in a lover’s interest. “Her father has no faith in the Black Devil who has haunted our London roads for the past six months, and he declared that he’d not insult the peace of his majesty’s kingdom by sending an armed escort with his daughter when she entered his majesty’s town. That was why he asked me to meet her here.”

“Oh, oh!” rallied his companions, and one of them added: “So, it’s at the father’s request that you meet the Lady Barbara. Ah, Percy, Percy, can’t you pretend affection, even if you have it not, for Lord Gordon’s daughter and her golden charms?”

“I’d pretend it to her if she’d let me,” answered Farquhart, still indifferently. “And I’d pretend it about her if it were worth while. But I’m afraid that my friends know me too well to suffer such pretense. I’m with friends to-night” – he glanced only at Treadway and at Lindley – “so why taint tone or manner with lies? The Lady Barbara Gordon knows as well as I know that it’s her lands that are to be wed to mine, that her gold must gild my title, that her heirs and my heirs must be the same. Old Gordon holds us both with a grip like iron, and we are both puppets in his hands. She knows it, and I know it. She is as resentful of pretended affection as she would be of love – from me. But come, let us forget the Lady Barbara while we may – after we have drunk a measure of wine to her safe conduct from Camberwell to The Jolly Grig. From here to London her safety will depend on our swords. To the Lady Barbara, I say, to her daffodil hair, to her violet eyes, to her poppy lips, to her lily cheeks! Is that lover-like enough? Eh, Clarence? And I’ll add, to the icicle that incloses her heart. May her peace be unbroken on the road from Camberwell to London.”

He raised his wine cup high, glancing frankly at Lindley and at Treadway, but passing hurriedly over Ashley’s scornful lips and hostile eyes. For Dame Rumor had been right once in a way, and The Jolly Grig tavern was not the only stronghold that she had invaded with the assertion that young Ashley had found favor in the Lady Barbara’s eyes; that he had possessed her heart. And an onlooker might have seen that Ashley’s nervous fingers had played an accompaniment upon his sword-hilt while the lady’s name had been on the lips of her affianced lover and his friends. But not only had the Lady Barbara commanded Farquhart to have Ashley much in his company, but she had also commanded Ashley to accept whatever courtesies were offered him by Lord Farquhart. Each was obeying strictly the lady’s commands, one for the sake of policy, the other for the sake of love.

A short silence fell after the toast had been drunk. The men had ridden hard and were tired.

“I’m sorry we did not meet the Black Devil, or one of his imps, ourselves,” observed Treadway, yawning and stretching his arms above his head. “We’re not in fashion if we can’t report a hold up by this representative of his Satanic majesty.”

“But he’d hardly attack a party as large as ours,” cried Lindley. “Eight against one would be too unequal a fight, even if the one were the devil himself.”

“Have a care, my good Cecil,” laughed Farquhart. “You mention the enemy’s name somewhat freely, seeing that we are to escort a lady through his haunts.”

“Ay, but my fingers are crossed, you see, and that closes the devil’s ears. If it really is the devil, we’ll have nothing to fear from him.”

“The last report is that he held up the bishop’s carriage, mounted escort and all,” interrupted Treadway.

“No, no,” corrected Lindley; “the fellow merely stopped the bishop’s carriage, escort and all. Then he begged for alms, and the episcopal blessing! Then he drew the ring from the hand that bestowed the alms and blessing, and slipped away before the ponderous escort perceived that the bishop had fainted with terror.”

“They say he returned the ring the following day,” added Treadway, “doubling the alms bestowed by the bishop, requesting that the gold be used for the good of the church!”

“A devilish good joke, I call that,” laughed Lord Farquhart. “And they say, too, that the poor old bishop is actually afraid to use the money for fear it – why, I really believe he is afraid that his Satanic majesty did have some part in the prank.”

“And old Grimsby swears he saw the fellow’s tail and cloven hoof when he was waylaid by him,” commented Lindley.

“I’d not heard that Lord Grimsby had been attacked by this highwayman.” This was Ashley’s first entrance into the conversation.

“Attacked!” the three men cried in chorus.

“Why, he was held up in his own garden,” explained Treadway. “It was just after it had been noised abroad that he had disinherited Jack. Poor Jack was bemoaning his luck and his debts in prison, and they say that Lord Grimsby spent all his time pacing the walks of his garden cursing Jack and those selfsame debts. That is to say, that is what he did before the episode of the highwayman. Then the man – or devil, whatever he is – appeared quite close behind Lord Grimsby, gagged him and blindfolded him, and would not release him until he had signed a promise to reinstate Jack, pay all his debts and present him with money enough to live like a prince of the blood for a year. Hard as it is to believe, old Grimsby signed it, and afterward he was afraid to go back on his signature, for fear – why, simply for fear that the devil would come for him if he did. Jack, of course, is all for worshipping the devil now, and swears if this gentlemanly highwayman proves to be human, and ever comes near the gallows, he’ll save him or become highwayman himself. So, in reality, old Grimsby will have to use his power to save this thief, if ever he’s caught, to keep his own son and heir off the road.”

“And Lord Grimsby’s power is absolute, is it not?” asked Ashley.

“As absolute as his majesty’s command,” agreed Treadway.

“Has it not been whispered in certain circles that this highwayman is some well-known London gallant, merely amusing himself with the excitement and danger of the game of the road?” asked Lindley.

“Somewhat too dangerous an amusement, in spite of its profits,” sneered Ashley.

“Ah, but that’s the most curious part of it!” cried Treadway. “The fellow never keeps anything that he takes. There are some two-score robberies laid to his account, and in each and every case some poor fellow down on his luck for want of funds has received, most mysteriously, the stolen wealth.”

“He fights like a fiend, they say,” commented Lord Farquhart, “whether he is a gentleman or not. And yet he has seriously wounded no one. Sir Henry Willoughby confessed to me that the fellow had pinked him twenty times in a moonlit, roadside attack, then disarmed him with a careless laugh and walked off, taking nothing with him. Sir Henry himself, mind you! The most noted duelist in London!”

“Why not drink to the fiend and a speedy meeting with him?” laughed Lindley. “I promise you that if I meet him I’ll unmask him and see if he be man or devil. To the Black Devil himself!” he cried, lifting high his wine cup. “To this most honorable and fearless gentleman of the highways!”

The four voices rose in chorus to the brown rafters of the inn.

“To this most honorable and fearless gentleman of the highways! To the Black Devil himself!”

III

Many a round of wine had been served to the young revelers, and, under its influence, each one was revealing a little more of his real self. They had all laid aside their muddy riding boots and heavy riding coats, and were lounging in picturesque undress. Lord Farquhart, who was easily the leader of the four, had thrown aside the cynical veneer that had for some time marred the dark, Oriental beauty of his face, and was humming a love song. Lindley's comely Irish face was slightly flushed, and he was keeping time on the white table with the tip of his sword to the ditty that floated from Lord Farquhart's lips. Treadway, London's dapperest beau, was smirking at his own reflection in a small hand mirror he carried, while Ashley, who had drunk more heavily than any of the others, permitted a definite scowl to contract his brows and droop his lips.

"I'm trying – I'm trying," murmured Lord Farquhart, "to change that last song I wrote for Sylvia into a song for Barbara! The rhyme and the rhythm go the same, I think." He stood up and sang the words out loud, repeating the verses several times, inserting sometimes Sylvia's name and sometimes Barbara's.

Lips that vie with the poppy's hue,
Eyes that shame the violet's blue,
Hearts that beat with love so true,
Sylvia, sweet, I come to you!
Barb'ra, sweet, I come to you!
His eyes questioned Treadway.

"Is it not quite the same? Does it not go to one name as well as to the other? To me it seems I've no need to write a new verse for my new love."

"How will the fair Sylvia take her *congé* in a fortnight's time?" demanded Ashley, in an undertone, of Lindley.

And it was in the same tone that Lindley answered: "Let's wonder, rather, if the fair Sylvia'll be given her *congé* in a fortnight's time!" But the sneer in Lindley's voice was for Ashley, who had asked the impertinent question, not for Farquhart, whose honor he, apparently, doubted. "Lord Farquhart's not to blame, as you know well enough. The mess is of Lord Gordon's making, for Lord Gordon holds in trust even the barren lands that came to Percy with his title."

Ashley's resentment of Lindley's tone was apparent on his face, and his fingers were again on his sword. He was under no promise to his lady not to fight with Lindley, and his blood cried out for a fight with some one. But at that instant there was a loud clamor in the courtyard. A horse's hoofs on the flags, a fretted whinny, the oaths of stable boys, all combined into an uproar.

"Can it be the Lady Barbara?" cried Percy Farquhart, sobered suddenly, and reaching for his plumed hat.

"Nay, my lord, 'tis but one horse," answered Marmaduke, hurrying to the door. "'Tis a riderless horse," he added, in a second.

"A riderless horse!" echoed all of the young men in chorus, springing to their feet.

"Ay, a riderless horse," called Marmaduke, from the darkness without; "'tis a woman's horse, too; a woman's cushioned seat."

The guests were crowding about the door, all save the lad who had been slumbering so deeply. He, roused by the sudden clamor, and apparently frightened by the sudden realization that he had unwittingly trespassed upon Lord Farquhart's privacy, slipped softly up the stairs.

"A woman's horse!" cried Lindley. "Is it possible that some woman has fallen victim to the Black Devil? Here, almost within earshot of our revelings? To the rescue!"

“Nay, we must think first of the Lady Barbara’s safety,” interrupted Ashley, holding back and barring the doorway with a peremptory arm. “We must not risk the Lady Barbara for the sake of some chance damsel. Rather let us mount and ride to meet the Gordon coach.”

“There is no sign whatsoever of foul play,” reported Marmaduke, coming in from the yard. “The lines are knotted loosely, and a tethering strap is broken. The beast has doubtless but strayed from some neighboring house.”

“If ’tis from some neighboring house, good Marmaduke, would you not know the horse and trappings?” queried Treadway. “Is there nothing to show the lady’s name or rank?”

“There’s no mark of any kind,” answered Marmaduke. “’Tis a white horse with a black star between the eyes, and the trappings are of scarlet. That is all I can tell you, your honor. In all likelihood some stable boy’ll be along shortly to claim the creature.”

The young men were again sitting about the table, and Ashley called for another round of wine.

“I, for one, have had wine enough and to spare,” declared Treadway. “The Lady Barbara must be here soon, and, to my thinking, ten minutes of sleep would not be amiss. You, too, my lord, could you not meet the lady with a better grace after at least forty winks?” He linked his arm in Lord Farquhart’s and led him toward a door at the side of the room. “Come to my room and we’ll pretend to imitate the lad with the good conscience and the good wine atop of it. Why, the lad’s gone! Slipped away like a frightened shadow, doubtless, when he found the company he’d waked into. Unless the Lady Barbara comes, give us fifteen minutes, Marmaduke. Not a second more, on your life. Fifteen minutes will unfuddle a brain that’s – that’s not as clear as it might be, but more than that will make it dull.”

Together the two men entered Treadway’s room, caroling aloud the love song that had been writ to Sylvia and changed to Barbara.

Ashley and Lindley, left alone over the table, sat for a moment in silence. Then the latter, forgetting his resentment toward Ashley as easily as it had been roused, spoke in a laughing, rallying voice.

“Cheer up, Hal! A fortnight’s a goodly time in which a slip may come between unwilling lips and a lagging cup. It seems to me that for a lover’s heart, yours is a faint heart. The Lady Barbara is unwon yet – by Percy, I mean.” The last words were added with a laugh at Ashley’s gloomy countenance.

“Yes, the lips are unwilling enough,” Ashley agreed, in a grudging voice, “and the cup lags, undoubtedly, but there’ll be no slip; old Gordon will force the lips, and old Gordon holds the handle of the cup. Mistress Barbara is but wax in her father’s hands, and as for Farquhart – well, unless he marries the Lady Barbara, Lord Gordon will ruin him. The old man has sworn that he will have his way, and have it he will, or I’m much mistaken.”

“But,” remonstrated Lindley, “wax can be molded by any hand that holds it. If the lady is wax in her father’s hands through fear, ’twould seem to me that – why, that love is hotter than fear, that love might mold as well, if not better, than fear.”

“Ay, if love had a chance to mold,” answered Ashley, with more animation, but the mask of reserve fell quickly over his features. “Enough of me and my affairs, though. How is it with you? Have you won the lady of your own heart’s desire? When last I saw you, you were lamenting, the obduracy of some fair one, if I remember right.”

“Alas and alack, no, I’ve not won her,” mourned Lindley, his Irish eyes and his Irish lips losing their laughter. “I’m in a fair way never to win her, I think. In my case, though, it’s the father that’s wax in the daughter’s hands. ’Tis a long time since he gave his consent to my wooing the maid, but the maid will not be wooed. She knows how to have her own way, and has always known it and always had it, too. She tyrannized over me when she was a lass of six and I was a lad of ten. Now she will not even meet me. When I visit at her house, she locks herself in her own chamber, and even I lose heart when it comes to wooing a maid through a wooden door. Ay, I tried it once, and only once. To my last letter, a hot, impassioned love letter, her only reply was to ask whether I still would turn white at a cock fight. The minx remembers well enough that I did turn white at a fight between two

gamecocks, which she, mind you, had arranged in her father's barnyard at that same time, when she was six and I was ten."

"Well, I wish you luck," answered Ashley, who had given little heed to Lindley's words. "But to my mind such a maid would not be worth the wooing. 'Tis to be hoped that Treadway has cleared Farquhart's addled wits as well as he has cleared his voice," he added, after a moment's silence.

Floating down from Lord Farquhart's room came the last words of the song to Sylvia.

Hearts that beat with love so true!
Sylvia, sweet, I come to you!

Yet at that very instant, in young Treadway's room, Lord Farquhart was snoring in unison with young Treadway. Lord Farquhart's head was pillowed next to the head of young Treadway. And, stranger yet, at that very instant, too, there sprang from Lord Farquhart's window a figure strangely resembling Lord Farquhart himself, decked out in Lord Farquhart's riding clothes, that had been cast aside after the miry ride from London town, and tucked away in one corner of Lord Farquhart's room were the dark riding coat and breeches of the youth who had slumbered before the hearth of The Jolly Grig.

About the figure, as it sped along the road, was a long black cloak, over its head was drawn a wide French cap, and over the face was a black mask, but on the lips, under the mask, were the words of Lord Farquhart's song to Sylvia, the song wherein the name of Sylvia had so lately given place to Barbara.

Hearts that beat with love so true!
Barb'ra, sweet, I come to you!

IV

The exchange of confidences between the two young men lasted for a few moments more. Then Ashley, examining the fastenings of his sword belt, exclaimed:

“Assuredly the Lady Barbara must arrive soon, whatever the state of the roads may be. I will go and look to the men and horses. Doubtless the former are as mad as their masters, and, doubtless, too, they have consumed as much of Marmaduke’s heady wine.”

Lindley, left to himself, drew a letter from some place not far distant from his heart and read it. It was written in a clerkly hand, and was, for the first part, clearly a dictation.

I regret to say, my dear Cecil, that I can give you no better word from my daughter, Judith. She declares roundly that she will have nothing to do with you, that she will not listen to your suit, and she commands me to advise you to put her out of your head for all time. I cannot, as you know, say aught against my girl.

“I should not let him if he would.”

In her duty to me she is all that I could ask, but in every other respect her madcap moods seem but to grow upon her. She spends much of her time shut up in her own room, and I have discovered quite recently that she rides much alone – through our own forests only, however. I would not for the world convey to you the idea that Judith is indiscreet. She has stripped from the trappings of her horse every sign of our name and station – or so the stable boys have reported to me. And not ten days since one of the maids ran to me in a great pother and told me that Mistress Judith was stamping about her chamber, behind locked doors, conversing at the top of her voice with herself or with the empty air. When I took her to task on the subject she explained that she was merely rehearsing to join some play actors she had seen performing on the common. Neither locks nor bars will hold her, for I have tried both. I would not dare to coerce her in any smallest degree, for I know not what might happen. So I hope you will see, my dear Cecil, that it would be indeed wise if you could take her advice and put her out of your mind. I fear that, as she says, she has given me all the love of which she is capable.

From this point the letter ran on in the same hand, but in another vein.

So far, dear coz, I’ve written according to my revered father’s words. You know I’m the only scholar in the family. The pen fits his hand but sadly, while every implement of love and war rests easily in mine. With the foils I – But, alas and alack, you care not for tales of that sort. I hear you say: “Fie, fie, Ju! Why play with a man’s toys?” To return to the subject in hand. Will you put me quite out of your mind and thoughts? Can you? If so, I pray you do so. For I love you not at all. ’Tis so absurd of you to want to marry the little red-haired termagant you used to play with. And believe me, I’m naught now save a big red-haired termagant. And I love you not one whit more than I did in the old days when I used to hate you. Perhaps ’twould be folly to say that I never will love you. I might meet you somewhere, at some odd chance, and find that you were the man for my inmost heart. And at that same meeting you might find that you loved me not at all. You think, doubtless, that I know nothing of love, and yet I do know that it lies all in the chance of meeting. If I might meet you in my mood of to-day I’d hate you, whereas to-morrow I might love you. To defend myself against my father’s charges I’ll not try. Yet why should I not ride alone? And am I alone with my beloved Star? Ay, even though it is only a black star between

two starry eyes blacker than night? Why should I not have stripped my father's name and rank from my horse's trappings when I go abroad? Suppose I should join the play actors – and they do tempt me sorely – why should my father's name and rank be known and defamed? And, truly, I grant you, I'm as likely to join the play actors as to enter a nunnery, the one as the other and the other as the one. Both draw me strangely, and I'm likelier to do either than to marry you. Here's my hand and seal on that, or, rather, here's my hand and a kiss, for a kiss is more binding than a seal. And now for the last word – will you put me out of your mind? Or will you wait for that chance meeting?

Judith, your Cousin. Also, Judith, dutiful daughter of James Ogilvie.

Lindley's lips had touched the paper more than once, and half a dozen sighs had crossed them, when suddenly he sprang to his feet.

A black star! Judith's horse, then, had a black star on its forehead! And the horse with the black star that had but now strayed into the stable yard! Could that be Judith's horse? Was Judith in danger or distress? In another instant Lindley was out through the door, calling aloud for the white horse with the black star between its eyes.

"But, my master," gasped a stable lad, "a squire from Master Ogilvie's led the beast away not ten minutes ago. 'Twas Mistress Ogilvie's horse, he said, strayed from the woods where the lady had been gathering wild flowers."

And it was then at that moment that the Lady Barbara's mud-bespattered outriders dashed into the courtyard, crying out that their lady's coach was but a short distance behind them.

V

The Lady Barbara's coach was wobbling slowly along the moonlit road that led to The Jolly Grig. Fast enough it traveled, however, according to Lady Barbara's way of thinking, in spite of the fact that, at the tavern, she would find a lover and love awaiting her; the lover, Lord Percy Farquhart, to whom she was betrothed, to whom she would, indeed, be married in a fortnight's time, and love in the person of Harry Ashley, who had loved her long, and whom she thought she loved. Under her gauntlet Lord Percy's betrothal ring chafed her finger. On her breast lay the red rose she wore always, for no other reason than that Ashley had asked her so to do.

Querulous to the ancient dame who traveled with her she had been from the start, and more than querulous to the two black-eyed maids whose sole apparent duties were to divine my lady's wishes before they could be expressed in words.

"Absurd; I say it is absurd that I should be dragged up to London in all this mire," Lady Barbara cried, in a petulant, plaintive voice. "What do I want with the latest fallals and fripperies to catch my Lord Farquhart's fancy when he never so much as looks at me? I know full as well as he that his Mistress Sylvia in rags would be more to him than I would be if I were decked in the gayest gauds the town could offer."

"Sylvia!" gasped her attendant dame.

"Ay, Sylvia, I said," answered the Lady Barbara. "Don't think that I'm deaf to London gossip, and don't imagine that I'm the unsophisticated child my father thinks me, merely because I acquiesce in this brutal plan to marry me to a man I hate. I know how my Lord Farquhart entertains himself. Not that I'd have his love, either. I'd hate him offering love more than I hate him denying it."

The petulant voice ran on and on, its only vehemence induced by the muddy ruts in the road. Mistress Benton, using every force to keep awake, interjected monosyllabic exclamations and questions. The two maids, exerting all their powers to fall asleep, gave little heed to their mistress' railings.

The outriders, lured onward by an imagined maltiness in the air, had permitted an ever-increasing distance between themselves and their lady's coach. It was certainly some several moments after they had passed a moon-shadowed corner that the lumbering coach horses stumbled, wavered and stopped short. Sleepy Drennins recovered his seat with difficulty, the sleepy coach boys sprang to the horses' heads, Mistress Benton squawked, and the young maids squeaked with terror. Only the Lady Barbara was quite calm. But it must be remembered that the Lady Barbara would welcome delay in any form. But even she drew back in some alarm from the masked face that appeared at the coach door.

"Aaaaay! God help us!" screamed Mistress Benton. "'Tis the Black Devil himself."

The two maids clung to each other and scurried into an anguished unconsciousness.

The mask had opened the coach door, and his face was close to the Lady Barbara's.

"A word in your ear, sweet cousin Babs," he whispered. "But first order your men, on pain of death, to stand each where they are."

The Lady Barbara recognized dimly a familiar tone in the voice. She saw Lord Farquhart's coat.

"Lord Farquhart! Percy!" The cry was faint enough in itself, but it was muffled, too, by the gauntleted hand of the highwayman.

"Only for *your* eyes, my cousin," he answered. "Only for *your* ears."

"What prank is this?" she demanded, haughtily, and yet she had, indeed, given her orders to her men to stand each in his place on pain of death.

"A lover's prank, perhaps, my sweetheart," the mask answered. "A prank to have a word alone with you. Come, step down upon my cloak and walk with me out into the moonlight. I would see by it your daffodil hair, your violet eyes, your poppy lips, your lily cheeks."

A mocking, rippling laugh crossed the Lady Barbara's lips. At once she gave her hand to her strange cavalier.

"I thought my eyes and ears were not mistaken," she said. "Now I know in very truth that you are my cousin Percy, for that is the only lover-like speech that ever came from his lips to me. You believe in repetition, it seems."

In spite of old Mistress Benton's commands and prayers, the Lady Barbara had stepped from the coach and the stranger had slammed the door upon the gibbering dame.

"Ripening corn in a wanton breeze, I should call the hair to-night," he said. "Bits of heaven's own blue, the eyes; roses red and white, the cheeks, and ripe pomegranate the lips. Does that suit you better, Lady Babs?"

The Lady Barbara's laughter rang back to Mistress Benton's frenzied ears.

"The moonlight seems to infuse your love with warmth, my cousin." The lady leaned with coquettish heaviness upon the arm that supported her hand.

"The icicle that holds your heart has chilled my love till now, my sweet," the mask answered.

"But why did you stop me in this fashion?" The Lady Barbara had drawn back from the ardor in her escort's voice. "What means this silly masquerade? What words would you speak to me here? In this fashion?"

"'Tis but a lover's prank, as you said," he answered, lightly. Then, singing softly Lord Farquhart's song to Sylvia, he swung her lightly from him, and bowed low before her as though she were his partner in a dance.

Hearts that beat with love so true!
Barb'ra, sweet, I come to you!

She, falling in with his humor, dropped him an answering courtesy, and, drawing off her gauntlet, gave him her bare hand. He fell on his knee before her, and lightly touched the hand with his lips.

"Give me the glove, sweetheart," he cried, "and the rose you wear on your heart and – and all these rings that mar your sweet, white hand with their gaudy reds and blues. Leave only mine to prove that you are only mine."

He drew the jewels from her hand, and, suddenly, she started from him.

"Take off your mask, Percy, and lift your hat," she cried, impulsively.

"You ask too much, sweet cousin." Still he answered lightly. He was still on his knees before her. "My mask and my hat proclaim my trade, if not to you, at least to your servants."

The roses in her cheeks faded, then blossomed once again. Again she laughed, but this time the rippling music held a tremor. Her hand caught her heart.

"For an instant," she gasped – "oh! for an instant I thought – I was afraid that you might indeed be –"

"And for once you thought the truth, sweet cousin. But you've naught to fear." The mask's voice had grown serious. He was on his feet and holding both her hands in his. "I am he; I am he in dread of whom all London shivers, and it was to tell you that – that I stopped you, Barbara. To tell you and to test, if not your love, at least your good intentions as my wife. The world tells me that I cannot win your love, that it has been given irretrievably to another. But your fidelity I must prove before you wear my name. I am placing my life, my safety, my honor, in the sweet jeopardy of your hands. My life is forfeit, as you know. My life is henceforth in your hands." She was shrinking away from him, but he held her fast. "My friends – your lover – await us at The Jolly Grig. I shall be with them before you arrive. You will face them and me in ten minutes or less. If you intend to keep faith with me as my wife, you will meet me as your betrothed. You will give no sign of this new knowledge of me."

"But – but –" she stammered.

“There are no buts, sweet cousin, sweetheart.” Already he was leading her back to the coach. “You may cry out, if you will, when you see us, that you were held up by the black highwayman. In truth, there will be no need for you to tell the tale. Your servants will save you the trouble. In proof of the story, the fellow has stolen your rose and your glove and your rings. In ransom of your life, you swore that he should not be followed. We’ll hurry you on to town. We’ll give the alarm, and the constables and their men will have a mad and a merry chase. But from now on, this is our secret. We are one in that already.”

Courteously and slowly he drew her to the coach, pressing her forward as she held reluctantly back. Denying her all chance to answer, he handed her into the coach and disappeared.

VI

The Jolly Grig was empty. The guests, all in the courtyard, were mounting to meet the Lady Barbara. A shadowy figure clambered to Lord Farquhart's window, a figure strangely like Lord Farquhart. A moment later, a shadowy figure, resembling, this time, the lad who had slept by the hearth, slipped down the stairs into the small room at the back of the inn. Here it stopped for an instant's reverie.

"'Tis curious how jests grow," the red lips murmured. "At first I but thought of frightening that haughty cousin of mine, the Lady Barbara Gordon. And now – heigh-ho! I hope I've not stored up trouble for Lord Farquhart. 'Twould be a sad pity to vex so fine a gentleman!"

Then the figure hurriedly caught up the bundle of woman's toggery that had enswathed its entrance to the inn, and through the dancing motes, over the sun-flecked floor, the same slim shadow, the shadow that resembled the lad who had slept by the hearth, the shadow that had slipped down the curving stairs, crept through another window, was off and away, lost in the other shadows of the night.

VII

Into the torch-filled courtyard rolled the Lady Barbara's coach. There was little need for the lady to tell her own story. Mistress Benton's shrieks were filling the air. The maids were squealing and praying Heaven to save them. Drennins and the shamed coach boys were cursing roundly.

"Thieves! Murder! Robbery!" screamed Mistress Benton. "We are killed!"

Even the Lady Barbara's white hand could not quell the tumult, and, all the time, her frightened eyes rested tremulously everywhere save on Lord Farquhart's face.

"Here, here, not a hundred paces from the inn," screamed Mistress Benton. "He robbed us. He stole our all. Oh, just Heaven! We are all murdered."

Here the Lady Barbara's hand did produce silence in one quarter by claspings Mistress Benton's mouth with its long, slim fingers.

But from one and another the story was soon out. They had, indeed, been stopped at the points of a dozen pistols! This version was told by one of the coach boys.

"A dozen, man!" scoffed Barbara. Even her voice was slightly tremulous. "There was one lone highwayman, a single highwayman in black mask and coat and hat!"

"'Twas the Black Devil himself!" cried the chorus of men, who had watched calmly at the inn while the outrage was occurring.

"One man! And the horses' legs knotted in a haze of ropes strung over the road!" cried Drennins, determined to maintain the number to which he had been willing to yield his own and his lady's life. "One man! God's truth! There must have been at least a dozen!"

"Ay, but 'twas Barbara's own fault!" Mistress Benton cried, but again Barbara's hand silenced her in the same way, and now Barbara's own voice rang out clear and decisive.

"Why do we dally here?" she demanded. "The story's all told, and I've given my word that the fellow should go free. There's little loss – a few jewels and an old glove. Nay, nay, Lord Percy. My word is given. You shall neither go yourself nor send your servants after the fellow. He is absolutely safe from molestation from me and mine." Her eyes now rested with curious insistence on Lord Farquhart's face, but he could not read the riddle in them. "And now" – the lady leaned back wearily – "if this clamor might all cease! I am desperately weary. Get me to my aunt's house with as much speed as possible."

There was a short conference among the men, and then the little group separated. But the lady had only closed her eyes. Her ears were eager. She sat suddenly erect.

"No, Mr. Ashley," she cried, summarily; "a woman's word is as weighty as a man's. Mine has been given. I desire that you should all of you – all, every one – ride with me to London."

In spite of her peremptory commands, there was still further parley before the coach was once more in progress, but the Lady Barbara, held in converse by Mr. Ashley, did not hear it, nor did she see that one of her escorting cavaliers remained behind when the coach moved on.

"I've reasons of my own for knowing whether the fellow still lingers in this vicinity," Cecil Lindley had declared. "I'll promise not to harm him, not to hold him; but I'll search the spot where Lady Barbara's coach was stopped."

"But not single-handed!" Lord Farquhart had cried. "If you must stay, if you must go on your fool's errand, at least take one or more of the men with you."

"Nay, I've no fear for myself, but – but –" Lindley had hesitated. "Our gentleman highwayman knows the standing of his victims too well for me to have fear for my own safety. But I'll go alone, for I'll pass the night at my cousin Ogilvie's. His place is near at hand, and I'd not care to quarter men on him at this unseemly hour. Good luck to you," he had cried; "and good luck to me," he had added, as he separated himself from them and rode away.

VIII

The night was so far advanced that the moon was now directly overhead, and it was not very long before Lindley saw, not a hundred yards ahead of him, a white horse, ridden negligently by a somewhat slovenly lad – hooded, cloaked and doubled up in the saddle, as though riding were a newly acquired accomplishment. The road was lonely enough to instill an eerie feeling in the stoutest heart, and yet the lad seemed quite unmoved when Lindley, after one or two vocal appeals, laid a heavy hand on his horse's bridle.

“Are ye stone deaf, my lad, or asleep, or merely mooning over some kitchen wench?” demanded Lindley, with asperity.

“Neither, my master,” answered the lad, in the cracking voice that leaps unbidden from piping youth to manly depths. “I'm uncommonly good of hearing. I'd sure fall off my horse if I were asleep, and the wench who's most in my mind would be sadly out of place in a kitchen.”

“Didn't you hear me calling, then?” Lindley was reining in his own steed to keep pace with the white horse.

“Surely I heard your halloo” – the boy's hand drew his hood closer about his face – “but I did not know that it was addressed to me.”

“You're servant to Master James Ogilvie, are you not?” Lindley's tone implied a statement rather than a question, but the lad denied him.

“No, you're wrong. I'm no servant of Master James Ogilvie's.”

“But it's Mistress Judith Ogilvie's horse you ride!” Again Lindley made an assertion.

“Ay, you're right there,” answered the boy. “Once wrong, once right. Try again, my master.”

“It's you who'll be tried, I'm thinking,” said Lindley, once again laying his hand on the scarlet bridle of the white horse. “What do you with Mistress Judith's horse at this hour of the night, if you're not Master Ogilvie's servant?”

“I might be servant to Mistress Judith,” hazarded the lad.

“No insolence, boy,” quoth Lindley, working himself into a fine rage. “Mistress Judith has no servants that are not of her father's household.”

“Ah, that proves that you've not seen Mistress Judith Ogilvie.” A faint ripple, that might have been laughter, shook the boy's words. “All men are servants to Mistress Ogilvie, all men who have laid eyes on the lady.”

“And so you're serving Mistress Judith by riding her horse from The Jolly Grig to the Ogilvie stables?” The sneer in Lindley's voice was evident, and he tried again to take possession of the scarlet bridle that had slipped or had been withdrawn from his fingers.

“Ay, my master, the horse had strayed while Mistress Judith was gathering wild flowers in the Ogilvie woods. And since you may have reason for your curiosity, I'll add that the maid was afraid her father would deprive her of the horse if he knew of this mischance, and she dared not trust one of the stable boys to search for it, so she came to me.”

“And thanking you for so much courtesy, add but one more favor,” scoffed Lindley. “Who and what may you be that Mistress Judith should come to you for aid?”

Lindley could see the careless shrug of the lad's shoulders as he answered:

“Why, as I told you to-night, I'm servant to Miss Judith Ogilvie, servant and lover of Mistress Judith Ogilvie.”

“Lover!” The word halted at Lindley's teeth, and his eyes rested superciliously on the slouched figure beside him.

“Ay, lover,” answered the lad, ignoring Lindley's tone, unconscious of his look. “As the brook loves the moon, as the brook holds the moon in its heart and cherishes her there, so hold I Mistress Judith in my heart.”

“I like not your manner, boy, neither your manner nor your conversation.” Lindley’s anger expressed itself in his voice.

“Alas! I cannot change my manner so readily, my lord. But the conversation? It is of your own seeking. It is yours to end when you please. I am in no hurry, and the road lies ahead of you.” The lad halted his horse, but Lindley also drew rein.

“Answer straight who and what you are,” he cried. “I am cousin to Master James Ogilvie, and I have a right to demand an answer to those questions.”

“Ah! A straight question always merits an answer, Master – Master – But I know not your name,” said the boy. “I’m called Johan, and I’m bonded for a term of years to a man who has many names, and who plays many parts.”

“You are one of the play actors, then!” burst from Lindley’s lips.

“Yes, one of the play actors.” The lad’s words were simple, yet something in his tone gave new offense.

“I’ll have my cousin whip you from his lands before the morning’s an hour old,” spluttered Lindley.

The boy’s laughter rang through the woods.

“Master Ogilvie had already made that threat, but Mistress Judith sent him word that the day we were whipped from the common, that day would she whip herself from his house. Mistress Judith is, I think, only too ready to sign a bond with my master. She loves – She’d make a good actor, would Mistress Judith.”

There was a long silence. The two horses were again pacing with well matched steps through the miry road. Twice, when the moonlight shone full upon them, Lindley tried to see the lad’s face, but each time only the pointed hood of the slouchy cape rewarded his curiosity. From his voice he judged his companion to be not more than fourteen or fifteen years old, although his words would have proved him older.

Suddenly the lad spoke.

“If you are cousin to Master James Ogilvie, as you say, why you are, then, cousin, too, to my Mistress Judith. You have seen her lately? Possibly she has confessed her plans, her ambitions, to you!”

“Nay, I’ve not seen the girl since we were children,” admitted Lindley, almost against his will.

“Well, she has – why, she has grown up since then. You would care to hear what she is like? I see her constantly, you know. Her face is as familiar as my own – almost. She’s over tall for a woman and over slight, to my way of thinking. But with the foils – at the butts – ay, and with the pistols, she’s better than any man I know. She’s afraid of naught, too – save stupidity.”

“She was afraid of naught when she was a child,” agreed Lindley, his interest in his cousin permitting his interest in the lad’s words. “It’s to be hoped that her temper has improved,” he added, to himself. “But red hair begets temper, and, if I am right, my cousin’s hair is red.”

Again the boy’s laughter startled the woods.

“Ay, red it is. Red as a fox, and her eyes are red, too; red with glints of yellow, save when she’s angry, and then they’re black as night. She’s no beauty, this Mistress Judith. Her skin’s too white, and her mouth’s too small, and, as I said, she’s over tall and over slight, but no man can look at her without loving her, and she – why, she cares nothing for any man. She gives no man a chance to woo her, and declares she never will.”

A plan was forming itself immaturely in Lindley’s mind, and he had given small heed to the boy’s description of his lady. Now he spoke shortly.

“I want your help, boy. I intend to marry Mistress Judith, with or without her consent. And I want all the assistance you can give me. She trusts you, it seems. Therefore I will trust you. I would know more of Mistress Judith than I do. You see her daily, you say. Then you can meet me here

each night and report to me what Mistress Judith does and says. The day she marries me, a hundred English crowns will be yours.”

“Ah, you go too fast, my lord,” cried the lad. “I know full well that Mistress Judith will never marry you. That I can promise you, and if I agreed to this proposition of yours I would be on a fool’s errand as well as you.”

“But I’ll pay you well for your trouble if I fail, never fear. And I know that I’ll not fail,” boasted Lindley. “But the day I speak first to Mistress Judith, I’ll give you a quarter of the sum. The day she consents to be my wife, I’ll double that, and on our wedding day I’ll double it once more. So *your* errand will not be a fool’s errand, whatever mine may be.”

The boy seemed to hesitate.

“And I’m to meet you here, each night, at the edge of the Ogilvie woods?” he questioned.

“Ay, each night for a fortnight, or a month, however long my wooing may take.”

“And I’m to spy on Mistress Judith and tell you all her goings and her comings and all?”

“No, not to spy,” retorted Lindley; “merely to let me know her passing moods and caprices, her whimsies, her desires.”

“But if you should be detained, my lord; if you cannot come, must I send word to – to – ”

“Ay, to Cecil Lindley, at – ”

“Oh, my master, my master!” interrupted the boy, his elfish laughter ringing through the woods. “Had you told me your name at first, we had been spared all this foolish dickering. Why, Lindley’s the man she detests; the man whose very name throws her into a frenzy of temper. There’s naught that *you* can do to win Mistress Judith. Why, man, she despises you. Nay, she told her father only to-day – I was standing near the tree where they sat, mind you – that if ever again your name was mentioned to her, she would leave her home or – or even kill herself – anything to rid her ears forever of the hateful sound. How can *you* hope to win Mistress Judith?”

“Win her I will, boy,” answered Lindley. “I’m not afraid of her temper, either. For you, your part is to do as you’re told. Leave the rest to me. But you need go no further now. This road leads to the stables. I’ll deliver Mistress Judith’s horse with mine. A bargain’s a bargain when it’s sealed with gold.” He flung a sovereign onto the road in front of him.

The two horses stood side by side, and the lad sat contemplating the gold where it shone in the moonlight.

“As you will, Master Lindley,” he said. “And I’ll wager it would speed your cause could I tell Mistress Judith that you defy her will and her temper. That, in itself, would go far toward winning her. As for the horses, best let me take the two of them. There are none of the boys awake at this hour. It must be near three. With your good leave, I’ll stable yours when I put Mistress Judith’s nag in its stall.”

Lindley, standing in the moonlight on his cousin’s steps, watched the young play actor as he walked somewhat unsteadily away between the two horses. He wished that he had seen the lad’s face, and, curiously enough, it was this wish, and the young play actor himself, who filled the last thoughts in Cecil Lindley’s brain before he fell asleep, in his cousin’s house – the play actor who was to be the go-between in his wooing of Mistress Judith Ogilvie.

IX

The following morning Judith Ogilvie awoke later than was her usual custom. She yawned as though she were not fully refreshed by her night's sleep. She rubbed her eyes, then stretched her arms high above her head. Then she drew one hand back and looked long and somewhat lovingly at a round piece of gold that the hand held. Then she kissed the gold and blushed rosy red in the empty solitude of her own room. At last, nestling down again among the bed covers, she laughed – and a gurgling, rippling melody it was.

“So he'll win me in spite of my hatred,” she murmured. “And yet – and yet, methinks if any man could win me, without much wooing either, 'twould be no other than my cousin, Master Cecil Lindley. Heigh-ho! He's a taking way with him, and who knows? – perhaps – yes, perhaps, he'll take even me, after I've had out my play acting with him.”

Doubtless, then, she drowsed again, for she was awakened once more by a voice and a vehement pair of knuckles on her door.

“Master Ogilvie desires that you should descend at once to speak with your cousin, Mr. Lindley,” said the voice, when Judith had sleepily ordered the knuckles to be silent.

“My cousin, Mr. Lindley?” questioned Judith. Even to the maid she feigned surprise. “How and when came my cousin, Mr. Lindley?”

“In the night, some time, I believe,” the voice answered. “He must return to London in an hour's time, and he desires to see you and speak with you.”

“Say to Mr. Lindley that both he and Master Ogilvie, my father, know well enough that Mistress Judith Ogilvie will hold no communication whatsoever with Mr. Lindley. Furthermore say that – can you remember all this, Marget? – say that if Mr. Lindley is unable to read the letter lately written him by Mistress Judith Ogilvie, doubtless he will find some clerk in London more versed in scholarly arts than he, who will read it to him.” The footsteps retreated slowly from the door. “And, Marget, Marget,” Judith called again, “when Mr. Lindley has departed you may waken me again.”

On that selfsame morning, the Lady Barbara Gordon also awoke late in the house of her aunt, the wife of Timothy Ogilvie. She also seemed little refreshed by her night's sleep. She also yawned and rubbed her eyes and stretched her arms above her head. She also laughed, but there was no rippling melody in the sound. Then she, too, held out one hand and looked at it curiously, looked curiously at all the ringless fingers, looked at the one finger that held Lord Farquhart's betrothal ring.

The Lady Barbara had been seriously considering the new aspect of the situation. Indeed, the situation looked serious, and yet Lady Barbara doubted if it could in reality be as serious as it seemed. Was it possible, she asked herself, that Lord Farquhart had been only jesting the night before, when he had declared himself to be the highwayman of whom all London stood in dread? But jesting had hitherto held no place in her intercourse with Lord Farquhart. If he were indeed this highwayman, why had he jeopardized his life and honor by revealing the secret to her? It was absurd for him to say that he desired to test her loyalty before he gave her his name and title. Did he suppose for a moment that she would betray him? And yet by betraying him she could escape this hateful marriage! But – was he trying to frighten her so that she would refuse to marry him – so that she alone would incur old Gordon's wrath – so that he would still be free to love and have his Sylvia?

Here she clinched her small fists and declared that, highwayman or not, she'd marry him! She would show him that he could not disdain her for any Sylvia. And then a tiny imp with immature horns and a budding tail whispered something in her ear, and she laughed again, and again there was no melody in the sound.

“Ay, I'll show him,” she said aloud. “It will not be so hard to marry him now. I fancy he will find it difficult to make objections to my comings and goings.”

All this, perhaps, will prove that the Lady Barbara knew more of London life than its gossip. Also it might prove that there were other ingredients in the Lady Barbara's character than dutiful submission to her father's commands. Undoubtedly, it shows that the devil's children are as subtle as the devil himself.

And yet, when the Lady Barbara called for her maid and while she waited for her, she looked at the hand the highwayman had kissed so often the night before. She blushed faintly and smiled slightly. But that only shows that every lover has a chance to win, that Lord Farquhart, offering love, might have wooed successfully. But to the maid, the lady said only:

“When Mr. Ashley comes, I will see him. To anyone else say that I desire to be left to myself.”

Lord Farquhart's awakening on that same morning was the most curious, the most unpleasant, of them all. It occurred even later in the day than the others, and there was no laughter of any kind on his lips. Rather were they framing curses. Another day and night of freedom were gone. His marriage to the Lady Barbara Gordon was a day nearer. How could he laugh? Why should he not curse?

Suddenly his eyes fell on a tabouret that stood near his bed. On it lay a withered rose and half a dozen jeweled rings. The rose he had never seen before. The rings he was almost sure he had seen on Lady Barbara's hands.

Hurriedly summoning a servant, he demanded an explanation of how the articles had come there.

The man, also unrefreshed by his night's sleep, admitted that he had found the flower and the jewels in Lord Farquhart's coat, that he had placed them on the tabouret himself.

“In my coat? In what coat?” demanded Lord Farquhart.

“In your lordship's riding coat,” stammered the servant. “In the coat that you wore yesterday when we rode to The Jolly Grig. It seemed safer to me to place the jewels near your lordship's bed than to leave them in the coat.”

And now it was Lord Farquhart's turn to rub his eyes. He wondered if he was indeed awake. And then the curses that had shaped his lips passed the threshold and poured forth in volumes upon the head of the luckless servant, who was in no wise to blame, and finally upon the Lady Barbara herself. For to Lord Farquhart's mind came no other solution of the mystery than that the Lady Barbara had met with no highwayman at all, that the whole story of the hold up had been but a silly country girl's joke gotten up by herself and her servants. Doubtless it was a joke on him that she had planned, and he had been too dull to see its point. The upshot of his thoughts and the end of his ravings were a command to the servant to return the articles forthwith to the Lady Barbara Gordon, to the lady herself, in person, and to say to her that Lord Farquhart would wait upon her late that afternoon.

X

The Lady Barbara, in the midst of her interview with Mr. Ashley, was disturbed by Lord Farquhart's servant bearing her rings and the rose that had been stolen the night before. Her confusion expressed itself in deep damask roses on the cheeks that had, indeed, been lily white before.

"Lord Farquhart returns these to me?" she cried in her amazement.

"Yes, my lady, he said that they were to pass into no other hands than yours, that you would understand."

"That I would understand?" she questioned, and the damask roses had already flown.

"How came they into Lord Farquhart's hands?" asked Ashley, but he was vouchsafed no answer.

"That you would understand, my lady, and that he would be with you himself this afternoon."

The servant was looking at the lady respectfully enough, but behind the respect lurked curiosity, for even a servant may question the drolleries and vagaries of his masters. And here, indeed, was a most droll mass of absurdities.

But the lady was not looking at the servant at all. Rather was she looking at Mr. Ashley, and something that she read in his narrowing eyes, in the smile that curved but one corner of his lips, caused her cheeks to blossom once again into damask roses – nay, not in damask roses; rather were they peonies and poppies that dyed her cheeks. She spoke no word at all, and only with a gesture of her hand did she dismiss the servant, a gesture of the hand that held the withered rose and the jeweled rings.

There was a long silence in the boudoir. My Lady Barbara was playing nervously with the rings Lord Farquhart's servant had returned to her. Mr. Ashley was watching the girl.

"So my Lord Farquhart masqueraded as our gentleman of the highways?" Mr. Ashley's voice was full of scorn.

A quick gleam shone in Barbara's eyes. Her breath fluttered.

"Masqueraded!" she whispered.

There was another silence, and then Mr. Ashley spoke again, his voice, too, but little above a whisper.

"You mean, Barbara, that Lord Farquhart *is* this gentleman of the highways?"

"Oh, why, why do you say so?" she stammered.

"Ah, Barbara, Barbara, why do you not deny it if it is deniable?" His voice rang with triumph. But he was answered only by the Lady Barbara's changing color, by her quivering lips.

"Why do you not admit it, then?" he asked again.

"Why should I admit it or deny it?" she asked, faintly. "What do I know of Lord Farquhart's movements, save that I am to marry him in less than a fortnight's time?"

"To marry Lord Farquhart!" Mr. Ashley laughed aloud. "To marry a highwayman whose life is forfeit to the crown! Say rather that you are free for all time from Lord Farquhart! Say rather, sweetheart, that *we* are free!"

"But why do you take it so easily for granted that my cousin is this highwayman?" asked Barbara.

"Why, it has long been whispered that this highwayman was some one of London's gallants seeking a new amusement. Surely it is easy to fit that surmise to Lord Farquhart. 'Twould be easy with even less assistance than Lord Farquhart has given us."

"But what would it profit us to be rid of Lord Farquhart – granting that he is this – this gentleman of the highways?" The Lady Barbara's eyes were still on her rings. She did not lift them to the man who stood so near her.

"Profit us!" he cried. "It would give you to me. It would permit you to marry me – if Lord Farquhart were out of the way. What else stands between us?"

“No,” she murmured, in a low, faint voice, her eyes still on the jewels in her hands. “’Tis not my Lord Farquhart stands between us, but your poverty and my father’s will. How can we marry when you have nothing, when I would have less than nothing if I defied my father? No, I intend to marry Lord Farquhart, whatever he may be.”

Ashley’s eyes questioned her, but his lips did not move. And she, although she did not raise her eyes to his, knew what his asked. And yet, for several moments, she did not answer. Then, flinging the rings from her, she sprang to her feet.

“Why not take this chance that’s flung to us, Hal?” she cried. “Can’t you see what we have won? Why, Lord Farquhart’s life is forfeit to *us* so long as we hold his secret. A pretty dance we can lead him at the end of our own rope, and we’ll have but to twitch a finger to show him that we’ll transfer the end to the proper authority if he dares to interfere with our pleasures!”

“But, Barbara!” The man was, indeed, as shaken as his voice. He had found it hard enough to credit the evidence of ears and eyes that proved to him that Lord Farquhart was the Black Devil of the London highways, but harder yet was it to believe that Barbara, the unsophisticated country girl, was versed in all the knowledge and diplomacy of a London *mondaine*.

“Don’t ‘but Barbara’ me,” she cried, impatiently. “I’ll not be tied down any longer. I must be free, free, free! All my life long I’ve been in bondage to my father’s will. Now, in a fortnight’s time I can be free – controlled by no will but my own. Can you not see how this act of Lord Farquhart’s throws him into my power? How it gives me my freedom forever?”

“But you’d consent to marry this common highwayman?” Incredulity held each of Ashley’s words.

“Ay, I’d marry a common highwayman for the same gain.” The Lady Barbara’s violet eyes were black with excitement. “But Lord Farquhart’s not a common highwayman, as you call him. You know well enough that this Black Devil has never once stolen aught for himself. My Lord Farquhart, if he is, in reality, this gentleman highwayman, doubtless loves the excitement of the chase. ’Tis merely a new divertimento – a hunt, as it were, for men instead of beasts. In truth, it almost makes me love Lord Farquhart to find he has such courage, such audacity, such wit and spirit!”

“But what if he is caught?” demanded Ashley. “Think of the disgrace if he is caught.”

“Ah, but he won’t be caught,” she answered, gayly. “’Tis only your laggards and cowards that are caught, and Lord Farquhart has proved himself no coward. What can you ask of fortune if you’ll not trust the jade? How can you look for luck when you’re blind to everything save ill luck? Trust fortune! Trust to luck! And trust to me, to Lady Barbara Farquhart that’ll be in less than a fortnight!” She swept him a low curtsey and lifted laughing lips to his, but he still held back. “Trust me because I love you,” she cried, still daring him on. “Though I think you’ll make me a willing bride to Farquhart if you show the white feather now.”

“But you can see, can you not, that it’s because I love you that I fear for you?” Ashley’s tone was still grave.

“Well, but then there are two loves to back luck in the game,” she cried. Then she echoed the gravity in his voice. “What else can we do, Hal? Have you aught else to offer? Can you marry me? Can I marry you? There’s naught to fear, anyway. Lord Farquhart’ll tire of the game. What has he ever pursued for any length of time? And he’s been at this for six months or more. Nay, we can stop him, if we will. Is he not absolutely in our power?”

For a lady to win a lover to her way of thinking is easy, even though her way be diametrically opposed to his. Love blinds the eyes and dulls the ears; it lulls the conscience to all save its words. And Ashley yielded slowly, with little grace at first, wholly and absolutely at last, accepting his reward from the Lady Barbara’s pomegranate lips.

XI

To the Lady Barbara, the game that she had planned seemed easy, and yet, in her first interview with her fiancé, certain difficulties appeared. Lord Farquhart presented himself, as in duty bound, late that first afternoon. Lady Barbara received him with chilly finger tips, offering him her oval cheek instead of her lips. He, ignoring the substitute, merely kissed the tapering fingers.

"I am glad to see that you are none the worse for last night's encounter," he said.

Wondering why his voice rang strangely, she answered, gayly:

"Rather the better for it, I find myself, thank you."

"You told your tale of highway robbery so well that it deceived even my ears." Lord Farquhart spoke somewhat stiffly. "I had not realized that you were so accomplished an actor."

"Ay, did I not tell it well?" Her agreement with him held but a faint note of interrogation.

"I failed to catch your meaning, though, if meaning there was," he said. And now his tone was so indifferent that the Lady Barbara might have been forgiven for thinking that he cared not to understand her meaning.

"I think I expressed my meaning fairly well last night," she answered, her indifference matching his.

"Shall we let it pass at that, then?" he asked. "At that and nothing more?" If the Lady Barbara did not care to explain her joke, why should he force her?

"Ay, let us call it a jest," she answered, "unless the point be driven in too far. A too pointed jest is sometimes a blunt weapon, my Lord Farquhart."

Lord Farquhart heard the words that seemed so simple. He realized, also, that the tone was not so simple, but, as he told himself, the time would come soon enough when he would have to understand the Lady Barbara's tones and manners. He would not begin until necessity compelled him. He had quite convinced himself that the story of the robbery, and the rings and rose in his coat, were naught save some silly joke of the unsophisticated schoolgirl he supposed his cousin to be. He moved restlessly in his chair. It was hard to find a simple subject to discuss with a simple country girl.

"You received the rings in safety?" he asked, merely to fill in the silence.

"Quite," she answered, "quite in safety, my Lord Farquhart." She was consuming herself with a rage that even she could not wholly understand. Her intended victim's indifference angered her beyond endurance, and yet she dared not lose the hold she had not fully gained. A jest, indeed! He chose to call the whole thing a jest! A sorry jest he'd find it, then! And yet, surely, now was not the time for her to prove her power. Tapping her foot impatiently, she added in a thin, restrained voice: "Suppose we let the rings close the incident for the moment, my cousin!"

Again Lord Farquhart questioned the tone and manner, but he answered both with a shrug. The Lady Barbara was even more tiresome than he had feared. He would have to teach her that snapping eyes and quarrelsome speech were out of place in a *mariage de convenance* such as they were making. Doubtless he had failed to please her in some way. How he knew not. But how could he please a lady to whom he was quite indifferent, who was quite indifferent to him, and yet a lady to whom he was to be married in less than a fortnight, a whole day less than a fortnight. Lord Farquhart sighed far more deeply than was courteous to the lady.

"If I can do aught to please you, Barbara, during your stay –" he began, with perfunctory deference, but she interrupted him hotly.

"Barbara!" she had been fuming inwardly. And only the night before it had been "Babs" and "sweetheart" and "sweet cousin"! Her wrath rose quite beyond control and her voice broke forth impetuously.

“I beg of you not to give me your time before it is necessary, my Lord Farquhart. And – and I beg you will excuse me now. I go to-night to Mistress Barry’s ball, and I – I – would rest after last night’s fatigues.”

She flounced from the room without further leave-taking, and as she fled on to her own chamber her anger escaped its bounds.

“He talks to me of jests,” she cried, with angry vehemence. “A sorry jest he’ll find it, on my word. *Aie!* I hate his insolent indifference. One would think I was a simple country fool to hear him talk. He – he – when I can have him hung just when it suits my good convenience! I’ll not marry him at all! Ay, but I will, though. I’ll make it worse for him by marrying him. And then I’ll show him! Just wait, my lord, until I’m Lady Farquhart and you’ll dance to a different tune, I’m thinking. Oh, I hate him, I hate him! I suppose he goes now to his Sylvia, or – or, perchance, out onto the road again.” The Lady Barbara’s tantrum had carried her into her own room and she had slammed the door. Now she found herself stopped by the opposite wall, and suddenly her tone changed. It grew quite soft, almost tender. “I wonder if his Sylvia is fairer than I am,” she said. “I wonder if he might not come to look upon me as worthy of something more than that sidewise glance.”

As for Lord Farquhart, left alone in the boudoir, he was still indifferent and still somewhat insolent, for, as he sauntered out from the room, he muttered:

“May the devil take all women save the one you happen to be in love with! And yet she’s a pretty minx, too, if she hadn’t such a vixenish temper!”

And then he hummed the last line of his song to Sylvia.

XII

Five times had Johan, the player's boy, met young Lindley at the edge of the Ogilvie woods. Five times he had reported nothing of any interest concerning Mistress Judith Ogilvie, or, rather, the sum of the five reports had amounted to naught. Once he said that Mistress Judith was, if anything, quieter than usual. Again he told that her maids had said that she had been in a fine rage when Master Lindley had braved her wrath by appearing at her home and demanding an interview with her. But when her father had taxed her with her rudeness in refusing to descend and speak with her cousin, she had merely shrugged her shoulders and said that Master Lindley was of too little consequence even to discuss. She had been little with the players. Johan himself had had much trouble in gaining any interviews with her. She had spent more time than usual sewing with the maids. She had spent more time with her father, giving as an excuse that she could not ride abroad because her horse was lame. But Johan averred that he had seen one of the stable lads exercising Star and there had been nothing wrong with the horse.

On the sixth night Johan, peering up at Lindley from under his black curls, asked if any inference could be gathered from aught that he had reported and Lindley was obliged to confess that he saw none. The shadows of the trees fell all about them.

"If Mistress Judith knew that I was watching her to make report to you," hazarded the lad, "it might almost seem as though she were playing some part for your benefit, so different is all this from her former ways, but –"

"But she does not know," Lindley concluded the sentence.

"Nay, how could she know?" the lad asked. "If she knew she would but include me in her hatred of you. She would deny me all access to her, and that I could not bear. 'Tis all of no use, my master. Mistress Judith is quite outside of all chance of your winning her. So little have I done that I'll gladly release you from your bargain if you'll but give up all hope of winning her."

"I've no faint heart, boy," answered Lindley. "Your Mistress Judith will come to my call yet, you'll see."

"I'm not so sure I'd like to see that day, my master," answered the lad, in a whimsical tone. "But, in all honesty, I should tell you – I mean I'm thinking –" He hesitated.

"Well, boy, you're thinking what?" questioned Lindley, impatiently. "Though I offered not to pay you for your thoughts."

"No, I give you my thoughts for no pay whatsoever." Johan's voice was still full of a restrained mirth. "And you must remember, too, that I told you at the first that I myself was a lover of Mistress Judith Ogilvie. That, perhaps, gives me better understanding of the maid. That, perhaps, makes my thoughts of value."

"Well, and what do you think?" demanded Lindley.

"I – I was going to say" – the boy spoke slowly – "it seems to me that – that Mistress Judith may already be in love."

"In love!" echoed Lindley. "And with whom, pray you, might Mistress Judith be in love? Whom has she seen to fall in love with? Where has she been to fall in love? It was only last week that you told me that Mistress Judith had sworn that she would never be in love with any man – that she would never be won by any man."

"Ay, but maids – some maids – change their minds as easily as their ribbons, my master," quoth the boy, somewhat sententiously.

"What reason have you for your opinion that Mistress Judith may be in love?" Lindley's question broke a short silence, and he bit his lip over the obnoxious word.

"I – why, it seems to me that her docility might prove it, might it not? I – it's a lover's heart that speaks to you, remember – a heart that loves mightily, a heart that yearns mightily. But is not docility

on a maid's part a sign of love? Might it not be? It seems to me that if I were a maid and I'd fallen desperately and woefully in love, I'd be all for gentleness and quiet, I'd sew with my maids and dream of love, I'd give all of my time to my father from whom love was so soon to take me. That's what I should think a maid would do, and that is what Mistress Judith has done for a week past. And then to-day, as I hung about outside her windows, I heard her rating her maids. Mistress Judith's voice can be quite high and shrill when she is annoyed, you may remember; and the one complete sentence that I heard was this: 'Am I always to be buried in a country house, think ye, and what would town folk think of stitches such as those if they could see them? But see them they'll not, for you'll have to do some tedious ripping here, my girls, and some better stitches.' Now" – the boy's lips curled dolorously – "does not that sound to you as though Mistress Judith were contemplating some change in her estate, as though she had already given her heart to some town gallant?"

Lindley's brows were black and his lips, too, were curled. But curses were the rods that twisted them.

"What devil's work is the girl up to now?" he demanded, savagely. "She's doubtless met some ne'er-do-well unbeknown to Master Ogilvie. I must see Mistress Judith at once, on the very instant, and have it out with her."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Johan, the player's boy. "You'll but drive her on in any prank she's bent on."

"Then it's Master Ogilvie I'll see," declared Lindley. "Where have all your eyes been that the girl could have met a lover; that she could have seen anyone with whom to fall in love? She must not fall in love with anyone save me. Do you hear, boy? I love her. I love her."

"Ah, then it is your heart that's engaged in this matter," commented Johan. "I thought, perhaps – why, perhaps it was merely Mistress Judith's defiance of her father's wishes that led you on to wish to marry her. You – you really do love Mistress Judith, for herself? Really love her as a lover ought to love?"

"You're over curious, my lad," growled Lindley. "And yet 'tis my own fault, I suppose. I've given you my confidence."

"But how know you that you love Mistress Judith?" persisted the boy.

"I love her – I love her because I've loved her always," answered Lindley, passionately. "I loved her when I was ten, when she was six, when her golden head was no higher than my heart."

"'Tis somewhat higher now, I think." The boy's words were very low. "More like her heart would match to yours. Her eyes are as high above the ground as your own. Her lips would not be raised to meet your lips."

Lindley's face had grown scarlet.

"Be silent, boy," he cried. "You speak over freely of sacred things."

The lad, backing away from under Lindley's upraised arm, still murmured, echoing Lindley's words: "Sacred things!" and added: "Mistress Judith's heart! Her eyes! Her lips!"

What Lindley's answer might have been from lips and hand the lad never knew. It was checked by a sudden onslaught from behind. Out from the low bushes that hedged the woods sprang two figures in hoods and cloaks. The foremost was tall and burly, though agile enough. The second seemed but a clumsy follower. In an instant Lindley's sword was engaged with that of the leader. For only an instant Johan hesitated. Drawing a short sword from under his cloak, he sprang upon the second of the highwaymen. Their battle was short, for the fellow's clumsiness made him an easy victim for the slender youth. Pinked but slightly in the arm, he gave vent to an unearthly howl and, turning away, he fled through the dark aisles of the woods, his diminishing shrieks denoting the speed and length of his flight.

But Johan's victory came not a second too soon, for just at that moment Lindley's sword dropped from his hand, the blood spurting from a deep wound in his shoulder. With a low snarl of victory, the highwayman drew back his arm to plunge his sword into his victim's breast, but Johan, springing forward and picking Lindley's weapon from the ground, hurled himself upon their assailant.

“Not so fast, my friend,” he cried, and in another second blades were again flashing. Lindley, who for a moment had been overwhelmed by the shock of his wound, raised a useless voice in protest. Johan’s own voice drowned every sound as he drove his antagonist now this way, now that, quite at his own will.

The moon, in its last quarter, was just rising above the trees, and the narrow glade was lighted with its weird, fantastic glow. From one side of the road to the other, the shadowy figures moved, the steel blades flashing in the glinting light, Johan’s short, sharp cries punctuating the song of the swords. Lindley could hear the ruffian’s heavy breathing as Johan forced him up the bank that edged the road. He heard his horse’s nervous whinny as the fight circled his flanks. But Lindley was so fascinated by the brilliancy of the lad’s fighting that he had no thought of the outcome of the fray until he heard a sudden sharp outcry. Then he saw Johan stagger back, but he saw at the same instant that the highwayman had fallen, doubled over in a heap, upon the ground. He saw, too, that Johan’s sword, trailing on the ground, was red with blood.

“You’re hurt, lad!” Lindley, faint from loss of blood, staggered toward the boy.

“Ay, ay, hurt desperately,” moaned Johan. His voice seemed weak and faltering.

“But how? But where? I did not see him touch you!” Lindley’s left arm encircled the lad, his right hung limp at his side.

Johan’s head sank for an instant onto Lindley’s shoulder.

“No, he did not touch me, ’tis no bodily hurt,” he moaned; “but I’ve – I’ve killed the man.”

Lindley’s support was withdrawn instantly and roughly.

“After such a fight, are you fool enough to bemoan a victory?” His words, too, were rough. “Why, man, it was a fight to the death! You’d have been killed if you had not killed. Did you think you were fighting for the fun of it? You’re squeamish as a woman.”

Johan tried to recover his voice. He tried to stand erect.

“I did it well, did I not?” An unsteady laugh rang out. “The play acting, I mean. You forget, Master Lindley, that I’m a player, that in my parts I’m more often a woman than a man. And we actors are apt to grow into the parts we oftenest counterfeit.” Suddenly he staggered and the sword clattered from his hand. But again he straightened himself. “Would I gain applause as a woman, think you?”

“If it’s play acting, have done with it,” growled Lindley, whose wound was hurting; who, in reality, was almost fainting from loss of blood. “You’ve saved my life as well as your own, Johan. But we’ll touch on that later. There’s no fear, is there, that your dead man will come to life?”

The boy for the first time raised his eyes to Lindley’s face. Even in the darkness he could see that it was ghastly white and drawn with pain. A nervous cry burst from his lips, and he stretched both arms toward Lindley.

“Da – damn your play acting, boy,” sputtered Lindley. “Nay, I mean not to be so harsh. I’ll – I’ll not forget the debt I owe you either. But you must help me to The Jolly Grig, where Marmaduke has skill enough to tend my wound until I can reach London.”

“But Master Ogilvie has skill in the care of wounds,” cried Johan. “Surely we are nearer Master Ogilvie’s than The Jolly Grig. And Mistress Judith will – ”

“Nay, I’ll not force myself on Mistress Judith in this way,” answered Lindley, petulantly.

“You are over considerate of Mistress Judith’s feelings, even for a lover,” returned the boy.

“Ah, it’s not Mistress Judith’s feelings I’m considerate of,” replied Lindley. “She’s capable of saying that I got the wound on purpose to lie in her house, on purpose to demand her care.”

Here Johan’s unsteady laugh rang out once more.

“Indeed she’s capable of that very thing, my master,” he said, and as he spoke he began to tear his long coat into strips.

“What are you doing that for?” demanded Lindley, leaning more and more heavily against his horse’s side.

“It’s a bandage and a sling for your arm,” answered the boy. “If you will persist in the ride to The Jolly Grig, your arm must be tied so that it will not bleed again.”

“Twill be a wonder if you do not faint away like a woman when you touch the blood,” scoffed Lindley.

“Twill be a wonder, I’m thinking myself,” answered the boy, unsteadily.

And then, the bandage made and adjusted, Johan offered his shoulder to assist the wounded man into the saddle. But Lindley, pressing heavily yet tenderly against the lad, said gently:

“I’ve been rough, Johan, but believe me, this night’s work will stand you in good stead. Hereafter your play acting may be a matter of choice, but never again of necessity.”

“Heaven grant that the necessity will never again be so great!” murmured Johan, indistinctly.

“I – I did not understand,” faltered Lindley, reaching the saddle with difficulty.

“I said – why I said,” stammered Johan, “Heaven be praised that there would be no more necessity for play acting.”

Arrived at The Jolly Grig, Master Marmaduke Bass’ perturbed face boded ill for his surgical skill.

“Hast heard the news, my master?” he cried, before he saw the condition of his guest. “Ah, Mr. Lindley, ’tis about a friend of your own, too – a friend who was with you here not a week ago.”

“I – I care not for your news, whatever it may be, whomever it may be about,” groaned Lindley, who was near the end of his endurance.

“Master Lindley’s met with highwaymen,” interrupted Johan. “Perchance ’tis the Black Devil himself. He’s wounded and has need of your skill, not of your news.”

“Met with my Lord Farquhart!” cried honest Marmaduke. “But that’s impossible. My Lord Farquhart’s been in prison these twelve hours and more, denounced by his cousin, the Lady Barbara Gordon!”

It would have been hard to say which was the whiter, Master Lindley or Johan, the player’s boy. It would have been difficult to distinguish between their startled voices.

“Lord Farquhart! In prison!”

“Ay, Lord Farquhart. The Black Devil. The Black Highwayman. Denounced at a festival at my Lord Grimsby’s by the Lady Barbara Gordon.”

XIII

The worthy Marmaduke's gossip was indeed true, for as strange a thing as that had really happened. Lady Barbara Gordon, in open company, had announced that she knew positively that Lord Farquhart was no other than the Black Highwayman who for a twelvemonth had been terrorizing the roads round about London town. He had confessed it to her, himself, she said. She had seen him guised as the highwayman. Mr. Ashley, the Lady Barbara's escort at the moment, had corroborated her statements, vouchsafing on his own account that he had been with the Lady Barbara when Lord Farquhart's servants had returned her rings and a rose that had been stolen from her by the Black Highwayman only the night before.

Just a moment's consideration of the conditions and incidents, the chances and mischances, that led up to this denouncement will show that it was not so strange a thing, after all. To take the Lady Barbara, first. Up to the time of her visit to London, Lord Farquhart had been to her something of a figurehead. She had considered him merely as a creature quite inanimate and impersonal, who was to be forced upon her by her father's will just as she was to be forced upon him. But Lord Farquhart in the flesh was a young man of most pleasing appearance, if of most exasperating manners. When the Lady Barbara compared him with the other gallants of the society she frequented she found that he had few peers among them, and as she accepted his punctilious courtesies and attentions she began to long to see them infused with some personal warmth and interest. She saw no reason why Lord Farquhart should be the one and only gentleman of her acquaintance who discerned no charm in her. It piqued something more than her vanity to see that she alone of all the ladies whom he met could rouse in him no personal interest whatsoever. And, almost unconsciously, she exerted herself to win from him some sign of approbation.

Also, in addition to her awakened interest in Lord Farquhart – or possibly because of it – the Lady Barbara thought she saw in Mr. Ashley's devotion some new, some curious, some quite displeasing quality. It was not that he was not as courteous as ever. It was not that he was not as attentive as ever. It was not that he did not speak his love as tenderly, as warmly, as ever. All this was quite as it had been. But in his courtesies the Lady Barbara recognized a thinly veiled – it was not contempt, of course, but there was the suggestion of the manner one would offer to a goddess who had advanced a step toward the extreme edge of her pedestal. And this Barbara resented. In his attentions he was quite solicitous, but it was a solicitude of custom – of custom to be, perhaps, as much as of custom that has been. To this Barbara objected. Already, too, his love savored of possession. Against this Barbara chafed. She would give her favors when she was ready to give them. They would be gifts, though – not things held by right.

Her resentments, her objections, her chafings, she tried to hold in check. She endeavored to show no sign of them to Ashley, with the result that in her manner to him he saw only the endeavor. So he, in turn, was piqued by the change in his lady. He was angry and annoyed, and asked himself occasionally what right the Lady Barbara had to change toward him when she and her Lord Farquhart were so absolutely in his power. All of which strained, somewhat, the relations between the Lady Barbara and Mr. Ashley.

To come to Lord Farquhart: he loved or thought he loved – he had loved or had thought he loved Sylvia – Sylvia, the light o' love, one of the pretty creatures on whom love's hand falls anything but lightly. To his prejudiced eyes, the Lady Barbara, cold and colorless in the gloom of Gordon's Court, had seemed quite lacking in all charm. But when he had sauntered from her presence to that of Sylvia on the afternoon when the jest of the highway robbery had been discussed, he found that his curiosity, nay, his interest, had been aroused by the Lady Barbara. He found that his unsophisticated cousin was not altogether lacking in color and spirit, and Sylvia, for the first time, seemed somewhat overblown, somewhat over full of vulgar life and gayety. Later, that same night, when he saw the future

Lady Farquhart dimpling and glowing, the central star in a galaxy of London beaux, he wondered if the Lady Barbara might not be worth the winning; he wondered if the *mariage de convenance* might not be transformed into the culmination of a quick, romantic courtship. To win the Lady Barbara before the Lady Barbara was his without the winning! Might not that be well worth while?

To give just a passing word to Sylvia; for it was to Sylvia that the main mischance was due. Sylvia saw that her reign was over, that she had lost all hold on Lord Farquhart, and, in her own way, which, after all, was a very definite and distinct way, poor Sylvia loved Lord Farquhart.

For six days these conditions had been changing, with all their attendant incidents and chances, and the time was ripe for a mischance. Lord Farquhart, lounging in the park, hoping to meet the Lady Barbara, even if it was only to be snubbed by the Lady Barbara, saw that young lady at the end of a long line of trees with Mr. Ashley. For Barbara had consented to walk with Mr. Ashley, partly so that she might have the freedom of open air and sunshine in which to express a belated opinion to Mr. Ashley concerning his new manner and tone, and partly in hopes that she would encounter Lord Farquhart and pique his jealousy by appearing with his rival.

“I tell you I’ll not stand it, not for an instant,” she was saying, the roses in her cheeks a deep, deep damask and the stars in her eyes beaming with unwonted radiance. “To hear you speak the world would think that we had been married a twelvemonth! That you demanded your rights like a commonplace husband, rather than that you sought my favor. I’ll warn you to change your manner, Mr. Harry Ashley, or you’ll find that you have neither rights nor favors.”

It was at this instant that the Lady Barbara caught sight of Lord Farquhart at his own end of the lime-shaded walk. Instantly her manner changed, though the damask roses still glowed and the stars still shone.

“Nay, nay, Hal” – she laid a caressing hand on his arm – “forgive my lack of manners. I’m – I’m – perchance I’m over weary. We country maids are not used to so much pleasure as you’ve given me in London.” She leaned languorously toward Ashley and he, made presumptuous by her change of tone, slipped his arm about her slender waist.

The Lady Barbara slid from his grasp with a pretty scream of amazement and shocked propriety. Then there might have followed a bit of swordplay; indeed, the Lady Barbara hoped there would – the affianced lover should have fought to defend his rights, the other should have fought for the privileges bestowed by the lady, and all the time the lady would have stood wringing her hands, moaning perchance, and praying for the discomfiture of the one or the other. But, unfortunately, none of this came to pass because, just at the critical moment, just when Lord Farquhart, watched slyly by Lady Barbara’s starry eyes, was starting forward to defend his rights, Sylvia slipped from behind a tree and flung herself with utter abandon upon Lord Farquhart.

Now, in reality, Lord Farquhart tried to force the woman away from him, but the Lady Barbara saw only that his hands were on her arms, that, in very truth, he spoke to the girl! Turning on her heel, she sped from the lime walk, followed by Mr. Ashley.

What ensued between Lord Farquhart and his Sylvia concerns the story little, for he had already told her that her reign was over, that a new queen had been enthroned in his heart. What ensued between the Lady Barbara and her escort cannot be written, for it was but a series of gasps and sharp cries on the lady’s part, interspersed with imploring commands on the lover’s part to tell him what ailed her. The interview was brought to a summary conclusion when the Lady Barbara reached her aunt’s house, for she flung the door to in his face and left him standing disconsolate on the outside.

XIV

It was on that night that the Lady Barbara received an ovation at Lord Grimsby's rout as the belle of London town. Most beautiful she was, in reality, for the damask roses in her cheeks were dyed with the hot blood of her heart; her eyes, that were wont to be blue as the noonday sky, were black as night, and the pomegranates of her lips had been ripened by passion. Surrounded by courtiers, she flung her favors right and left with impartial prodigality. All the time her heart was crying out that she would be avenged for the insult that had been offered her that afternoon. Harry Ashley, approaching her with hesitating deference, was joyously received, although to herself she declared that she loathed him, abhorred him and detested him.

Jack Grimsby, toasting the Lady Barbara for the dozenth time, exclaimed to his crony:

"Pon my honor, though, I know not if I envy Lord Farquhart or not. His future lady seems somewhat unstinting in her favors."

"To me it seems that Lord Farquhart asks but little from his future lady," laughed the crony.

"Is not that Lord Farquhart now?" asked young Grimsby. "Let us watch him approach the lady. Let us see if she has aught left for him."

A narrow opening in the court that surrounded Lady Barbara permitted Lord Farquhart to draw near her. There was a sudden lull in the chatter that encompassed her, for others beside Jack Grimsby were questioning what the Lady Barbara had reserved for her future lord. Possibly the Lady Barbara had drawn a little aloof from her attendant swains, for she seemed to stand quite alone as she measured her fiancé with her eyes from his head to his feet and back again to his eyes. And all the while her heart was beating tempestuously and her brain was crying passionately: "If only he had loved me! If only he had loved me the least little bit!"

On Lord Farquhart's lips was an appeal to his lady's forbearance, in his eyes lay a message to her heart, but she saw them not. His face flushed slightly, for he knew that all eyes were bent upon him. Then it paled under Barbara's cold glance. For a full moment she looked at him before she turned from him with a shiver that was visible to all, with a shrug that was seen by all. And yet, when she spoke, it was after a vehement movement of her hand as though she had silenced a warning voice.

"My lords and ladies," she cried, her voice ringing even to the corners of the hushed room, "I – I feel that I must tell you all that this man, this Lord Farquhart, who was to have been my husband in less than a week, is – is your gentleman highwayman, your Black Devil who has made your London roads a terror to all honest men."

For an instant there was absolute silence. Then surprise, amazement and consternation rose in a babel of sound, but over all Lady Barbara's voice rang once more.

"I am positive that I speak only the truth," she cried. "No, Lord Farquhart, I'll not hear you, now or ever again. I've seen him in his black disguise. He told me himself that he was this Black Devil of the roads. He confessed it all to me."

The lady still stood alone, and the crowd had edged away from Lord Farquhart, leaving him, also, alone. On every face surprise was written, but in no eyes, on no lips, was this so clearly marked as on Lord Farquhart's own face.

And yet he spoke calmly.

"Is this the sequel to your jest, my lady, or has it deeper meaning than a jest?"

"Ah, jest you chose to call it once before, and jest you may still call it," she answered, fiercely, but now her hand was pressed close against her heart.

"For a full week I have known this fact," exclaimed Ashley, stepping to the Lady Barbara's side. "Unfortunately, I have seen with my own eyes proofs convincing even me that my Lord Farquhart is this highway robber. I cannot doubt it, but I have refrained from speaking before because Lady

Barbara asked me to be silent, asked me to protect her cousin, hoping, I suppose, that she could save him from his fate, that she could induce him to forego this perilous pursuit; but – ”

Lord Farquhart's hand was closing on his sword, but he did not fail even then to note the disdain with which Lady Barbara turned from her champion. She hurriedly approached Lord Grimsby, who was looking curiously at this highwayman who he himself had had reason to think was the devil incarnate.

“I beg your pardon, Lord Grimsby” – Lady Barbara was still impetuous – “for this interruption of your fête, but, to me, it seemed unwarranted that this man should longer masquerade among you as a gentleman.”

She swept away from Lord Grimsby. She passed close to Lord Farquhart, lingering long enough to whisper for his ear alone: “You see I can forgive a crime, but not an insult.” Then, sending a hurried message to her aunt, she paced on down the room, her head held high, the damask roses still blooming brilliantly, the stars still shining brightly.

A score of officious hands held her cloak, a dozen officious voices called her chair. And my Lady Barbara thanked her helpers with smiling lips that were still pomegranate red, and yet the curtains of her chair caught her first sob as they descended about her, and it seemed but a disheveled mass of draperies that the footmen discovered when they set the lady down at her own door, so prone she was with grief and despair.

XV

Lord Farquhart seemed to recover himself but slowly from the shock of Lady Barbara's denunciation, from the surprise of her whispered words. At last he raised his eyes to Lord Grimsby, who was still looking at him curiously.

"I fear that I should also ask your pardon, my Lord Grimsby, for this confusion." Lord Farquhart's words came slowly. "My cousin, the Lady Barbara, must be strangely overwrought. With your permission, I will follow her and attend to her needs."

He turned and for the first time looked definitely at the little knot of men that surrounded him. The women, young and old, had been withdrawn from his environment by their escorts. His eyes traveled slowly from one to another of the familiar faces.

"Surely, my Lord Grimsby," clamored Ashley, "you will not let the fellow escape!"

"Surely my Lord Grimsby is going to place no reliance on a tale like this told by a whimsical girl!" retorted Lord Farquhart before Lord Grimsby's slow words had fallen on his ears.

"We will most assuredly take all measures for safeholding my Lord Farquhart."

"But, Lord Grimsby," cried Farquhart, realizing for the first time that the situation might have a serious side, "you surely do not believe this tale!"

"I would like to see some reason for doubting the lady's word," answered the older man. "And you forget that her story is corroborated by Mr. Ashley. Neither must you overlook the fact that for some time the authorities have been convinced that this highwayman was no common rogue, that he is undoubtedly some one closely connected with our London life, if – if indeed – " But this was no place for Lord Grimsby to assert his own opinion that the highwayman was indeed the devil incarnate.

"Why, the whole thing is the merest fabrication," cried Lord Farquhart, impatiently. "It is all without reason, without sense, without possible excuse. The Lady Barbara's imagination has been played upon in some way, for some reason that I cannot understand. You heard her declare that she'd seen me in the fellow's disguise. That is an absolute impossibility. I've never seen the rogue, much less impersonated him."

"You shall, of course, have the benefit of any doubt, Lord Farquhart." Lord Grimsby's voice had assumed its judicial tones and fell with sinister coldness on every ear. "But, innocent or guilty, you must admit that the safety of his majesty's realm demands that the truth be proved."

"Ay, it shall be proved, too," cried Jack Grimsby, who had been so warmly befriended in time of direct need by the Black Highwayman. "And you shall have the benefit of every doubt there may be, Percy. Rest assured of that. And in the event that there is no doubt, if it is proved that you are our Black Devil, you'll still go free. Your case will be in my father's hands, and I here repeat my oath that if the Black Devil goes to the gallows, I go on the road, following as close as may be in his footsteps."

Farquhart shuddered out from under the protecting hand young Grimsby had laid on his shoulder.

"You speak as though you half believed the tale," he cried. His eyes traveled once again around the little circle. Then his face grew stern. "Let Mr. Ashley repeat his tale," he said, slowly. "Let him tell the Lady Barbara's story and his own corroboration as circumstantially as may be."

"Yes, let Harry Ashley tell his story," echoed Jack Grimsby, "and when he has finished let him say where and when he will measure swords with me, for if he lies he lies like a blackguard, and if he spoke the truth he speaks it like a liar."

Ashley's sword was half out of its sheath, but it was arrested by Lord Grimsby's voice.

"I will consent that Mr. Ashley should tell his story here and now," he said. "It's unusual and irregular, but the circumstances are unusual and irregular. I request your appreciation of this courtesy, my Lord Farquhart, and as for you, my son, a gentleman's house may serve strange purposes, but it's no place for a tavern brawler. So take heed of your words and manners."

Lord Farquhart had merely bowed his head in answer to Lord Grimsby's words; Jack still stood near him, his hand on his shoulder, but Ashley looked in vain for a pair of friendly eyes to which he might direct his tale. And yet he knew that everyone was waiting avidly for his words.

"The story is short and proves itself," he began. "A week ago the Lady Barbara Gordon was traveling toward London attended only by her father's servants. My Lord Farquhart, with a party of his friends, among whom I was included at that time, awaited her at Marmaduke Bass' tavern, The Jolly Grig. A short time before the Lady Barbara was to arrive, Lord Farquhart withdrew to his room, presumably to sleep, until – "

"Ay, and sleep he did," interrupted young Treadway, who spoke for the first time. "We both slept in my room on the ground floor of the tavern."

"You slept, no doubt, Mr. Treadway," answered Lord Grimsby. "But, if so, how can you vouch for the fact that Lord Farquhart slept?"

"I can vouch for it – I can vouch for it because I know he slept," spluttered Treadway.

"I fear me much that your reasoning will not help to save your friend," answered the councillor, a little scornfully. "Let me beg that Mr. Ashley be not again interrupted to so little purpose."

"While, according to his own account, Mr. Treadway slept," continued Ashley, "while he supposed Lord Farquhart was also sleeping, I heard Lord Farquhart singing in his room overhead. At the time I paid little heed to it. In fact, I did not think of it again that night, although, if I remember rightly, I commented on Lord Farquhart's voice to Mr. Cecil Lindley, who sat with me in the tavern. It was full fifteen minutes after that when the Lady Barbara drove into the inn, crying that she had been waylaid by the Black Highwayman. Her rings had been stolen, her rings and a jeweled gauntlet and a rose. She was strangely confused and would not permit us to ride in pursuit of the villain, averring that she had promised him immunity in exchange for her own life."

"A pretty tale," Jack Grimsby again interrupted, in spite of his father's commands. "It's a lie on its own face. 'Tis well known that the Black Devil has never taken a life, has never even threatened bodily injury."

"Be that as it may" – Ashley's level voice ignored the tone of the interruption, although his nervous fingers were on his sword – "when the Lady Barbara's companion, Mistress Benton, tried to say that the Lady Barbara had recognized her assailant, that the Lady Barbara had willingly descended from the coach with the highwayman, the Lady Barbara silenced her peremptorily and ordered that we hurry with all speed to London. 'Twas the following morning, my Lord Grimsby, that the truth was revealed to me, for Lord Farquhart's own servant returned to the Lady Barbara, in my presence, the jewels that had been stolen the night before, the jewels and the rose the highwayman had taken from her."

"You forget the jeweled gauntlet, Mr. Ashley." Again it was Jack Grimsby's sneering voice that interrupted Ashley's tale. "Did my Lord Farquhart keep his lady's glove when he returned the other baubles?"

Ashley's face flushed, but he looked steadily at Lord Grimsby; he directed the conclusion of his story to Lord Grimsby's ears.

"It was then that the Lady Barbara confessed, much against her will, I will admit, that it was indeed her cousin and her fiancé who had waylaid her, merely to confess to her his identity with this bandit whose life is, assuredly, forfeit to the crown."

Lord Farquhart had listened in tense silence. Now he started forward, his hand on his sword, but his arms were caught by two of Lord Grimsby's men. "You will admit, my Lord Farquhart, that the matter demands explanation," said the councillor, dryly. "How came you by the jewels and rose? Can you tell us? And what of the missing gauntlet?"

"The rings and the rose my servant found in my coat," answered Farquhart, his eyes so intent on his questioner's face that he failed to see the smile that curved the lips of those who heard him. "The gauntlet I never saw, I never had it in my possession for a moment."

“How did you account for the jewels in your coat if you did not put them there yourself?” demanded Lord Grimsby.

“At first I was at a loss to account for them at all.” Lord Farquhart’s voice showed plainly that he resented the change in his questioner’s manner. “I recalled my cousin’s confusion when she had told her tale of highway robbery, and all at once it seemed to me that the whole affair was an invention of her own, some madcap jest that she was playing on me, perchance to test my bravery, to see if I would ride forthwith after the villain. If so, I had failed her signally, for I had accepted her commands and gone with her straight to London. I supposed, in furtherance of this idea, that she had hired her own servant, or bribed mine, to hide the jewels in my coat. I never thought once of the gauntlet she had claimed to lose, never remembered it from that night until now. I sent the jewels to her, and later in the day I taxed her with the jest, and she agreed, it seemed to me, that it had been a jest and asked that the return of the rings might close the incident. I have not spoken of it since, nor has she, until to-night.”

There was a long silence, and then Lord Grimsby spoke.

“Your manner carries conviction, Lord Farquhart, but Mr. Ashley’s tale sounds true. Perchance some prank is at the bottom of all this, but you will pardon me if I but fulfill my duty to the crown. The case shall be conducted with all speed, but until your name is cleared, or until we find the perpetrator of the joke, if joke it be, I must hold you prisoner.”

There was a short scuffle, a sharp clash of arms. But these came from Lord Farquhart’s friends. Lord Farquhart himself stood as though stunned. He walked away as though he were in a dream, and not until he was safely housed under bolt and bar in the sheriff’s lodge could he even try to sift the matter to a logical conclusion.

For an instant only did he wonder if Barbara and Ashley had chosen this way to rid themselves of him. He remembered with a gleam of triumph Barbara’s disdainful manner toward Ashley when he had stepped to her side, vouching for the truth of her statement. He remembered, too, that Barbara had had short moments of kindness toward him in the last few days, that there had been moments when she had been exceeding sweet to him; when he had even hoped that he was, indeed, winning her love.

Then, like a flash, he remembered Sylvia’s presence under the trees that afternoon. Undoubtedly Barbara had seen her, and if Barbara had grown to care for him ever so little, she would have resented bitterly a thing like that. That might have been the insult to which she referred. But the crime! Of what crime had he been guilty? Assuredly she did not believe, herself, the tale she had told. She did not believe that he was this highwayman.

Here Lord Farquhart caught a gleam of light. Ashley might have convinced her that such a tale was true. Ashley might have arranged the highway robbery and might have placed the jewels in his coat to throw the guilt on him. Ashley was undoubtedly at the bottom of the whole thing. Then he remembered Ashley’s flush when the gauntlet had been referred to. Had Ashley kept the gauntlet, then?

Following fast upon this question was another flash of light even brighter than the first. To Farquhart the truth seemed to stand out clear and transparent. Ashley was the gentleman of the highways! Ashley was the Black Devil. Farquhart threw back his head and laughed long and loud. If only he had used his wits, he would have denounced the fellow where he stood.

And in this realization of Ashley’s guilt, and in the consciousness that Barbara must love him at least a little if she had been jealous of Sylvia, Lord Farquhart slept profoundly.

XVI

All this merely brings the narrative back to the announcement made by Marmaduke to Lindley and Johan when they entered the courtyard of The Jolly Grig after the fight with the highwaymen.

As may be supposed, it was several nights before Lindley was sufficiently recovered from his wound to again keep tryst with Johan, the player's boy. When at last he could ride out to the edge of the Ogilvie woods, he found the lad sitting on the ground under an oak, apparently waiting for whatever might happen. He did not speak at all until he was accosted by Lindley, and then he merely recited in a listless manner that Mistress Judith was gone to London with her father.

The boy's manner was so changed, his tone was so forlorn, that Lindley's sympathy was awakened. He wondered if the lad really loved Judith so devotedly.

"And that has left you so disconsolate?" he asked.

"Ay, my master!" Indeed the youth's tone was disconsolate, even as a true lover's might have been.

"And when went Mistress Judith to London?" asked Lindley. "This afternoon? This morning?"

"But no. She went some four days ago, all in a hurry, as it seemed," Johan answered.

"Four days ago!" echoed Lindley. "But why did you not send me word?" He was thinking of the days that had been wasted with his lady near him, all unknown to him, in London.

"She – I mean – I thought you would be here each night," stammered the boy, contritely, and yet his tone was listless. "I've but kept the tryst with you."

Lindley looked at the boy curiously. Preoccupied as he was with his own thoughts, he still recognized the change in his companion.

"What's the matter, Johan?" he asked. "You were not hurt the other night, were you? Are you still brooding on the fact that you killed your man? Are you ill? Or do you fear that I've forgot my debt? What ails you? Can't you tell me?" The questions hurried on, one after another. "Or is it Mistress Judith's absence, alone, that hurts you thus? Is she to be long in London?"

"N – no. That is, I do not know," the boy made answer to the last question. "We, my master and I and all his company, go ourselves early to-morrow to London. Doubtless I shall see Mistress Judith there."

"Why, then, 'tis only that the scene will shift to London," cried Lindley. "Cheer up, my lad, we'll name a tryst in London. Besides, there's news waiting you in London; news for you and your master concerning your bond to him. You hardly look the part of a lad who's won to freedom by a pretty bit of swordplay. You should have learned ere now to fit your countenance to the parts you perform."

"But I've performed so few parts, Master Lindley. I am only Johan, the player's boy, and, by your leave, I'll go now, and for a tryst – she – for our tryst, say at ten o'clock, in front of Master Timothy Ogilvie's mansion, where Mistress Judith and her father lodge. I'll have surely seen Mistress Judith then, and can report to you any change, if change there be."

The slender lad slipped back into the shadows of the Ogilvie woods, but for full ten minutes he held Lindley's thoughts away from the lady of his heart's desire. What could ail the lad to be so changed, so spiritless? Was his love so deep that to be weaned from Judith for even a few short hours could break his spirit thus? Or was it possible that the duel and the fatigues of that midnight encounter had been too much for his strength? Lindley could answer none of these questions, so the lover's thoughts soon strayed back to Mistress Judith, and the player's lad was forgot.

But even Mistress Judith held not all of Lindley's thoughts that night, for Lord Farquhart's fate was resting heavily on his mind. That Farquhart was, indeed, the gentleman of the highways Lindley knew to be impossible, and yet all the facts seemed to be against the imprisoned lord. Even Lindley's word had gone against him, for Lindley had been questioned, and had been obliged to admit that he had heard Lord Farquhart singing in his room above the stairs at the very time when Clarence

Treadway, when Farquhart himself, swore that he was asleep downstairs in Treadway's room. There was no evidence, whatsoever, for Lord Farquhart save his own words. All the evidence was against him.

And the affair that had savored more of a jest than of reality seemed gradually to be settling down to a dull, unpleasant truth. Farquhart could and would tell but the one tale. Ashley would tell but one tale, and he, in truth, had convinced himself of Farquhart's guilt, absurd as it seemed. The Lady Barbara could only lie on her bed and moan and sob, and cry that she loved Lord Farquhart; that she wished she could unsay her words. She could not deny the truth of what she had told, though nothing could induce her to tell the story over. But all of her stuttering, stammering evasions of the truth seemed only to fix the guilt more clearly upon Lord Farquhart. Even to Lindley, who had been with him on the night in question, it did not seem altogether impossible that Lord Farquhart had had time to ride forth, waylay his cousin and rejoin his friends at the inn ere the lady drove into the courtyard.

Another point that stood out strongly against Lord Farquhart – a point that was weighing heavily in public opinion – was that since the night of Lady Barbara's arrival in London, since which time Lord Farquhart had been obliged to be in close attendance upon his cousin, there had been no hold ups by this redoubtable highwayman. The men who had attacked Lindley and the player's lad had been but bungling robbers of the road. That they could have had any connection with the robbery of the Lady Barbara, or with the other dashing plays of the Black Devil, had been definitely disproved.

So all of Farquhart's friends were weighed down with apprehension of the fate in store for him, whether he was guilty or not. The only hope lay in Lord Grimsby, the old man who had been convinced that the highwayman was in league with the devil, if he was not the devil himself; the old man whose only son had vowed to take to the road if the Black Highwayman met his fate at his father's hands. But the hopes that were based on the demon-inspired terror, and the paternal love of Lord Grimsby, seemed faint, indeed, to Lindley as he rode toward London that night.

XVII

Lindley was first at the tryst in London, but Johan soon slipped from the shadow of Master Timothy Ogilvie's gateway.

"I can stop but a moment," he whispered, nervously. "I must not be seen here. My – my master must not know that I – I am abroad in London."

"And Mistress Judith?" questioned Lindley. "Have you seen her? Is she still here? Is she well?"

"I have seen Mistress Judith for a moment only," answered the lad. "She is well enough, but she is worn out with the care of her cousin, Lady Barbara, and she is sadly dispirited, too."

"'Tis a pity Lady Barbara cannot die," muttered Lindley, "after the confusion she's gotten Lord Farquhart into. A sorry mess she's made of things."

"The poor girl –" Johan shuddered. "Mistress Judith says the poor girl is in desperate straits, does naught but cry and sob, and vows she loves Lord Farquhart better than her life."

"Ay, she may well be in desperate straits," shrugged Lindley. "And she'll be in worse ones when she finds she's played a goodly part in hanging an innocent man!"

"Hanging!" Johan's exclamation was little more than a shrill, sharp cry.

"Ay, hanging, I said," answered Lindley. "What other fate does she think is in store for Lord Farquhart?"

"But – but this Lord Farquhart is a friend of yours, too, is he not, Master Lindley?" The boy's question was slow and came after a long silence.

"Yes, a good friend and an honest man, if ever there was one," answered Lindley.

"An – an honest man!" Johan shuddered again. "That's it, an honest man he is, isn't he?"

"As honest as you or I!" Lindley's thoughts were so preoccupied that he hardly noticed his companion's agitation.

"But there must be some way of escape," Johan whispered, after another silence. "Some way to save him! If nothing else, some way to effect his escape!"

"Nay, I see no way," gloomed Lindley.

In the darkness Johan crept closer to Lindley.

"Is it only grief for Lord Farquhart that fills your heart," he asked, "or is it your wound that still hurts? Or – or has Mistress Judith some place in your thoughts? You seem so somber, so depressed, my master!"

"Ah, lad!" Lindley's sigh was deep and long. "Even Mistress Judith herself might fail to comprehend. She still fills all of me that a woman can fill, but a man's friend has a firm grip on his life. If harm comes to Lord Farquhart, the world will never again be so bright a place as it has been!"

"But harm cannot come to Lord Farquhart!" Johan's voice was suddenly soft and full. "He *must* be helped. There are a hundred ways that have not been tried. There is one way – oh, there is one way, in all those hundred ways – I mean, that must succeed. Think, Master Lindley. Cannot I help? Cannot I help in some way – to – to save your friend?"

Lindley was touched by the earnestness of the boy's tone, and laid a kindly hand on his shoulder.

"I'll think, my lad, but to what purpose I cannot promise you. This is no place for swordplay, however brilliant it may be."

Johan had drawn roughly away from Lindley's side. Now he leaned against the gate, dejection in every line of his drooping figure.

"There is one way," he muttered, slowly. "There is always one way, but –"

"You need not take it so to heart, boy," Lindley urged. "You're sadly worn and tired now. I saw last night that you were quite spiritless and lacking in heart! To-night, I see it even plainer."

"Oh, 'tis naught but the work I have to do," Johan answered, wearily.

"The work?" questioned Lindley. "Is it a new part you have to play?"

“Ay, that’s it,” sighed Johan; “a new part, a man’s part and a woman’s part all in one! It’s a most difficult part, indeed.” He was muttering the words to himself, and, under his cloak, Lindley could see his hands twisting nervously.

“Forgive me, lad!” Lindley’s tone was conscience-stricken. “I’d not forgotten the debt I owed you, though I seem to have forgot the promised payment. There’s been over much on my mind these last few days. But I’ll buy your freedom now, to-night, from this master player of yours. Where lies he? Let us go to him at once. Then you can give up this part and take the rest you need.”

“Oh, no, no, I must play this part,” answered the player’s boy, hurriedly. “I – I – Let me win to success before I speak to him of leaving him. I must, *must* succeed now. Then, perhaps, we can talk of freedom, not before.”

“Well, as you like!” Lindley’s voice had grown careless once again. He was again absorbed in his own affairs. “Think you I might see Mistress Judith to-morrow, if I had a message from Lord Farquhart for the Lady Barbara?”

“But have you access to Lord Farquhart?” The boy spoke quickly, so quickly that Lindley failed to notice the change in voice and manner.

“Why, I suppose I can gain access to him,” answered Lindley.

“But then surely I – surely we can rescue him,” cried Johan. “I’d not supposed that we could see Lord Farquhart, that we could gain speech with him. Now I know that I can help you free him. Think, think from now until to-morrow night at this time of some feasible plan, some way of taking Johan, the player’s boy, into Lord Farquhart’s presence. But wait! Why could you not take me to him disguised as the Lady Barbara? Mistress Judith would provide me with Lady Barbara’s cloak and veil and petticoats. She could coach me in her looks and manners. Have you forgotten how well I can impersonate a woman? And then, if I could pass the jailer as the Lady Barbara, what would hinder Farquhart from passing out as the Lady Barbara? I – I could personate Lord Farquhart, at a pinch, until rescue came to me. Or if it came to a last extremity, why I could still go to the gallows as Lord Farquhart! But that extremity would not come. There would be no difficulty in saving a worthless player’s lad, and they say that ’tis only Mr. Ashley’s work that is telling against the prisoner; that he is using this public means to wreak a private vengeance. Oh, if I can but see Lord Farquhart! If I can but speak to him! Much might be done, even if he refused the disguise of hood and cloak. Be here to-morrow night, with permits for yourself and Lady Barbara to see Lord Farquhart. Leave all the rest to me!” Johan’s impetuous voice had grown stronger, more positive, as his thoughts had formed themselves. His last words savored of a command. They were uttered in the tone that expects obedience, but Lindley ignored this.

“’Twould be but a waste of time,” he answered, gloomily.

“Well, what of that?” demanded Johan. “Perhaps it would be but a waste of one night. But of what value is your time or my time when there is even a chance of safety for Lord Farquhart?”

“I suppose you’re right in that,” agreed Lindley. “I’ll be here with the permits, as you say, to-morrow night. But what think you of my ruse to speak to Mistress Judith in the morning? If I were to present myself here at the house with a message from Lord Farquhart to the Lady Barbara, would not Judith speak with me? Remember, boy, that twenty-five crowns are yours the day I speak with Mistress Judith!”

“Oh, Mistress Judith, Mistress Judith!” cried the lad, impatiently. “Your thoughts are all for Mistress Judith. She will see no one, she will speak to no one, so she said to-day, until the Lady Barbara is recovered, until Lord Farquhart is free. It will be all that I can do to gain access to her to make my demand for the Lady Barbara’s clothes. And she is – she says that she is sick of the whole world. Her cousin’s plight, Lord Farquhart’s danger, have sickened her of the whole world. It’s for her sake that I would free Lord Farquhart. Until Lord Farquhart is released, Judith Ogilvie’s mind cannot rest for a single second. So for her sake you must work to free him, for Judith’s sake, for the sake of the woman you love!”

Without further word Lindley was left standing alone in the empty street, and his entire mind was absorbed in amazement at the impetuosity of the lad's voice and manner.

XVIII

The following night it was again Lindley who was first at the tryst under Master Timothy Ogilvie's gateway. A gusty wind blew down the street, and there was little comfort to be found in any shelter that was near at hand. Just as Lindley's patience was about exhausted, though, he saw a slender shadow move with hesitating steps out from the gate, then scurry back to its protection. A voice, muffled in the folds of a cloak that covered the figure, a voice sweet as a silver bell, called softly:

"Master Lindley, Master Lindley, are you not here? Are you not waiting?"

Lindley advanced somewhat slowly until he saw that a woman stood half in, half out, of the shadow.

"But is it not you, Johan?" he asked, with some hesitation.

"Nay, 'tis I, Lady Barbara Gordon," a girl's voice answered. "Judith – Johan, the lad that came to Judith, told me that you were to take him to-night in my guise to Lord Farquhart. But I would speak to Lord Farquhart myself. I must see Lord Farquhart myself. I may not have another chance. You have the permits of which the boy spoke? You will take me in his place?"

She advanced slowly, still hesitating, her manner pleading as her words had pleaded; her trembling voice seeming but an echo of the tremors that shook her frame.

Lindley hurriedly tried to reassure her. Yes, he said, he had the permits. Assuredly he would take her. And yet, even as he spoke, he chafed at the woman's interference with Johan's plan of rescue. Why could she not have let the boy offer Lord Farquhart a chance to escape? But nothing of this was in his manner. Instead he soothed her fears, assuring her that 'twas but a short distance to the place where Farquhart was lodged, and, undoubtedly, the stormy night would aid their purpose, for few inquisitive stragglers would be abroad.

With faltering steps the lady moved by his side. Once he thought he heard a sob, and he laid a hand on her arm to comfort her.

"You must have courage, my lady," he muttered. "You must take courage to Lord Farquhart."

Once in the flare of a passing torch he saw the girl quite distinctly. She was draped all in scarlet, a scarlet velvet coat and hood, and, underneath, a scarlet petticoat. One hand held a corner of the cloak about her chin and lips, and, under the drooping hood, he saw a black silk mask. She shrank toward him as the light fell on her and caught his arm with her free hand. He laid his hand protectingly on hers, and after that, until they reached the sheriff's lodge, she held fast to him.

Even when Lindley showed his permits to the guard on duty, she still held him fast, and it was well that she did, for she seemed almost to swoon when their entry was denied.

All permits to see the prisoner had been revoked at sundown, the fellow said. The prisoner's case had come before the court that afternoon. He was to be sentenced in the morning at ten o'clock. No, Lord Grimsby had not been present. Lord Grimsby had been summoned from Padusey, however, to pronounce the highwayman's doom.

For an instant the Lady Barbara seemed about to fall forward. Her entire weight hung on Lindley's arm. He supported her as best he could, but his own voice shook as he whispered once more:

"Courage, courage, my lady!"

Then his anger vented itself upon the guard.

"Have you no sense, blockhead?" he cried. "How dare you blurt out your tidings in such a careless fashion? Do you not see the lady? Did I not tell you that it was the Lady Barbara Gordon's name in that permit? You've likely killed her with your words."

For, indeed, it seemed a dead weight that he held in his arms. The guard thrust forward a bench, and Lindley tried to place the lady down upon it, but she clung to him almost convulsively. When he attempted to take the cloak from over her mouth, he heard her whispered words.

"Ah, get me away from here, away from here – anywhere. I can walk, I – Indeed I can walk!"

Then she stood erect and turned away from the guarded door, but Lindley still hesitated there. "At ten o'clock you said the prisoner would be sentenced?" he asked.

"Ay, at ten o'clock, they said."

Then Lindley heard the Lady Barbara's voice.

"You said Lord Grimsby would come to-night from Padusey?" she asked, faintly.

"Yes, from Padusey, to-night," the guard answered once again.

Why did she care from where Lord Grimsby would come, Lindley demanded, savagely, of himself. Was this a time to think of trivial things like that? And although he supported her as tenderly, as courteously, as he could, he felt in every fiber of him that it was this woman alone who was responsible for Lord Farquhart's fate, and he longed to be free from her. Monotonously he was counting the distance that must be traversed with her clinging to his arm, when suddenly she drew away from him and stopped short.

"Enough of this, Master Lindley!" It was Johan's voice that came from the hidden hooded face.

"Johan!" cried Lindley, now in a frenzy of indignation. "What do you mean by bringing your cursed play acting into a tragedy like this? Have you no heart whatsoever?"

"Nay, I've heart enough and to spare," the boy returned. "And 'tis not all play acting, by any means. Did I not tell you that I would personate the Lady Barbara? Did I not have to practice my part before I passed the guards? Did you not serve me as well for that as anyone? But there's no time for more of it. And I've no time for foolish words and explanations, either." He had thrown aside the mask, the scarlet coat and hood, and at last he stepped from the scarlet petticoat, standing slim and long in black silk hose and short black tunic, his black curls that fringed his small black cap alone shading his eyes. "Listen to me, Master Lindley, and save your reproaches until I've time for them. There are still more chances to save Lord Farquhart, and not one must be lost. Not one second can be wasted. Take these woman's togs and throw them inside Master Timothy Ogilvie's gate, where they'll be found in the morning. I – I leave you here."

"But where are you going?" demanded Lindley. "You cannot cross London at night in that guise, with no coat or cloak about you. You've woman's shoes on your feet. You're mad, boy, and you'll be held by the first sentry you pass."

Johan, who had turned away, stopped and came back to Lindley's side.

"Ay, perhaps you're right," he said. "Give me your coat and lend me your sword. I may have need of it, and you've but to pass Master Ogilvie's, and then to reach your own lodging, a safer transit than mine by many odds. And – and, Master Lindley, wait in your lodgings until you hear from me. Wait there unless it nears ten o'clock. If you've not heard from me by then, you'll find me there, where Lord Farquhart is to be sentenced, and – and be on the alert for any signal that may be made to you by anyone, and – and –" He had buckled Lindley's sword about his waist, he had wrapped himself in Lindley's coat, and still he hesitated. Suddenly he dashed his hand across his eyes. "Ah, I've no time for more," he cried, "save only – only good-by."

He was gone into the darkness, and Lindley was left alone – coatless and swordless – with a bundle of scarlet garments under his arm, and, in his heart, an inexplicable longing to follow the boy, Johan, into the night.

XIX

It seemed as though fate had decreed that there should be but two more acts in the career of Lord Farquhart. All London knew that he was to be condemned to death for highway robbery at ten o'clock on the Friday morning. All London knew that his hanging would quickly follow its decree, and all London, apparently, was determined to see, at least, the first act in the melodrama. The court was crowded with society's wits and beaux, with society's belles, many of the latter hooded and masked, but many revealing to all the world their ardent sympathy for the prisoner at the bar.

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