# HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

## THE CORNET OF HORSE: A TALE OF MARLBOROUGH'S WARS

George Henty

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**Henty G.**

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# Содержание

# G. A. Henty
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## Chapter 1: Windthorpe Chace

"One, two, three, four, one, two, three, four–turn to your lady; one, two, three, four–now deep reverence. Now you take her hand; no, not her whole hand–the tips of her fingers; now you lead her to her seat; now a deep bow, so. That will do. You are improving, but you must be more light, more graceful, more courtly in your air; still you will do.

"Now run away, Mignon. to the garden; you have madam's permission to gather fruit.

"Now, Monsieur Rupert, we will take our lesson in fencing."

The above speech was in the French language, and the speaker was a tall, slightly-built man of about fifty years of age. The scene was a long low room, in a mansion situated some two miles from Derby. The month was January, 1702, and King William the Third sat upon the throne. In the room, in addition to the dancing master, were the lad he was teaching, an active, healthy-looking boy between fifteen and sixteen; his partner, a bright-faced French girl of some twelve years of age; and an old man, nearer eighty than seventy, but still erect and active, who sat in a large armchair, looking on.

By the alacrity with which the lad went to an armoire and took out the foils, and steel caps with visors which served as fencing masks, it was clear that he preferred the fencing lesson to the dancing. He threw off his coat, buttoned a padded guard across his chest, and handing a foil to his instructor, took his place before him.

"Now let us practise that thrust in tierce after the feint and disengage. You were not quite so close as you might have been, yesterday. Ha! ha! that is better. I think that monsieur your grandfather has been giving you a lesson, and poaching on my manor. Is it not so?"

"Yes," said the old man, "I gave him ten minutes yesterday evening; but I must give it up. My sword begins to fail me, and your pupil gets more skillful, and stronger in the wrist, every day. In the days when I was at Saint Germains with the king, when the cropheads lorded it here, I could hold my own with the best of your young blades. But even allowing fully for the stiffness of age, I think I can still gauge the strength of an opponent, and I think the boy promises to be of premiere force."

"It is as you say, monsieur le colonel. My pupil is born to be a fencer; he learns it with all his heart; he has had two good teachers for three years; he has worked with all his energy at it; and he has one of those supple strong wrists that seem made for the sword. He presses me hard.

"Now, Monsieur Rupert, open play, and do your best."

Then began a struggle which would have done credit to any fencing school in Europe. Rupert Holliday was as active as a cat, and was ever on the move, constantly shifting his ground, advancing and retreating with astonishing lightness and activity. At first he was too eager, and his instructor touched him twice over his guard. Then, rendered cautious, he fought more carefully, although with no less quickness than before; and for some minutes there was no advantage on either side, the master's longer reach and calm steady play baffling every effort of his assailant.

At last, with a quick turn of the wrist, he sent Rupert's foil flying across the room. Rupert gave an exclamation of disgust, followed by a merry laugh.

"You always have me so, Monsieur Dessin. Do what I will, sooner or later comes that twist, which I cannot stop."

"You must learn how, sir. Your sword is so; as you lunge I guard, and run my foil along yours, so as to get power near my hilt. Now if I press, your sword must go; but you must not let me press; you must disengage quickly. Thus, you see?

"Now let us try again. We will practise nothing else today–or tomorrow–or till you are perfect. It is your one weak point. Then you must practise to disarm your opponent, till you are perfect in that also. Then, as far as I can teach you, you will be a master of fencing. You know all my coups, and all those of monsieur le colonel. These face guards, too, have worked wonders, in enabling you to play with quickness and freedom. We are both fine blades.

"I tell you, young sir, you need not put up with an insult in any public place in Europe. I tell you so, who ought to know."

In the year 1702 fencing was far from having attained that perfection which it reached later. Masks had not yet been invented, and in consequence play was necessarily stiff and slow, as the danger of the loss of sight, or even of death, from a chance thrust was very great. When Rupert first began his lessons, he was so rash and hasty that his grandfather greatly feared an accident, and it struck him that by having visors affixed to a couple of light steel caps, not only would all possibility of an accident be obviated upon the part of either himself or his pupil, but the latter would attain a freedom and confidence of style which could otherwise be only gained from a long practice in actual war. The result had more than equalled his expectations; and Monsieur Dessin had, when he assumed the post of instructor, been delighted with the invention, and astonished at the freedom and boldness of the lad's play. It was, then, thanks to these masks, as well as to his teachers' skill and his own aptitude, that Rupert had obtained a certainty, a rapidity, and a freedom of style absolutely impossible in the case of a person, whatever his age, who had been accustomed to fence with the face unguarded, and with the caution and stiffness necessary to prevent the occurrence of terrible accident.

For another half hour the lesson went on. Then, just as the final salute was given, the door opened at the end of the room, and a lady entered, in the stiff dress with large hoops then in fashion. Colonel Holliday advanced with a courtly air, and offered her his hand. The French gentleman, with an air to the full as courtly as that of the colonel, brought forward a chair for her; and when she had seated herself, Rupert advanced to kiss her hand.

"No, Rupert, you are too hot. There, leave us; I wish to speak to Colonel Holliday and monsieur."

With a deep bow, and a manner far more respectful and distant than that which nowadays would be shown to a stranger who was worthy of all honour, Rupert Holliday left his mother's presence.

"I know what she wants," Rupert muttered to himself. "To stop my fencing lessons; just as if a gentleman could fence too well. She wants me to be a stiff, cold, finnikin fop, like that conceited young Brownlow, of the Haugh.

"Not if I know it, madame ma mere. You will never make a courtier of me, any more than you will a whig. The colonel fought at Naseby, and was with the king in France. Papa was a tory, and so am I."

And the lad whistled a Jacobite air as he made his way with a rapid step to the stables.

The terms Whig and Tory in the reign of King William had very little in common with the meaning which now attaches to these words. The principal difference between the two was in their views as to the succession to the throne. The Princess Anne would succeed King William, and the whigs desired to see George, Elector of Hanover, ascend the throne when it again became vacant; the tories looked to the return of the Stuarts. The princess's sympathies were with the tories, for she, as a daughter of James the Second, would naturally have preferred that the throne should revert to her brother, than that it should pass to a German prince, a stranger to her, a foreigner, and ignorant even of the language of the people. Roughly it may be said that the tories were the descendants of the cavaliers, while the whigs inherited the principles of the parliamentarians. Party feeling ran very

high throughout the country; and as in the civil war, the towns were for the most part whig in their predilection, the country was tory.

Rupert Holliday had grown up in a divided house. The fortunes of Colonel Holliday were greatly impaired in the civil war. His estates were forfeited; and at the restoration he received his ancestral home, Windthorpe Chace, and a small portion of the surrounding domain, but had never been able to recover the outlying properties from the men who had acquired them in his absence. He had married in France, the daughter of an exile like himself; but before the "king came to his own" his wife had died, and he returned with one son, Herbert.

Herbert had, when he arrived at manhood, restored the fortunes of the Chace by marrying Mistress Dorothy Maynard, the daughter and heiress of a wealthy brewer of Derby, who had taken the side of parliament, and had thriven greatly at the expense of the royalist gentry of the neighbourhood. After the restoration he, like many other roundheads who had grown rich by the acquisition of forfeited estates, felt very doubtful whether he should be allowed to retain possession, and was glad enough to secure his daughter's fortune by marrying her to the heir of a prominent royalist. Colonel Holliday had at first objected strongly to the match, but the probable advantage to the fortune of his house at last prevailed over his political bias. The fortune which Mistress Dorothy brought into the family was eventually much smaller than had been expected, for several of the owners of estates of which the roundhead brewer had become possessed, made good their claims to them.

Still Herbert Holliday was a rich man at his father-in-law's death, which happened three years after the marriage. With a portion of his wife's dowry most of the outlying properties which had belonged to the Chace were purchased back from their holders; but Herbert Holliday, who was a weak man, cared nothing for a country life, but resided in London with his wife. There he lived for another six years, and was then killed in a duel over a dispute at cards, having in that time managed to run through every penny that his wife had brought him, save that invested in the lands of the Chace.

Dorothy Holliday then, at the Colonel's earnest invitation, returned to the Chace with her son Rupert, then five years old. There she ruled as mistress, for her disposition was a masterful one, and she was a notable housekeeper. The colonel gladly resigned the reins of government into her hands. The house and surrounding land were his; the estate whose rental enabled the household to be maintained as befitted that of a county family, was hers; and both would in time, unless indeed Dorothy Holliday should marry again, go to Rupert. Should she marry again–and at the time of her husband's death she wanted two or three years of thirty–she might divide the estate between Rupert and any other children she might have, she having purchased the estate with her dowry, and having right of appointment between her children as she chose. Colonel Holliday was quite content to leave to his daughter-in-law the management of the Chace, while he assumed that of his grandson, on whom he doted. The boy, young as he then was, gave every promise of a fine and courageous disposition, and the old cavalier promised himself that he would train him to be a soldier and a gentleman.

When the lad was eight years old, the old vicar of the little church at the village at the gates of the Chace died, and the living being in the colonel's gift as master of the Chace, he appointed a young man, freshly ordained, from Oxford, who was forthwith installed as tutor to Rupert.

Three years later, Colonel Holliday heard that a French emigre had settled in Derby, and gave lessons in his own language and in fencing. Rupert had already made some advance in these studies, for Colonel Holliday, from his long residence in France, spoke the language like a native; and now, after Mistress Dorothy's objection having been overcome by the assurance that French and fencing were necessary parts of a gentleman's education if he were ever to make his way at court, Monsieur Dessin was installed as tutor in these branches, coming out three times a week for the afternoon to the Chace.

A few months before our story begins, dancing had been added to the subjects taught. This was a branch of education which Monsieur Dessin did not impart to the inhabitants of Derby, where indeed he had but few pupils, the principal portion of his scanty income being derived from his

payments from the Chace. He had, however, acceded willingly enough to Mistress Dorothy's request, his consent perhaps being partly due to the proposition that, as it would be necessary that the boy should have a partner, a pony with a groom should be sent over twice a week to Derby to fetch his little daughter Adele out to the Chace, where, when the lesson was over, she could amuse herself in the grounds until her father was free to accompany her home.

In those days dancing was an art to be acquired only with long study. It was a necessity that a gentleman should dance, and dance well, and the stately minuet required accuracy, grace, and dignity. Dancing in those days was an art; it has fallen grievously from that high estate.

Between Monsieur Dessin and the old cavalier a cordial friendship reigned. The former had never spoken of his past history, but the colonel never doubted that, like so many refugees who sought our shore from France from the date of the revocation of the edict of Nantes to the close of the great revolution, he was of noble blood, an exile from his country on account of his religion or political opinions; and the colonel tried in every way to repay to him the hospitality and kindness which he himself had received during his long exile in France. Very often, when lessons were over, the two would stroll in the garden, talking over Paris and its court; and it was only the thought of his little daughter, alone in his dull lodgings in Derby, that prevented Monsieur Dessin from accepting the warm invitation to the evening meal which the colonel often pressed upon him. During the daytime he could leave her, for Adele went to the first ladies' school in the town, where she received an education in return for her talking French to the younger pupils. It was on her half holidays that she came over to dance with Rupert Holliday.

Mistress Dorothy did not approve of her son's devotion to fencing, although she had no objection to his acquiring the courtly accomplishments of dancing and the French language; but her opposition was useless. Colonel Holliday reminded her of the terms of their agreement, that she was to be mistress of the Chace, and that he was to superintend Rupert's education. Upon the present occasion, when the lad had left the room, she again protested against what she termed a waste of time.

"It is no waste of time, madam," the old cavalier said, more firmly than he was accustomed to speak to his daughter-in-law. "Rupert will never grow up a man thrusting himself into quarrels; and believe me, the reputation of being the best swordsman at the court will keep him out of them. In Monsieur Dessin and myself I may say that he has had two great teachers. In my young days there was no finer blade at the Court of France than I was; and Monsieur Dessin is, in the new style, what I was in the old. The lad may be a soldier–"

"He shall never be a soldier," Madam Dorothy broke out.

"That, madam," the colonel said courteously, "will be for the lad himself and for circumstances to decide. When I was his age there was nothing less likely than that I should be a soldier; but you see it came about."

"Believe me, Madam," Monsieur Dessin said deferentially, "it is good that your son should be a master of fence. Not only may he at court be forced into quarrels, in which it will be necessary for him to defend his honour, but in all ways it benefits him. Look at his figure; nature has given him health and strength, but fencing has given him that light, active carriage, the arm of steel, and a bearing which at his age is remarkable. Fencing, too, gives a quickness, a readiness, and promptness of action which in itself is an admirable training. Monsieur le colonel has been good enough to praise my fencing, and I may say that the praise is deserved. There are few men in France who would willingly have crossed swords with me," and now he spoke with a hauteur characteristic of a French noble rather than a fencing master.

Madam Holliday was silent; but just as she was about to speak again, a sound of horses' hoofs were heard outside. The silence continued until a domestic entered, and said that Sir William Brownlow and his son awaited madam's pleasure in the drawing room.

A dark cloud passed over the old colonel's face as Mistress Dorothy rose and, with a sweeping courtesy, left the room.

"Let us go into the garden, monsieur," he said abruptly, "and see how your daughter is getting on."

Adele was talking eagerly with Rupert, at a short distance from whom stood a lad some two years his senior, dressed in an attire that showed he was of inferior rank. Hugh Parsons was in fact the son of the tenant of the home farm of the Chace, and had since Rupert's childhood been his playmate, companion, and protector.

"Monsieur mon pere," Adele said, dancing up to her father, and pausing for a moment to courtesy deeply to him and Colonel Holliday, "Monsieur Rupert is going out with his hawks after a heron that Hugh has seen in the pool a mile from here. He has offered to take me on his pony, if you will give permission for me to go."

"Certainly, you may go, Adele. Monsieur Rupert will be careful of you, I am sure."

"Yes, indeed," Rupert said. "I will be very careful.

"Hugh, see my pony saddled, and get the hawks. I will run in for a cloth to lay over the saddle."

In five minutes the pony was brought round, a cloth was laid over the saddle, and Rupert aided Adele to mount, with as much deference as if he had been assisting a princess. Then he took the reins and walked by the pony's head, while Hugh followed, with two hooded hawks upon his arm.

"They are a pretty pair," Colonel Holliday said, looking after them.

"Yes," Monsieur Dessin replied, but so shortly that the colonel looked at him with surprise.

He was looking after his daughter and Rupert with a grave, thoughtful face, and had evidently answered his own thought rather than the old cavalier's remark.

"Yes," he repeated, rousing himself with an effort, "they are a pretty pair indeed."

At a walking pace, Rupert Holliday, very proud of his charge, led the pony in the direction of the pool in which the heron had an hour before been seen by Hugh, the boy and girl chattering in French as they went. When they neared the spot they stopped, and Adele alighted. Then Rupert took the hawks, while Hugh went forward alone to the edge of the pool. Just as he reached it a heron soared up with a hoarse cry.

Rupert slipped the hoods off the hawks, and threw them into the air. They circled for an instant, and then, as they saw their quarry rising, darting off with the velocity of arrows. The heron instantly perceived his danger, and soared straight upwards. The hawks pursued him, sailing round in circles higher and higher. So they mounted until they were mere specks in the sky.

At last the hawks got above the heron, and instantly prepared to pounce upon him. Seeing his danger, the heron turned on his back, and, with feet and beak pointed upwards to protect himself, fell almost like a stone towards the earth; but more quickly still the hawks darted down upon him. One the heron with a quick movement literally impaled upon his sharp bill; but the other planted his talons in his breast, and, rending and tearing at his neck, the three birds fell together, with a crash, to the earth.

The flight had been so directly upwards that they fell but a short distance from the pool, and the lads and Adele were quickly upon the spot. The heron was killed by the fall; and to Rupert's grief; one of his hawks was also dead, pierced through and through by the heron's beak. The other bird was with difficulty removed from the quarry, and the hood replaced.

Rupert, after giving the heron's plumes to Adele for her hat, led her back to the pony, Hugh following with the hawk on his wrist, and carrying the two dead birds.

"I am so sorry your hawk is killed," Adele said.

"Yes," Rupert answered, "it is a pity. It was a fine, bold bird, and gave us lots of trouble to train; but he was always rash, and I told him over and over again what would happen if he was not more careful."

"Have you any more?" Adele asked.

"No more falcons like this. I have gerfalcons, for pigeons and partridges, but none for herons. But I dare say Hugh will be able to get me two more young birds before long, and it is a pleasure to train them."

Colonel Holliday and Monsieur Dessin met them as they returned to the house.

"What, Rupert! Had bad luck?" his grandfather said.

"Yes, sir. Cavalier was too rash, and the quarry killed him."

"Hum!" said the old man; "just the old story. The falcon was well named, Rupert. It was just our rashness that lost us all our battles.

"What, Monsieur Dessin, you must be off? Will you let me have a horse saddled for yourself; and the pony for mademoiselle? The groom can bring them back."

Monsieur Dessin declined the offer; and a few minutes later started to walk back with his daughter to Derby.

# Chapter 2: Rupert to the Rescue

About a month after the day on which Rupert had taken Mademoiselle Adele Dessin out hawking, the colonel and Mistress Dorothy went to dine at the house of a county family some miles away. The family coach, which was only used on grand occasions, was had out, and in this Mistress Dorothy, hooped and powdered in accordance with the fashion of the day, took her seat with Colonel Holliday. Rupert had been invited, as the eldest son was a lad of his own age.

It was a memorable occasion for him, as he was for the first time to dress in the full costume of the period–with powdered hair, ruffles, a blue satin coat and knee breeches of the same material, with silk stockings. His greatest pleasure, however, was that he was now to wear a sword, the emblem of a gentleman, for the first time. He was to ride on horseback, for madam completely filled the coach with her hoops and brocaded dress, and there was scarcely room for Colonel Holliday, who sat beside her almost lost in her ample skirts.

The weather was cold, and Rupert wore a riding cloak over his finery, and high boots, which were upon his arrival to be exchanged for silver-buckled shoes. They started at twelve, for the dinner hour was two, and there were eight miles to drive–a distance which, over the roads of those days, could not be accomplished much under two hours. The coachman and two lackeys took their places on the box of the lumbering carriage, the two latter being armed with pistols, as it would be dark before they returned, and travelling after dark in the days of King William was a danger not to be lightly undertaken. Nothing could be more stately, or to Rupert's mind more tedious, than that entertainment. Several other guests of distinction were present, and the dinner was elaborate.

The conversation turned chiefly on county business, with an occasional allusion to the war with France. Politics were entirely eschewed, for party feeling ran too high for so dangerous a subject to be broached at a gathering at which both whigs and tories were present.

Rupert sat near one end of the table, with the eldest son of the host. As a matter of course they kept absolute silence in an assembly of their elders, only answering shortly and respectfully when spoken to. When dinner was over, however, and the ladies rose, they slipped away to a quiet room, and made up for their long silence by chatting without cessation of their dogs, and hawks, and sports, until at six o'clock the coach came round to the door, and Rupert, again donning his cloak and riding boots, mounted his horse, and rode slowly off after the carriage.

Slow as the progress had been in the daytime, it was slower now. The heavy coach jolted over great lumps of rough stone, and bumped into deep ruts, with a violence which would shake a modern vehicle to pieces. Sometimes, where the road was peculiarly bad, the lackeys would get down, light torches at the lanterns that hung below the box, and show the way until the road improved.

They had ridden about six miles, when some distance ahead the sound of pistol shots, followed by loud shouts, came sharply on the ear. Rupert happened to be in front, and with the love of adventure natural to his age, he set spurs to his horse and dashed forward, not hearing, or at any rate not heeding, the shouts of his grandfather. Colonel Holliday, finding that Rupert was fairly off, bade the lackeys get down, and follow him at a run with their pistols, and urged the coachman to drive on with all possible speed. Rupert was not long in reaching the scene of action; and hurried the more that he could hear the clinking of sword blades, and knew that the resistance of those assailed had not ceased.

On arriving at the spot he saw, as he expected, a carriage standing by the road. One or two figures lay stretched on the ground; the driver lay back, a huddled mass, on his seat; a man held high a torch with one hand, while with the other he was striving to recharge a pistol. Four other men with swords were attacking a gentleman who, with his back to the coach, was defending himself calmly and valiantly.

As he rode up Rupert unbuttoned his riding cloak, and threw it off as he reined up his horse and dismounted. An execration broke from the assailants at seeing this new arrival, but perceiving that he was alone, one of the four men advanced to attack him.

Just as Rupert leapt from his horse, the man holding the torch completed the loading of his pistol, and levelling it at him, fired. The ball knocked off his hat just as he touched the ground, and the man shouted:

"Kill him, Gervais. Spit him like a lark; he is only a boy."

Rupert drew his sword as the highwayman advanced upon him, and was in a moment hotly engaged. Never before had he fenced with pointed rapiers; but the swords had scarcely crossed when he felt, with the instinct of a good fencer, how different were the clumsy thrusts of his opponent to the delicate and skillful play of his grandfather and Monsieur Dessin. There was no time to lose in feints and flourishes; the man with the torch had drawn his sword, and was coming up; and Rupert parried a thrust of his assailant's, and with a rapid lunge in tierce ran him right through the body. Then with a bound he dashed through the men attacking the traveller, and took his stand beside him, while the torchbearer, leaving his torch against a stump of a tree, also joined the combat.

Beyond a calm "I thank you, sir; your arrival is most opportune," from the traveller, not a word passed as the swords clashed and ground against each other.

"Dash in, and finish him," shouted the man who appeared the leader of the assailants, and three of them rushed together at the traveller. The leader fell back cursing, with a sword thrust through his shoulder, just at the moment when Rupert sent the sword of the man who was attacking him flying through the air, and turning at once, engaged one of the two remaining assailants of the traveller. But these had had enough of it; and as the lackeys came running up, they turned, and rushed away into the darkness. The lackeys at Rupert's order discharged their pistols after them; but a moment later the sound of four horses making off at full gallop, showed that they had escaped.

"By my faith," the traveller said, turning to Rupert, and holding out his hand, "no knight errant ever arrived more opportunely. You are a gallant gentleman, sir; permit me to ask to whom I am so indebted?"

"My name is Rupert Holliday, sir," the lad said, as the stranger shook his hand warmly, and who, as the lackey approached with the torch, exclaimed:

"Why, by the king's head, you are but a stripling, and you have run one of these fellows through the body, and disarmed the other, as neatly as I ever saw it done in the schools. Why, young sir, if you go on like this you will be a very Paladin."

"I have had good masters, sir," Rupert said, modestly; "and having been taught to use my sword, there is little merit in trouncing such rascals as these."

"By my faith, but there is though," the stranger said. "It is one thing to fence in a school with buttoned foils, another to bear oneself as calmly and as well as you did. But here are your friends, or I mistake not."

The coach came lumbering up, at a speed which for coaches in those days was wonderful, and as it stopped Colonel Holliday leapt out, sword in hand.

"Is it all over?" he exclaimed. "Is Rupert hurt?"

"It is all over, sir; and I have not so much as a scratch," Rupert said.

"Sir," the stranger said, uncovering, and making a courtly bow to the old cavalier, and to Mistress Dorothy, who was looking from the open door, "your son–"

"My grandson," the colonel, who had also uncovered, corrected.

"Your grandson arrived in time to save me from grievous peril. My coachman and lackey were shot at the first fire, and I fancy one of the horses. I disposed of one of the rascals, but four others pressed me hard, while a fifth held a light to them. Your grandson ran one through in fair fight, and disarmed another; I disabled a third, and they ran. I have to thank him for my life; and, if you will

permit me to say so–and I have been many frays–no man ever bore himself more coolly, or used his sword more skilfully, than did this young gentleman."

"I am very proud indeed to hear that the lad bore himself so well; although I own that he caused some anxiety to his mother and myself; by rushing forward alone to join in a fray of whose extent he knew nothing. However, all is well that ends well.

"And now, sir, as your servants are killed, and but one horse remains to your carriage, will you permit me to offer you for the night the hospitality of Windthorpe Chace? I am Colonel Holliday, sir, an old servant of King Charles the First–"

"I accept your offer, sir, as frankly as it is made. I have often heard your name. I, sir, am George Churchill."

"The Earl of Marlborough!" exclaimed Colonel Holliday.

"The same," the earl said, with a smile. "I am not greatly loved, sir; but my name will, I am sure, do me no ill service with one of the men of Naseby."

"No, indeed!" Colonel Holliday said, warmly; "it is at once a pleasure and an honour to me to entertain so great a general at the Chace."

"And now," the earl said, "a truce to compliments. Pray resume your seat in the coach, sir. I will cut loose the horse from the coach, and will follow you in company with your grandson."

Colonel Holliday in vain tried to persuade the earl to take his place in the carriage.

The latter, however, firmly declined, and the colonel took his place in the coach, and drove off at once, to make preparation for the reception of his guest. The earl had even declined the offer to leave one or both of the lackeys behind. And when the carriage had driven off, he said to Rupert, who had stood looking with respectful admiration at the greatest general of the age:

"Now, young sir, let us have a look at this carrion; maybe their faces will throw some light upon this affair."

So saying, he took the torch which had been left burning, and turned over the body of the man he had slain before Rupert arrived on the scene.

"I do not know him," he said, looking steadily at the dead man's face.

"I know him," Rupert exclaimed in surprise. "He is a saddler of Derby–a fierce nonconformist and whig, and a preacher at conventicles. And to think of his being a highwayman!"

"An assassin is a better term," the earl said contemptuously. "I guessed from their number it was my life, and not my money, that they sought.

"Now let us look at the fellow you sent to his account."

Rupert hung back as they approached the man he had killed. In those days of rebellions, executions, and duels, human life was regarded but lightly. Still, to a lad of little over fifteen the thought that he had killed a man, even if in fair fight, was very painful.

"Ah, I thought so," the earl said. "This is a creature of a political enemy. I have seen him in his antechamber. So the order came from London, and the tools were found here. That will do. Now let us get this horse out of the traces. It is some years since I have ridden barebacked.

"No, I thank you," in answer to Rupert's offer of his own horse; "a saddle matters not one way or the other. There, now for the Chace; and I shall not be sorry to fall to on the supper which, I doubt not, the good gentleman your grandfather will have prepared."

So saying, he vaulted on his horse, and with Rupert rode quietly along the road to the Chace. The great door opened as they approached, and four lackeys with torches came out. Colonel Holliday himself came down the steps and assisted the earl to alight, and led the way into the house.

They now entered the drawing room, where Mistress Dorothy was seated. She arose and made a deep courtesy, in answer to the even deeper bow with which the earl greeted her.

"My lord," she said, "welcome to Windthorpe Chace."

"Madam," the earl said, bowing over the hand she extended, until his lips almost touched her fingers, "I am indeed indebted to the fellows who thought to do me harm, in that they have been the

means of my making the acquaintance of a lady whose charms turned all heads in London, and who left the court in gloom when she retired to the country."

Nowadays, such a speech as this would be thought to savour of mockery, but gentlemen two hundred years since ordinarily addressed women in the language of high-flown compliment.

Mistress Holliday, despite her thirty-seven years, was still very comely, and she smiled as she replied:

"My lord, ten years' absence from court has rendered me unused to compliments, and I will not venture to engage in a war, even of words, with so great a general."

Supper was now announced, and the earl offered his hand to lead Mistress Dorothy to the dining hall.

The meal passed off quietly, the conversation turning entirely upon country matters. The earl did full justice to the fare, which consisted of a stuffed carp, fresh from the well-stocked ponds of the Chace, a boar's head, and larded capon, the two latter dishes being cold. With these were served tankards of Burgundy and of sherries. Rupert, as was the custom of the younger members of families, waited upon the honoured guest.

The meal over, Mistress Holliday rose. The earl offered her his hand and led her to the door, where, with an exchange of ceremonious salutes, she bade him goodnight.

Then the earl accompanied Colonel Holliday to the latter's room, hung with rapiers, swords, and other arms. There ceremony was laid aside, and the old cavalier and the brilliant general entered into familiar talk, the former lighting a long pipe, of the kind known at present as a "churchwarden."

The earl told Colonel Holliday of the discovery that had been made, that the attack was no mere affair with highwaymen, but an attempt at assassination by a political rival.

"I had been down," he said, "at Lord Hadleigh's, where there was a gathering of many gentlemen of our way of thinking. I left London quietly, and thought that none knew of my absence; but it is clear that through some spy in my household my enemies learned both my journey and destination. I came down on horseback, having sent forward relays. When I arrived last night at Hadleigh my horse was dead lame. I misdoubt now 'twas lamed in the stable by one of the men who dogged me. Lord Hadleigh offered me his coach, to take me back the first stage–to the inn where I had left my servants and had intended to sleep. I accepted–for in truth I sat up and talked all last night, and thought to doze the journey away. Your Derbyshire roads are, however, too rough, and I was wide awake when the first shot was fired!"

"Do you think of taking steps to punish the authors of this outrage?" Colonel Holliday asked.

"By no means," the earl answered. "I would ask you to send over a man, with the horse I rode on and another, at daybreak. Let him put them into the coach and drive back to Hadleigh, taking with him the bodies of the lackey and coachman. With him I will send a note to my lord, asking that no stir be made in the matter. We need not set the world talking as to my visit to his house; but lest any magistrate stir in the matter, I will leave a letter for him, saying that the coach in which I travelled was attacked by highwaymen, and that two of them, as well as the two servants, were killed, and that no further inquisition need be made into the matter. You may be sure that the other side will say naught, and they will likely enough go back and carry off their dead tonight, and bury them quietly."

"Very well, sir," Colonel Holliday said. "My grandson will ride over with you in the morning to Ashby-de-la-Zouche. Two well-armed lackeys shall accompany you."

"Oh, there is no fear of another attempt," the earl said, smiling. "Besides, your grandson and I could fight a whole troop of cutthroats by daylight. What a swordsman that boy is! And as cool as a veteran! He is your pupil with the sword, I presume?"

"Only partly; he owes most of his skill to a French emigre, who calls himself Monsieur Dessin, but who had, I suspect, a far higher title across the water. He is a magnificent swordsman; and as I was able to teach the lad a few thrusts which in their time did me good service, and the boy has a clear eye, a cool head, and a firm wrist, he can, young as he is, hold his own, go where he will."

"What do you mean to do with him? You ought to make a soldier of him. It is the career of a gentleman, and we shall have a stirring campaign on the Rhine next spring. He will have plenty of opportunities to distinguish himself, and I need not say he will have my best favour and protection!"

"I thank you heartily," the colonel said, "and doubt not that one day the lad may claim the fulfilment of your promise. At present his mother dreams of his being a Parliament man, and shining at court. But you might as well expect to teach a falcon to dance. Besides, the lad is a soldier heart and soul, and has, saving your presence, little of the whig in him; and his mother will find ere long, that if he goes to Parliament it will not be to vote as she wishes.

"Besides," he said, moodily, "I foresee changes here which he, young as he is, will not brook. If then at present I decline your kind offer in his name, I think that the time is not far off when he may remind you of it."

"Let him do so," the earl said, "and a commission in horse, foot, or artillery is at his service. And now, with your permission, I will to bed, for my eyelids are consumedly heavy."

Colonel Holliday rang a hand bell, and a lackey appeared with lighted candles. Preceded by him the old cavalier accompanied his guest to the door of his apartment, and seeing that a posset cup of spiced cordial was steaming on the table, and that everything else was properly prepared, left him to repose.

# Chapter 3: A Kiss and its Consequences

Three months have passed since the Earl of Marlborough's visit to the Chace. Changes have taken place in England, for on the eighth of March King William died from the effects of a fall from his horse, and the Princess Anne ascended the throne. After her accession, one of her first steps had been to shower honour upon the Earl of Marlborough. A whig cabinet was formed, of which he and Lord Godolphin were the leading spirits, two tories however–Harley and Saint John–having seats in the ministry.

The Earl of Marlborough was her most trusted adviser. He had during the reign of the late monarch been always a firm friend of the Princess Anne, and was at one time regarded almost as a tory. He had indeed plotted for the restoration of the Stuarts, and had entered into negotiation with the French king for that purpose. The plot having been discovered, he had with other noblemen been sent to the Tower, and had continued in disgrace until a year after the death of William.

Anne appointed him one of her ministers, and made the duchess her most intimate friend. In fact, in politics the Duke of Marlborough took no very strong part. He was attached to the Stuarts, for under them he had at first risen to rank and honour; but he was a strong Protestant, and therefore in favour of the maintenance of the Act of Succession, fixing the reversion of the throne on the Elector of Hanover, who, although not the nearest in the line of succession, had been selected because the nearest heirs to the throne were Catholics.

At the Chace things have gone on as before. Rupert has worked hard at his lessons and his fencing, and Monsieur Dessin allows that, save for his extra length of reach, he should have no advantage now over his pupil. In the afternoon the lad spent his time with his hawks, or practised firing with pistol or carbine, or roamed over the country with Hugh.

Nevertheless, things had somehow changed. Colonel Holliday had become gloomy and silent; and although he and his daughter-in-law were studiously ceremonious and polite to each other, it was clear that a cloud had risen between them. Rupert saw but little of this, however, and was surprised one day when, as he was going out for a ride, his grandfather said to him gravely:

"Take a turn in the garden with me, Rupert. I want to have a talk with you.

"I think it well, Rupert," he said, after walking for some time in silence, "to prepare you for what, if you have not guessed already, you will be told ere long. Madam will no doubt herself inform you of it; and it is as well, my lad, that you should be prepared, for you might in your surprise say something hasty, and so cause a breach which it would take long to heal."

Rupert looked in astonishment at his grandfather. He had not the most remote idea of what was coming.

"You have doubtless noticed," Colonel Holliday went on, "the frequency of Sir William Brownlow's visits here?"

"Yes, sir, I have noticed that, but I do not often see him. I keep out of his way, for in truth I like him not, nor that son of his, who, on the strength of his three years' seniority, looks down upon me, and gives himself as many airs as madam my mother's peacock."

"And you have never even thought why he comes here so frequently?"

"No, sir," Rupert said, surprised; "it was no business of mine, and I gave no single thought to it."

"He is a suitor for your lady mother's hand," Colonel Holliday said, gravely.

"What!" almost shouted Rupert; "What, sir! He, with his sneering face, dares to think–"

"My dear boy, he not only dares to think, but madam approves of the thought, and has promised him her hand."

Rupert stood motionless.

"It shall not be," he burst out. "We must stop it, sir. Why do not you?"

"I have no shadow of authority over Mistress Holliday," the old colonel said. "As far as I could go, for your sake I have gone–farther, perhaps, than was wise. It has been a great blow for me, Rupert. I had hoped that in the time to come you would be master of the Chace, and of all the broad acres I owned when young; now it will never be. This house and the home farm are mine, and will be yours, lad; but the outlying land will never come back to the Chace again, but will go to swell the Haugh estate on the other side. My lady can leave it as she likes. I have begged her to have it settled upon you, but she has declined. She may have another family, and, infatuated as she is with her suitor, she is more likely to leave it to them than to you, especially as I fear that you will not take kindly to the new arrangement."

"I will not submit to it, sir; I will not have it. I will insult him, and force him to fight me," the lad gasped, his face white with passion.

"No, Rupert, it won't do, lad. Were you four or five years older you might interfere; now he would laugh at you for a headstrong boy. You would gain his hate, and forfeit your mother's favour utterly. It was because I feared an outbreak like this that I told you today what you will in a few hours learn from her."

"What is to be done?" Rupert said, despairingly.

"Nothing, my boy. At her marriage, your mother will of course live at the Haugh with Sir William. This house is mine, and if you cannot get on at the Haugh, it will be always open to you."

"I will never set my foot inside the Haugh," Rupert said, firmly. "My lady mother may leave her lands where she will; but if I am to have them only at the price of being the humble servant of this new father-in-law, I care not for them. He has an evil face, grandfather, and I hated him before I knew what he came for."

"My boy," Colonel Holliday said, "we have all many things to go through in life that we like not. This is your trial, and I trust that you will come out of it worthily. Your respect and duty are due to your mother. If you will not feign gladness that you do not feel, I do not blame you; but when she tells you the news, answer her with that respect which you owe her. She has a clear right to choose for herself. She is still a comely dame, and no one will blame her for taking another husband. To me and to you the thing may seem hard, even unnatural, but it is not so. I like Sir William no more than you do. Report says that he has deeply dipped into his estates over the dice box; and your lady mother's estates, and the sum that many years of quiet living has enabled her to save, are doubtless items which he has not overlooked."

Rupert remained for some time silent.

"I will be perfectly respectful to my mother," he said, "but I will not disguise my feelings. If I did so at first, it would in the end be useless, for Sir William I could never treat with respect. Sooner or later a quarrel would come, and I may therefore as well have it understood first as last. The estates I care for only because they were part of the Chace, and I know that they will never be mine if this match is made. You feel that yourself, do you not, sir?"

"Yes," the colonel said, reluctantly, "I have felt that all along."

"Very well, sir," Rupert said; "in that case I have nothing to gain by affecting a satisfaction at this match. I shall respectfully but firmly warn my mother against it, and tell her that if she persists in it I will never put my foot under the roof of Sir William Brownlow."

The next morning the servant brought word to Rupert, that Mistress Holliday wished to speak to him in her room. Knowing what was coming, Rupert went with slow steps and a heavy heart to the little drawing room which was known as madam's room.

"Rupert," she said, as he stood respectfully before her, "I have sent for you to tell you that I have accepted the offer of marriage of Sir William Brownlow. Sir William has much court influence, and will be able to do you much service, and he has promised me to look upon you as a son of his own."

"Madam." Rupert said, calmly and respectfully, "that you should marry Sir William Brownlow is a matter as to which, alas! I have no right to say aught. I trust that the marriage will bring you

happiness, although my mind sorely misgives me as to whether it will be so. As to myself, I decline Sir William's offer of protection. It is enough for me that my fathers have for generations owned Windthorpe Chace. Come what may, madam, I neither acknowledge Sir William as my father, nor do I put a foot under his roof."

"Malapert boy!" Mistress Holliday said angrily, "this is the teaching of Colonel Holliday."

"Pardon me," Rupert said quietly. "Colonel Holliday begged me to submit to what could not be helped; but I declined. This man is not worthy of you, madam. Were you about to marry a good man, I would gladly receive him as my father. I should be glad to know when out in the world that you were cared for and happy; but this is not a good man."

"Hush, sir," Mistress Holliday said. "I will not suffer you to speak thus. And know, Rupert, if you do not know it already, that I have absolute power over the estates of the Chace, and that if you defy me I can leave them where I will."

"I know it, madam," Rupert said, sadly; "but this will in no way alter my determination. If when you marry you give me your permission to remain here with my grandfather, I will do so. If not, I will go forth into the world to seek my fortune."

"Insolent boy!" Mistress Holliday said, furiously, "I have a mind to call the lackeys in and bid them beat you."

"Madam," Rupert said, drawing himself up and touching his sword lightly, "if you value your lackeys you will give no such order; for the first man, lackey or lord, who lays his hand on me, I would kill like a dog. With your permission, madam, I will retire, since this morning I take my dancing lesson."

So saying, with a ceremonious bow Rupert left his mother's presence. Monsieur Dessin and his daughter were already with Colonel Holliday when Rupert joined them, and he went through his dancing lesson as usual. Then Adele went as usual out into the garden, and the fencing lesson began. When it was half over, Rupert's brow clouded angrily, for he heard horsemen ride up to the door, and felt sure who they were.

"Steady, my dear pupil, steady," Monsieur Dessin cried, as with knitted brow Rupert pressed him hotly, fancying at the moment that Sir William Brownlow stood in front of him.

"Peste!" he exclaimed, as the lad lunged and touched him in the chest, "you are terrible, Monsieur!

"Colonel," he went on, dropping his sword, "I resign my post. I have seen it coming for some time, and now it has arrived. Your grandson is more than a match for me. He has all my skill, some of yours, and has besides an activity and suppleness greater, I think, than I ever had. You young islanders are trained to use hand and eye; and although French lads may have as much activity, they have far less strength, far less aptitude for such exercises. Besides, there are other reasons.

"Go, Monsieur Rupert, and take care of my daughter; I would talk with monsieur your grandfather."

Slowly, and brooding over the change which the late twenty-four hours had made in his fortune, Rupert sought the garden. As he sauntered along the walks he heard a cry, and looking up saw Adele struggling in the arms of James Brownlow, who was trying to kiss her, while a young fellow his own age stood by laughing. Rupert's pent-up fury found a vent at last, and rushing forward, he struck the aggressor so violent a blow between the eyes that, loosing his hold of Adele, he fell to the ground.

"Thunder and lightning," the other young man exclaimed, drawing his sword, "what means this, young cockerel?"

Rupert's sword flew from its sheath, but before he could cross it, James Brownlow sprang to his feet and crying to his friend, "Stand back! I will spit the saucy knave!" rushed upon Rupert.

The swords clashed, and almost simultaneously Brownlow's weapon flew far through the air.

With a cry of fury he ran to fetch it, while his companion burst into a coarse laugh.

Rupert did not move from his position, but stood passive, until his antagonist again rushed at him.

"Mind this time," Rupert said, between his teeth, "for I will kill you like a dog."

Warned by the lesson, James Brownlow fought more carefully; but he was too enraged to continue these tactics long, and after a short bout he lunged furiously. Rupert turned aside the point and straightened his arm, and his antagonist fell to the ground, run completely through the body.

"You are a witness that I killed him in fair fight," Rupert said, turning to the young man, who gazed stupefied at the body of his comrade, and then sheathing his sword bounded away to the stables.

Hugh was there.

"Quick, Hugh; saddle Ronald. I have just killed young Brownlow, and must ride for it."

Hugh stood for a moment astonished, and then calling a helper ran into the stables. In a minute he came out with two horses saddled. Without a word Rupert leapt on one, while he vaulted on the other, and the two dashed off at full speed.

"Where are you going, Master Rupert?"

"To London," Rupert said. "This is no place for me now. I killed him in fair fight, and after warning; still, what with Sir William and my lady mother, there will be no stopping here. You had better ride back, Hugh, and tell my grandfather, privately, that I am going to the Earl of Marlborough, to ask him to give me the cornetcy he promised me."

"With your leave, Master Rupert, I shall do nothing of the sort. Where you go, I go. My grandfather rode out with yours to Naseby, and died there. My people have been the tenants of the Chace as long as the Hollidays have been its lords, and have always followed their master to the field. My old father would beat me out of the house with a broom handle, if I went back and said I had let you go to the wars alone. No, master Rupert, wherever you go, Hugh Parsons goes too."

Rupert held out his hand, which his companion grasped, and the two galloped rapidly along the road towards London.

In the meantime all was consternation at the Chace.

Colonel Holliday and Monsieur Dessin were deeply engaged in conversation when Adele burst in upon them.

"Quick, quick!" she exclaimed, "Monsieur Rupert is fighting with a wicked young man!"

"Then," said Monsieur Dessin grimly, "it will be very bad for the wicked young man, whoever he is."

"Where are they?" exclaimed Colonel Holliday.

"In the garden," the girl said, bursting into tears. "The wicked young man was rude to me, and wanted to kiss me, and Monsieur Rupert knocked him down, and then they began to fight, and I ran away."

Monsieur Dessin swore a very deep oath in French, and was about to hurry out with Colonel Holliday. Then he stopped, and putting his hand on the colonel's shoulder, said coldly:

"Do not let us hurry, sir. Monsieur Rupert has taken the matter in his hands. It is as well that he should kill this fellow as that I should have to do so."

Just at this moment they reached the door, and a young man came running up to the house shouting:

"Young Mr. Brownlow is killed. Help! help!"

"I think, Monsieur Dessin," Colonel Holliday said, stopping, "it would be as well if you and mademoiselle were for the present to leave us. There will be trouble enough, and the fewer in it the better. Sir William is a hot man, and you are not a cool one. Enough mischief has been done."

"You are right," Monsieur Dessin said. "Will you tell Monsieur Rupert that so long as my arm can lift a sword it is at his service, and that I am his debtor for life.

"Come, Adele, let us leave by the front of the house."

Colonel Holliday now hurried out into the garden, just as Sir William Brownlow, accompanied by his son's friend, rushed out of the house, followed by some lackeys with scared faces.

Not a word was spoken as they ran to the spot where young Brownlow was lying.

Sir William and Colonel Holliday both knelt beside him, and the latter put his finger to his pulse.

"He is not dead," he said, after a moment. "Ralph, saddle a horse, and ride with all speed to Derby for a doctor."

"Ay," Sir William said, "and tell the chief magistrate that he is wanted here, with one of his constables, for that murder has been done."

"You will do nothing of the sort," Colonel Holliday said.

"Sir William Brownlow, I make every excuse for you in your grief, but even from you I will permit no such word to be used. Your son has been wounded in fair fight, and whether he dies or not, alters the circumstances no whit. My grandson found him engaged in offering a gross insult to a young lady in the garden of my house. He did what I should have done had I so found him–he knocked him down. They fought, and your son was worsted. I think, sir, that for the credit of your house you had best be quiet over the matter.

"Hush, sir," he went on sternly, seeing that the baronet was about to answer furiously. "I am an old man, but I will put up with bluster from no man."

Colonel Holliday's repute as a swordsman was well known, and Sir William Brownlow swallowed his passion in silence. A door was taken off its hinges, and the insensible young man was carried into the house. There he was received by Mistress Holliday, who was vehement in her reproaches against Rupert, and even against Colonel Holliday, who had, as she said, encouraged him in brawling.

The colonel bent quietly before the storm; and leaving the wounded man in the care of his daughter-in-law and the attendants, made his way to the stables, to inquire what had become of Rupert. There he found that a few minutes before, Rupert, accompanied by Hugh Parsons, had ridden off at full speed, having placed valises and a brace of pistols in the holsters on their saddles. The colonel was glad to hear that Rupert had his humble friend with him, and doubted not that he had made for London. With a somewhat lightened heart he went back to the house.

After galloping fast for the first two miles, Rupert drew rein, for he had now time to think, and was assured that even should Sir William at once send into Derby for a warrant for his apprehension, he would be across the borders of the county long before he could be overtaken.

"Have you any money with you, Hugh?" he asked, suddenly; "for I have not a penny with me."

"I have only two shillings, Master Rupert. I got that yesterday in Derby for a nest of young owlets I found in the copse."

Rupert reined up his horse in dismay.

"Two shillings between us, Hugh! And it is 126 miles to London. What are we to do?"

Hugh thought a moment. "We can't go on with that, sir. Do you take these two shillings and ride on to the Red Dragon. You will be outside the county there. I will ride back to father's. It's under two miles, and I shall be back here in half-an-hour again. He will give me any money he may have in the house. I may as well fill my valise too, while I am about it; and he's got a pair of pistols, too, that he will give me."

It was clearly the best course to take, and Rupert trotted forward on his way, while Hugh galloped back at full speed. In a quarter of an hour the latter drew rein at his father's door.

"Hullo, Hugh, lad," the farmer, a hearty man of some fifty years of age, said, as he came to the door, "be'est thou? What art doing on the squire's horse? He looks as if thou had ridden him unmercifully, surely?"

In a few words Hugh related what had taken place, and told him of his own offer to go to the wars with Rupert.

"That's right, lad; that's right and proper. It's according to the nature of things that when a Holliday rides to the war a Parsons should ride behind him. It's always been so, and will always be so, I hope. Mother will grieve, no doubt; but she won't want to fly in the face of nature.

"Here, mother, come out. Master Rupert's killed Sir William Brownlow's son, and is off to the wars, and so our Hugh's, natural-like, going with him."

Mrs. Parsons after her first ejaculation of surprise burst into tears, but, as her husband had predicted, offered no objection whatever to what seemed to her, as to him, a matter of plain duty on the part of her son. Hugh now explained the reason of his return.

"Ay, ay, lad; thou shalt have the money. I've got fifty pounds for next quarter's rent. Colonel Holliday will be glad enough for some of it to go to his grandson. I'll gin ye half o't, Hugh, and take my chance of the colonel agreeing to it. I'll give'e as much more out of my old stocking upstairs. Put it carefully by, lad. Money is as useful in war as at other times, and pay ain't always regular; maybe the time may come when the young master may be short of money, and it may come in useful. Now put on thy riding coat; and mother will put thy best clothes in a valise.

"Bustle up, mother, there bain't no time to lose."

Thus addressed, Mrs. Parsons dried her tears and hurried away. Hugh, hitching the bridle over a hook, made his way to his room to change his clothes. When he came down, all was ready.

"Thy clothes are in the valise, Hugh. I have put on the holsters, and the pistols are in them. They are loaded, boy. In the bottom of one are the master's twenty-five pounds. Thy own money is in the valise. Here, boy, is my father's sword; it hasn't been used since Naseby, but it's a good blade. Thou art a deft hand at quarterstaff and singlestick, though, and I doubt not that thy hands can guard thy head. I need not say, Hugh Parsons, you will, if need be, die for thy master, for I know thou will do it, lad. Now kiss thy mother, boy; and God speed you."

A long embrace with his father and mother, and then Hugh, blinded by his tears, mounted his horse, and rode off in the track of Rupert.

After an hour's sharp riding he overtook him, at a wayside inn, just across the boundary between Derby and Leicestershire.

"Is it all right, Hugh?" he asked, as Hugh drew up at the door.

"All right, Master Rupert. Father has sent thee twenty-five pounds out of the rent that will be due at Lady day; and he doubts not that the colonel will approve of what he has done. H ow long have you been here?"

"Only some five minutes, Hugh. We had best let the horses feed, and then ride quietly into Leicester, it's only fifteen miles away. I see you've got a sword."

"A sword and pistols, Master Rupert; and as you have the same, methinks any highwayman chaps we might meet would think twice ere they venture to cry 'Stand and deliver.'"

"You heard no word of whether James Brownlow was alive or dead, Hugh? I should be very glad to hear that he is not killed."

"No word of the matter had come to the farm when I came away," Hugh said; "but I should not worry about it one way or the other, Master Rupert. You'll kill lots more when you get to the wars; and the country won't grieve over James Brownlow. Young as he was, he was a bad one; I've heard more than one dark story whispered of him. Folks say he took after his father, who was as wild and as bad as any man in Derbyshire when he was young."

# Chapter 4: The Sedan Chair

"This is our last stage, Hugh, and tonight we shall be in London," Rupert said, as they rode out of Watford. "Methinks we shall find it very strange in that great city. I am glad I thought of asking our host the name of an inn at which to put up. The Bell in Bishopsgate Street, he said. It will seem less strange asking the way there than it would be to be wandering about gazing for a place at which to alight."

"Ay, truly, Master Rupert; and I've heard say those London folk are main fond of making game of strangers."

"So I have heard, Hugh; any reasonable jest we had best put up with with good temper. If they push it too far, we shall be able, I doubt not, to hold our own. The first thing to do will be to get clothes of the cut in vogue, for I have come away just as I stood; and I fear that even your clothes will have a marvellously country air about them in the eyes of the city folk.

"There is London," he said, as they passed over the crest of Hampstead Hill. "That great round dome that stands up so high must be Saint Paul's; and look how many other church towers and spires there are. And there, away to the right, those must be the towers of Westminster."

"It is a big place, surely, Master Rupert. How many people do you think live there?"

"I believe there are near 300,000 souls there, Hugh. It seems wonderful, does it not?"

"It's too big to think of, Master Rupert," Hugh said, and they continued their journey southward.

They entered the city at Aldersgate, but they had ridden some distance through houses before they arrived at the boundary, for the city was already spreading beyond its ancient limits. Once inside the walls, the lads were astonished at the bustle and noise.

Hugh inquired the way to Bishopsgate Street of a respectable citizen, who directed them to follow the road until they came to a broad turning to their left. This would be Chepeside, and they were to follow this until they came to the Exchange, a large building straight in front of them. Passing this, they would find themselves in Bishopsgate Street.

If Aldersgate Street had surprised them, much more were they astonished at the din and turmoil of Chepeside, and Hugh, having twice narrowly escaped riding over a citizen, and being soundly rated for a country gawk, Rupert turned to him.

"Look at your horse's head, Hugh, and pay no attention to aught else. When we have reached our destination, we shall have plenty of time to look at all these wonders."

The advice was good, and without mischance they reached the Bell in Bishopsgate Street, and rode into the yard. The host at once came out, and after a momentary look of surprise at the youth of the new arrivals, he asked Rupert courteously if he needed a room.

"Two rooms if it please you," Rupert said, "and together."

The host called a hostler, who at once took charge of the horses, and led them to the stable, the lads first removing the valises and holsters, which a servant carried up to their rooms.

"We would have supper," Rupert said; "and while that is preparing we would, if it is not too late, order some clothes more in the mode than these. Can you direct us to a tailor?"

"You cannot do better," the landlord said, "than visit my neighbour, Master John Haliford. His shop is just opposite, and he makes for many of our best city folk, and for more than one of the gentry of the Court."

Rupert thanked him, and they crossed the street to the shop indicated.

The landlord looked after them with a puzzled air.

"It is not often that Joe Miles cannot guess the quality and errand of his guests, but this time he is floored. Has that young spark run away from home? I hardly think so, for he speaks gravely, and without haste; lads who have run away may generally be known by their speaking in a hurry, and as if anxious. They are both well mounted; the younger is clearly of the higher estate, although

but meanly dressed; nor does the other seem like his lackey. What are they talking about outside neighbour Haliford's shop, I wonder? I would give a silver penny to know. I will walk over presently, and smoke a pipe with him, and hear what he thinks of them."

The conversation which the host of the Bell had wished he could overhear was as follows:

Hugh began it.

"Look, Master Rupert, before we go into the shop, let us talk over what you are going to order."

"I am going to order a walking suit, Hugh, and a court suit for myself, and a suit for you."

"Yes, but what sort of a suit, Master Rupert?"

"I should say a walking suit, Hugh, such as would become a modest citizen."

"That's just it, Master Rupert. So far you have treated me as a friend; but now, sir, it must be different, for to do so any longer would not be seemly. You are going to be an officer. I am going to follow you as a trooper; but till we go to the war I must be dressed as your retainer. Not a lackey, perhaps, but a sort of confidential retainer. That will be best, Master Rupert, in every way."

Rupert was silent for a moment.

"Well, Hugh, perhaps that would be best; but you must remember that whatever we are before others, we are always friends when we are alone."

"Very well," Hugh said, "that is understood; but you know that alone or before others, I shall always be your faithful servant."

"What can I make you, sir?" the tailor asked, as the lads entered his shop.

Master Haliford was a small man; neat in his dress; a little fussy in manner. He was very upright, and seemed to look under rather than through the pair of horn spectacles which he wore. His look changed from affability to doubt as he took a nearer look at his intending customers.

"I need a suit such as a gentleman might wear at court," Rupert said, quietly, "and a walking or ordinary suit for myself; and a suit such as would be worn by a trusted retainer for my friend here."

The tailor put his head on one side, and rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"Have I had the honour of being recommended to you by the honourable gentleman your father?" he asked.

"No, indeed," Rupert said. "It was mine host at the Bell, who advised me that I could not do better than come to your shop."

"Ah, you are known to him, beyond doubt," John Haliford said, brightening.

"No, indeed," Rupert answered. "He was a stranger to me to within five minutes back."

"You must excuse my caution, young sir," John Haliford said, after another minute's reflection; "but it is the custom of us London tradesmen with those gentlemen who may honour us with their custom, and whom we have not the honour of knowing, to require payment, or at least a portion of payment, at the time of giving the order, and the rest at the time of delivery of the goods. In your case, sir, I am sure, an unnecessary piece of caution, but a rule from which I never venture to go."

"That is only fair and right," Rupert said. "I will pay half now, and the other half when the garments are completed; or if it please you, will pay the whole in advance."

"By no means, by no means," the tailor said with alacrity; "one third in advance is my rule, sir. And now, sir, what colour and material do you affect?"

"As sober both in hue and in material as may be," Rupert said, "and yet sufficiently in the fashion for me to wear in calling upon a nobleman of the court."

"Pardon me," the tailor said, "but perhaps you would condescend to take me into your confidence. There are noblemen, and noblemen. A tory lord, for instance, is generally a little richer in his colour than a whig nobleman, for these affect a certain sobriety of air. With some again, a certain military cut is permitted, while with others this would be altogether out of place."

"I am going to the Earl of Marlborough," Rupert said briefly.

"Dear me, dear me! Indeed now!" the little tailor said with an instant and great accession of deference, for the Earl of Marlborough was the greatest man in the realm. "Had your honour mentioned that at first, I should not have ventured to hint at the need for previous payment."

"What!" Rupert said, with a smile. "You would have broken your fixed rule! Surely not, Master Haliford."

The tailor looked sharply at his young customer. Whoever he might be, he was clearly no fool; and without more ado he brought forward his patterns and bent himself to the work in hand.

Having chosen the colours and stuffs for the suits of clothes, the lads returned to the Bell, where a supper of cold chicken and the remains of a fine sirloin awaited them, with two tankards of home-brewed ale. The next morning, before sallying out to see the town, Rupert wrote to his grandfather, asking his pardon for running away, expressing his intention of applying to the Earl of Marlborough for a cornetcy of horse, and giving his address at the Bell; asking him also to make his humble excuse to his lady mother, and to assure her of his devotion and respect, although circumstances had caused his apparent disobedience to her wishes.

Although there was a much greater amount of filial respect and obedience expressed in those days than now, human nature has differed but slightly in different ages of the world; and it is probable that sons went their own way quite as much as they do now, when there is very little talk either of obedience or respect. Indeed, the implicit obedience, and almost servile respect, which our forefathers expected from their sons, could not but in a great number of cases drive the sons to be hypocrites as well as undutiful; and our modern system of making our boys companions and friends, of taking an interest in all they do, and in teaching them to regard us as their natural advisers, has produced a generation of boys less outwardly respectful, no doubt, but as dutiful, and far more frank and truthful than those of the bygone times.

Rupert, finding that few of the citizens wore swords, and feeling that in his present attire he would attract attention by so doing, left his sword at the inn, and bought for Hugh and himself a couple of stout sticks–Hugh's a cudgel which would be useful in a hand well accustomed to singlestick, his own a cane of a wood such as he had never before seen–light, strong, and stiff. He chose it because it was well balanced in the hand. Then they sallied out into Cornhill, past the Exchange, erected by the worshipful citizen Sir Thomas Gresham, and then into Chepeside, where they were astonished at the wealth and variety of the wares displayed in the shops. Gazing into the windows, they frequently got into the way, and were saluted many times with the query, "Where are you going, stupids?" a question which Hugh was largely inclined to resent, and would have done so had not Rupert told him that evidently they did get into the way of the hurrying citizens, and that it was more wise to put up with rudeness than to embark in a series of quarrels, in which, moreover, as strangers they were likely to get the worst of the dispute. Saint Paul's Cathedral, then but newly finished, astonished them vastly with its size and magnificence, and they returned to the midday dinner at the Bell delighted with all that they had seen.

Asking the landlord how he would recommend them to pass the afternoon, he said that they could do no better than take a boat at London Bridge, and be rowed up to the village of Chelsea, where many of the nobility did dwell, and then coming back to Westminster might get out there, see the Abbey and the great Hall, and then walk back along the Strand.

The lads followed the advice, and were soon delighted and surprised with the great river, then pure and limpid, and covered with boats proceeding rapidly in all directions, for it was at that time the great highway of London. Tide was flowing and the river nearly full, and having given their waterman the intimation that time did not press, he rowed them very gently along in the centre of the stream, pointing out to them, when they had passed above the limits of the city, the various noblemen's houses scattered along the banks of the river. Off Westminster the waterman ceased rowing, to allow them to view the grand old Abbey; and then as they went on again, they marvelled at the contrast of the

low, deserted marshes of Lambeth and Bankside, which contrasted so strongly with the magnificence and the life they had left behind.

At Chelsea they admired the grand palace for the reception of old soldiers, and then–for the tide was turning now–floated back to Westminster. So long were they in going round the Abbey, and examining the tombs of the kings, that it was getting dark when they started eastward again, up past the Palace of Whitehall, and then along the Strand. Already the distance between the city and Westminster was connected with houses, and the junction of the two cities had fairly taken place.

Dim oil lamps were lighted here and there as they went along, foot passengers bore lanterns to enable them to pick their way across rough places, and link men carried torches in front of sedan chairs, in which ladies were being taken to fashionable entertainments, which then commenced at six o'clock.

All this was new and amusing to the boys; and having gone into a tavern near the Abbey, and partaken of some refreshment, they were not pressed for time; and it was near eight before they seriously thought of proceeding towards the city.

When a few hundred yards from Temple Bar, they heard a shouting and a scream down one of the streets leading to the river. The street was deserted, but down at the farther end they could see the flash of sword blades, in the light of an oil lamp.

"Come along, Hugh; that is a woman's scream."

"Better not interfere, Master Rupert," Hugh said.

But Rupert had already darted off, and Hugh without a moment's hesitation followed in his steps.

At the end of the street they came upon a sedan chair. The two porters stood surlily against the wall, menaced by the drawn swords of two men standing over them; while two other men–evidently of higher rank, but enveloped in cloaks–were forcibly dragging a lady from the chair. They had thrown a cloak over her head to drown her cries.

As the lads came up, one of the men uttered a furious oath.

"Rolf, Simon! leave those fellows and keep these springalls back. They are but boys. I will whistle when I am in the boat.

"Now, mistress!" and he began to carry the lady away.

As the lads arrived, the servitors–for such they were by their appearance–leaving the chairmen, turned upon them. One of the chairmen at once ran off as fast as his legs could carry him; but the other, a sturdy fellow, leaped on the back of the man who had been guarding him, as the latter turned upon Rupert. Hugh was attacked by the other.

"Be careful, Hugh! keep out of reach of his point," Rupert cried; and darting past, he struck the man who had hold of the lady a sharp blow across the ankle, which brought him instantly to the ground with his burden.

The other gentleman drew his sword, and rushed upon Rupert. It was fortunate for the latter that he had chosen his stick for lightness and balance, for it moved as quickly and easily as a foil. Without a thought of guarding, his assailant rushed at him to run him through; but Rupert parried the thrust, and in turn drove the end of his stick, with all his force, into his opponent's stomach. The man instantaneously doubled up with a low cry, and fell on the ground.

Then the other man, who had by this time risen to his feet, in turn rushed furiously at Rupert. A few times the sword and stick scraped and rasped against each other, and then Rupert lunged full at the other's face.

There was a loud cry, an oath, and then, as the sound of the watch running down the street, led by the chairman who had run away, was heard, the man took to his feet and fled. The lackey who had engaged Hugh, and who had in vain endeavoured to get to close quarters with the lad, imitated his example; but the prostrate man on the ground, and the fellow held by the chairman, were seized by the watch.

Rupert turned to the young lady, who, having now disencumbered herself of the folds of the cloak over her head, was leaning, half fainting, against the chair.

Taking off his hat and bowing deeply, he expressed his hope that she had suffered no harm through the unmannerly assault upon her.

"I thank you greatly, sir," she said, speaking with a slightly foreign accent. "I am unhurt, although somewhat breathless. I owe you my deep gratitude for rescue from these evil-minded men."

"What may be your name, mistress?" one of the watch asked. "You will be needed tomorrow to testify against these men."

"My name is Maria Von Duyk, and I reside at present with the worthy alderman, Peter Hawkins, to whom I was returning in the chair, as the chairmen will tell you, after a visit to Mistress Vanloct, whose house we had just left when molested."

"And yours, young sir?" the watchman asked.

"My name is Rupert Holliday. I am staying at the Bell, in Bishopsgate Street."

"You will both have to be present tomorrow morning before the worshipful magistrate Master Forman, at Westminster."

The watch now secured the man on the ground, who was recovering from the effect of the violent thrust in the stomach, and putting handcuffs on him and the other, led them away.

"You will permit me, I trust, to escort you to your door," Rupert said, as he ceremoniously handed the young lady into her chair.

"Yes, indeed, sir; and I trust that you will enter, and allow Dame Hawkins to add her thanks to mine."

Rupert bowed, and the chair being closed the chairmen lifted it, and with Rupert and Hugh following, proceeded eastward.

When they arrived at the house of Alderman Hawkins, in Lawrence Pulteney, the young lady on alighting begged Rupert to enter; but the latter excused himself on account of the hour, but said that he would call next morning, and would, if allowed, accompany her and the alderman to give evidence as to the assault.

On arriving next morning, Rupert was overwhelmed with thanks by the alderman, his wife, and Mistress Maria Von Duyk, all of whom were much surprised at his youth, for in the dim light of the preceding evening the young lady had not perceived that her rescuer was a mere lad.

Rupert found that there was no occasion to go before the magistrate, for the alderman having sent down early to the watch house to inquire at what hour their presence would be required, found that the prisoners had been rescued, on their way to the watch house, by a party of armed men.

"We are," the alderman said, "well aware who was the leader of the assailants, the man who escaped. Sir Richard Fulke is a ruined gamester, and is a distant relation of Dame Vanloct, whom my young friend was yesterday visiting. Knowing the wealth of Mistress Von Duyk's good father, he has sought to mend his ruined fortune by a match with her. At the urgent request of Mistress Von Duyk I wrote to him, saying that his attentions were unpleasing to her, and that they must be discontinued, or that she could no longer visit at Dame Vanloct's where she usually had met him. This was a week since. He replied courteously, regretting that the deep devotion he felt was unrequited, but withdrawing from the undertaking of trying to win her, and promising that henceforth she should be no longer troubled with his presence when she visited Dame Vanloct. This was of course done to lull our suspicion. When the chair was stopped yesterday, Maria at once recognized his voice. As they dragged her from the chair, he said:

"'Quick! hurry her down to the boat.'

"There is no doubt upon my mind that he intended to carry her off, and to compel her to marry him. I bethought me at first of applying to the secretary of state for a warrant for his arrest to answer for this outrage, but Mistress Maria leaves us tomorrow for Holland, and the process would delay her departure, and would cause a scandal and talk very unpleasant to herself, and which would greatly

offend my good friend her father. Had the men in custody been brought up this morning, there would have been no choice but to have carried the matter through. It was then a relief to us to find that they had escaped. I have told you this, young sir, as your due after having rescued Mistress Von Duyk from so great a peril. Now, as to yourself, believe me if my friendship and assistance can in any way advantage you, they are at your service. Even of your name I am yet in ignorance."

Rupert thanked the worthy alderman, and then stated that he was the grandson of Colonel Holliday, of Windthorpe Chace, in Derbyshire, and had come up to London to wait upon the Earl of Marlborough, who had promised him his protection and a cornetcy in a regiment of horse for service in Holland.

"In that case, sir," Mistress Von Duyk said, "it is like you may come to Dort. If so, believe me that my father, whom I shall tell how much we are indebted to you, will not be backward in manifesting his gratitude for the great service that you have rendered to his daughter."

"How were you thinking of passing the day?" the alderman asked.

"I had no plan," Rupert said. "In truth, I am waiting to call upon the Earl of Marlborough until Master Haliford has fashioned me a suit of clothes fitted for such an occasion; he has promised them for this evening."

"Would it please you to go down the river? I have a boat, and if you would like to see the shipping of this great port, and the palace at Greenwich for our seamen, my boatmen will take you down; and you will, I trust, return and take your midday meal with us."

And so it was arranged; and as Rupert and Hugh were rowed down the river, lost in wonder at the numerous craft that lay there, Hugh admitted that Rupert's interference in a business which was no concern of his had turned out a fortunate occurrence.

# Chapter 5: The Fencing School

It was with no small trepidation that Rupert Holliday ascended the steps of the Earl of Marlborough's residence in Pall Mall. Hugh accompanied him thus far and stopped at the door, outside which, in the courtyard and in the hall, were standing many lackeys who had attended their masters. Rupert felt very young, and the somewhat surprised looks of the servants in the hall at his appearance added to his feeling of youth. He was shown into an antechamber, where a number of officers of all ranks, of courtiers, and politicians, were assembled, talking in groups. Rupert felt alone and uncomfortable among this crowd of distinguished men, none of whom did he know, and no one paid the smallest attention to him. He had on entering written his name down in a book in the hall, whence it would be taken in with others to the great man.

Presently an officer in general's uniform came out from an inner room, and an instant afterwards the earl himself appeared. Not only was John Churchill one of the most handsome men in Europe, but he was the most courtly and winning in manner; and Rupert, shrinking back from observation, watched with admiration as he moved round the room, stopping to say a few words here, shaking hands there, listening to a short urgent person, giving an answer to a petition, before presented, by another, giving pleasure and satisfaction wherever he moved.

Rupert saw, however, that even while speaking his eye was wandering round the room, and directly he perceived him he walked straight towards him, those standing between falling back as he advanced.

"Ah, my young friend," he said warmly, holding out his hand to Rupert, "I was expecting you.

"Sir John Loveday, Lord Fairholm," he said, turning to two young gentlemen near, "let me present to you Master Rupert Holliday, grandson of Colonel Holliday, one of the bravest of our cavaliers, and who I can guarantee has inherited the skill and courage of his grandfather. He will make the campaign in Holland with you, gentlemen, for his commission has been made out today in her Majesty's fifth regiment of dragoons.

"I will speak to you more, presently, Rupert."

So saying, the earl moved away among his visitors, leaving Rupert flushed with pleasure and confusion. The young gentlemen to whom the earl had introduced him, much surprised at the flattering manner in which the great general had spoken of the lad before them, at once entered into conversation with him, and hearing that he was but newly come to London, offered to show him the various places where men of fashion resorted, and begged him to consider them at his disposal. Rupert, who had been carefully instructed by his grandfather in courtly expression and manner, returned many thanks to the gentlemen for their obliging offers, of which, after he had again spoken to the earl, and knew what commands he would lay upon him, he would thankfully avail himself.

It was nearly an hour before the Earl of Marlborough had made the round of the antechamber, but the time passed quickly to Rupert. The room was full of men whose names were prominent in the history of the time, and these Sir John Loveday, and Lord Fairholm, who were lively young men, twenty-two or twenty-three years old, pointed out to him, often telling him a merry story or some droll jest regarding them. There was Saint John, handsome, but delicate looking, with a half sneer on his face, and dressed in the extremity of fashion, with a coat of peach-coloured velvet with immense cuffs, crimson leather shoes with diamond buckles; his sword was also diamond hilted, his hands were almost hidden in lace ruffles, and he wore his hair in ringlets of some twenty inches in length, tied behind with a red ribbon. The tall man, with a haughty but irritable face, in the scarlet uniform of a general officer, was the Earl of Peterborough. There too were Godolphin and Orford, both leading members of the cabinet; the Earl of Sutherland, the Dukes of Devonshire and Newcastle, Lord Nottingham, and many others.

At last the audience was over, and the minister, bowing to all, withdrew, and the visitors began to leave. A lackey came up to Rupert and requested him to follow him; and bidding adieu to his new friends, who both gave him their addresses and begged him to call up on them, he followed the servant into the hall and upstairs into a cosy room, such as would now be called a boudoir. There stood the Earl of Marlborough, by the chair in which a lady of great beauty and commanding air was sitting.

"Sarah," he said, "this is my young friend, Rupert Holliday, who as you know did me good service in the midlands."

The countess held out her hand kindly to Rupert, and he bent over it and touched it with his lips.

"You must remember you are my friend as well as my husband's," she said. "He tells me you saved his life; and although I can scarce credit the tale, seeing how young you are, yet courage and skill dwell not necessarily in great bodies. Truly, Master Holliday, I am deeply indebted to you; and Sarah Churchill is true in her friendships."

"As in her hates, eh?" laughed the earl.

Between the Earl of Marlborough and his wife there existed no common affection. They were passionately attached to each other; and the earl's letters show that at all times, even when in the field surrounded by difficulties, harassed by opposition, menaced with destruction by superior forces, his thoughts were turned affectionately towards her, and he was ever wishing that the war would end that he might return to her side. She on her part was equally attached to him, but much as she strove to add to his power and to forward his plans, her haughty and violent temper was the main cause of the unmerited disgrace into which he fell with his royal mistress, who owed so much to him personally, and whose reign he did so much to render a brilliant and successful one. At the present time, however, she stood upon the footing of the closest intimacy and affection with Queen Anne.

The earl then introduced Rupert to those other ladies who were present; the eldest, his daughter Lady Harriet, recently married to Mr. Godolphin; the second, Anne, married to Lord Spencer; and the two daughters still unmarried, aged sixteen and seventeen respectively.

Rupert was so confused with the earl's kindness that he had difficulty in finding words, but he made a great effort, and expressed in proper set terms his thankfulness to the countess for her great kindness to him, and of his own want of deserts.

"There," the countess said, "that will do very nicely and prettily; and now put it aside until we are in public, and talk in your own natural way. So you have been fighting again, have you, and well-nigh killing young Master Brownlow?"

Rupert was completely astounded at this address; and the earl said, laughing:

"I told you that I expected you. The worthy colonel your grandfather wrote me a letter, which I received this morning, telling me the incident which had taken place, and your sudden disappearance, stating that he doubted not you had made for London, and begging–which indeed was in no way necessary–my protection on your behalf."

"Did my grandfather say, sir," Rupert asked anxiously, "aught of the state of Master Brownlow?"

"Yes; he said that the leech had strong hopes that he would recover."

"I am indeed glad of that," Rupert said; "for I had no ill will to him."

"We must be careful of you, Master Holliday," the countess said; "for if you go on like this you will much diminish the number of the queen's subjects."

"I can assure your grace," Rupert said earnestly, "that I am no brawler, and am not quarrelsome by nature, and that the thought of shedding blood, except of the foes of my country in battle, pains me much."

"I'll warrant me you are the mildest-tempered boy alive," the earl said. "Now tell me frankly: you have been in London some forty-eight hours; have you passed that time without getting into a fray or quarrel of any kind?"

Rupert turned scarlet with confusion.

"His looks betray him," the earl laughed. "Look, girls, at the mild-tempered young gentleman. "Now, out with it. How was it?"

Thus exhorted, Rupert very stammeringly gave an account of the fray in which he had been engaged.

"Von Duyk!" the earl said. "She must be a daughter of the great merchant of Dort–a useful friend to have made, maybe, Master Holliday; and it may be that your adventure may even be of service to the state. Never speak now, Master Rupert, of your peaceful intentions. You take after your namesake, the Prince, and are a veritable knight errant of adventure. The sooner I have you over in Holland fighting the queen's enemies, and not the queen's subjects, the better.

"Now tell me, where have you taken up your abode?"

"At the Bell, at Bishopsgate Street," Rupert answered.

"And your follower, for I know one accompanied you; where is he?"

"He waits without, sir."

The earl touched a hand bell.

"Fetch in Master Holliday's retainer; you will find him without. Make him at home in the servant's hall. Send a messenger down to the Bell at Bishopsgate, fetch hither the mails of Master Holliday; he will remain as my guest at present."

Rupert now entered upon a life very different to that which he had led hitherto. He received a letter from Colonel Holliday, enclosing an order on a London banker for fifty pounds, and he was soon provided with suits of clothes fit for balls and other occasions. Wherever the earl went, Rupert accompanied him as one of his personal followers; and the frank, straightforward manners of the lad pleased the ladies of the court, and thus "Little Holliday," as he was called, soon became a great favourite.

It was about a fortnight after his arrival in town that, for the first time, he accompanied his friends Sir John Loveday and Lord Fairholm to the fencing school of Maitre Dalboy, the great fencing master of the day. Rupert had been looking forward much to this visit, as he was anxious to see what was the degree of proficiency of the young court gallants in the art which he so much loved.

Maitre Dalboy's school was a fashionable lounge of the young men of the court and army. It was a large and lofty room, and some six assistants were in the act of giving instructions to beginners, or of fencing with more advanced students, when the trio entered. Maitre Dalboy himself came up to greet them, for both Rupert's friends had been his pupils.

"You are strangers," he said reproachfully. "How are your muscles to keep in good order, and your eye true, if you do not practise? It is heart rending! I take every pains to turn out accomplished swordsmen; and no sooner have my pupils learned something of the business, than they begin to forget it."

"We shall begin to put your teaching into effect before long, Maitre Dalboy," Sir John Loveday said, with a smile, "for we are going over to join the army in Holland in a few weeks, and we shall then have an opportunity of trying the utility of the parries you have taught us."

"It is too bad," the Frenchman said, shrugging his shoulders, "that my pupils should use the science I have taught them against my countrymen; but what would you have? It is the fortune of war. Is this young gentleman a new pupil that you have brought me?"

"No, indeed," Lord Fairholm said; "this is Master Rupert Holliday, a cornet in the 5th regiment of dragoons, who is also about to start for Holland."

"I have had the advantage of learning from a countryman of yours, Monsieur Dalboy," Rupert said, "a Monsieur Dessin, who is good enough to teach the noble art in the town of Derby."

"Dessin! Dessin!" Maitre Dalboy said, thoughtfully "I do not remember the name among our maitres d'escrime."

"The Earl of Marlborough himself vouches for the skill of Master Holliday with the sword. His grandfather, Colonel Holliday, was, I believe, noted as one of the finest blades at the court of Saint Germains."

"I have heard of him," Monsieur Dalboy said, with interest. "Let me think; he wounded the Marquis de Beauchamp, who was considered one of the best swordsmen in France. Yes, yes, his fame as a swordsman is still remembered. And he is alive yet?"

"Alive and active," Rupert said; "and although, as he says himself, he has lost some of his quickness of reposte, there are, Monsieur Dessin says, few fencers who could even now treat him lightly."

"And you have had the benefit of his instruction as well as that of my countryman?" Monsieur Dalboy asked.

"Yes," Rupert said, "my grandfather, although he cares not at his age for prolonged exercise, has yet made a point of giving me for a few minutes each day the benefit of his skill."

"I should like to have a bout with you, Master Holliday," Monsieur Dalboy said; "will you take a foil? I am curious to see what the united teaching of my countryman and that noted swordsman Colonel Holliday may have done. To me, as a master, it is interesting to discover what is possible with good teachers, when the science is begun young. What may your age be, Master Holliday?"

"I am four months short of sixteen," Rupert said, "and I shall be very proud of the honour of crossing swords with so famed a master as yourself, if you think me worthy of so great a privilege."

There was quite a sensation in the fencing school, round which were gathered some forty or fifty of the young men of the day, when Maitre Dalboy called for his plastron and foil, for it was seldom indeed, and then only with swordsmen of altogether exceptional strength, that Monsieur Dalboy condescended to fence, contenting himself ordinarily with walking about the school and giving a hint now and then to those fencing with his assistants, not, perhaps, more than once a week taking a foil in his hand to illustrate some thrust or guard which he was inculcating. At this call, therefore, there was a general silence; and everyone turned to see who was the fencer whom the great master thus signally deigned to honour.

Great was the astonishment when, as Monsieur Dalboy divested himself of his coat and vest, the lad who had entered with Lord Fairholm and Sir John Loveday was seen similarly to prepare for the contest.

"Who is he? What singular freak is this of the maitre to take up a foil with a boy!" was the question which ran round the room.

Several of those present had met Rupert Holliday, and could give his name; but none could account for the freak on the part of the master.

Fortunately Rupert was unacquainted with the fact that what seemed to him a natural occurrence was an extraordinary event in the eyes of all assembled, and he therefore experienced no feeling of nervousness whatever. He knew that Colonel Holliday was a master of the sword, and his grandfather had told him that Monsieur Dessin was an altogether exceptional swordsman. As he knew himself to be fully a match for the latter, he felt sure that, however perfect a master Monsieur Dalboy might be, he need not fear discrediting his master, even if his present opponent should prove more than his match.

There was a dead silence of curiosity at the singularity of the affair, as Rupert Holliday took his post face to face with the master; but a murmur of surprise and admiration ran round the room at the grace and perfection of accuracy with which Rupert went through the various parades which were then customary before the combatants crossed swords.

Rupert felt as calm and as steady as when fencing at home, and determined to use all his caution as well as all his skill; for not only did he feel that his own strength was upon trial, but that the honour of the teachers who had taken such pains with him was concerned in the result. The swords had scarcely crossed when an expression of surprise passed across Maitre Dalboy's face. The first few

passes showed him that in this lad he had found an opponent of no ordinary character, and that all his skill would be needed to obtain a victory over him.

For the first few minutes each fought cautiously, feeling each other's strength rather than attempting to attack seriously. Then the master dropped his point.

"Ma foi! Young sir, you have done monsieur le colonel and my compatriot justice. I offer you my congratulations."

"They are premature, sir," Rupert said, smiling; "you have not as yet begun."

The silence in the school was even more profound when the swords again crossed than it had been when the bout began, for wonder had now taken the place of amused curiosity. The struggle now commenced in earnest. Several times at first Rupert narrowly escaped being touched, for the master's play was new to him. The thrusts and feints, the various attacks, were all familiar; but whereas Colonel Holliday had fought simply with his arm and his head, standing immovably in one place, and Monsieur Dessin had, although quick to advance and fall back, fought comparatively on the defensive, while he himself had been the assailant from his superior activity, Monsieur Dalboy was as quick and as active as himself, and the rapidity of the attacks, the quick bounds, the swift rushes, at first almost bewildered him; but gradually, as he grew accustomed to the play, he steadied himself, and eluded the master's attacks with an activity as great as his own.

In vain Monsieur Dalboy employed every feint, every combination in his repertoire. Rupert was always prepared, for from one or other of his teachers he had learnt the defence to be employed against each; and at last, as the master, exhausted with his exertions, flagged a little, Rupert in turn took the offensive. Now Monsieur Dalboy's skill stood him in equal stead to defend himself against Rupert's rapid attacks and lightning-like passes and thrusts; and although the combat had lasted without a second's interruption for nearly a quarter of an hour, neither combatant had touched the other.

At last Rupert saw by his opponent's eye that a new and special combination was about to be put into action against him, and he instantly steadied himself to resist it. It came with the rapidity of thought, but Rupert recognized it by the first pass as the very last combination which Monsieur Dessin had taught him, assuring him at the time that he would find it irresistible, for that there were not three men in Europe acquainted with it. He met the attack then with the defence which Monsieur Dessin had showed him to be the sure escape, ending with a wrench which nearly tore the sword from the hand of his opponent.

Monsieur Dalboy sprang back on guard, with a look of profound astonishment; and then throwing down his foil, he threw himself, in the impetuous manner of his countrymen, on Rupert's neck, and embraced him.

"Mon dieu! mon dieu!" he exclaimed, "You are incroyable, you are a miracle.

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to those present, when the burst of enthusiastic applause which greeted the conclusion of this extraordinary contest subsided, "you see in this young gentleman one of the finest swordsmen in Europe. I do not say the finest, for he has not touched me, and having no idea of his force I extended myself rashly at first; but I may say he is my equal. Never but once have I crossed swords with such a fencer, and I doubt if even he was as strong. His parry to my last attack was miraculous. It was a coup invented by myself, and brought to perfection with that one I speak of. I believed no one else knew it, and have ever reserved it for a last extremity; but his defence, even to the last wrench, which would have disarmed any other man but myself, and even me had I not known that it should have come then, was perfect; it was astounding.

"This maitre of yours–this Monsieur Dessin," he went on, turning to Rupert, "must be a wonder.

"Ah!" he said suddenly, and as if to himself; "c'est bien possible! What was he like, this Monsieur Dessin?"

"He is tall, and slight except as to his shoulders, where he is very broad."

"And he has a little scar here, has he not?" the fencing master said, pointing to his temple.

"Yes," Rupert said, surprised; "I have often noticed it."

"Then it is he," Monsieur Dalboy said, "the swordsman of whom I spoke. No wonder you parried my coup. I had wondered what had become of him. And you know him as Monsieur Dessin? And he teaches fencing?"

"Yes," Rupert said; "but my grandfather always said that Monsieur Dessin was only an assumed name, and that he was undoubtedly of noble blood."

"Your grandfather was right," the master said. "Yes, you have had wonderful masters; but unless I had seen it, I should not have believed that even the best masters in the world could have turned out such a swordsman as you at your age."

By this time the various couples had begun fencing again, and the room resounded with the talk of the numerous lookers on, who were all discoursing on what appeared to them, as to Monsieur Dalboy, the almost miraculous occurrence of a lad under sixteen holding his own against a man who had the reputation of being the finest maitre in Europe. Lord Fairholm, Sir John Loveday, and other gentlemen, now came round.

"I was rather thinking," Sir John said, with a laugh, "of taking you under my protection, Master Holliday, and fighting your battles for you, as an old boy does for a young one at school; but it must even be the other way. And by my faith, if any German Ritter or French swordsman should challenge the British dragoons to a trial of the sword, we shall put you forth as our David."

"I trust that that may not be," Rupert said; "for though in battle I hope that I shall not be found wanting, yet I trust that I shall have nought to do in private quarrels, but be looked upon as one of a peaceful disposition."

"Very peaceful, doubtless!" laughed Lord Fairholm. "Tell me, Master Rupert, honestly now, didst ever use in earnest that sword that you have just shown that you know so well how to wield?"

Rupert flushed up crimson.

"Yes," he said, with a shame-faced look, "I have twice used my sword in self defence."

"Ha, ha! Our peaceful friend!" laughed Lord Fairholm. "And tell me, didst put an end to both unfortunates?"

Rupert coloured still more deeply.

"I had the misfortune to slay one, my lord; but there are good hopes that the other will recover."

A general shout of laughter greeted the announcement, which together with Rupert's evident shame-faced look, was altogether too much for their gravity.

Just at this moment a diversion was caused by a young man dressed in the extreme of fashion who entered the school. He had a dissipated and jaded air.

"Fulke, where hast been?" one of the group standing round Rupert asked. "We have missed you these two weeks. Someone said you had been roughly mauled, and had even lost some teeth. Is it so?"

"It is," the newcomer said, with an angry scowl. "Any beauty I once may have had is gone forever. I have lost three of my upper teeth, and two of my lower, and I am learning now to speak with my lips shut, so as to hide the gap."

"But how came it about?"

"I was walking down a side street off the Strand, when four men sprang out and held my hands to my side, another snatched my watch and purse, and as I gave a cry for the watch, he smote me with the pommel of his rapier in my mouth, then throwing me on the ground the villains took to their heels together."

The exclamations of commiseration and indignation which arose around, were abruptly checked by a loud laugh from Rupert.

There was a dead silence and Sir Richard Fulke, turning his eyes with fury towards the lad who had dared to jeer at his misfortune, demanded why he laughed.

"I could not help but laugh," Rupert said, "although doubtless it was unmannerly; but your worship's story reminded me so marvellously of the tale of the stout knight, Sir John Falstaff's adventure with the men of buckram."

"What mean you?" thundered Sir Richard.

"I mean, sir," Rupert said quietly, "that your story has not one word of truth in it. I came upon you in that side street off the Strand, as you were trying to carry off by force, aided by a rascal named Captain Copper, a lady, whose name shall not be mentioned here. I had not my sword with me, but with a walking stick I trounced your friend the captain, and then, with my stick against your rapier, I knocked out those teeth you regret, with a fair thrust.

"If my word is doubted, gentlemen, Alderman Hawkins, who heard the details of the matter from the young lady and her chairman, can vouch for it."

A cry of fury burst from Sir Richard Fulke; and drawing his sword he would have sprung upon the lad, who had not only disfigured him for life, but now made him the laughingstock of society, for the tale would, he knew, spread far and wide. Several of the gentlemen threw themselves between him and Rupert.

"I will have his life's blood!" he exclaimed, struggling in the arms of those who would hold him back. "I will kill the dog as he stands."

"Sir Richard Fulke," Lord Fairholm said, "Master Holliday is a friend of mine, and will give you an honourable meeting when you will; but I should advise you to smother your choler. It seems he proved himself with a stick your superior, although armed with a sword, and Master Dalboy will tell you that it is better to leave him alone."

Master Dalboy was standing by, and going up to Sir Richard, he said:

"Sir, if you will take my poor advice you will go your way, and leave Master Holliday to himself. He has, as those here will tell you, proved himself fully my equal as a swordsman, and could kill you if only armed with a six-inch dagger against your sword. It would be safer for you to challenge the whole of those in this present company than to cross swords with him."

A few words from those standing round corroborated a statement which at first appeared fabulous; and then finding that an open encounter with Rupert would be the worst possible method of obtaining satisfaction for the injuries he had received, Sir Richard Fulke flung himself out of the school, muttering deep vows of future vengeance.

"You have made a dangerous enemy," Lord Fairholm said, as the three friends walked homeward. "He bears a bad character, and is a reckless and ruined man. After what he has heard of your skill as a swordsman he will, we may be sure, take no open steps against you; but it is certain that he will scheme night and day for vengeance. When the report gets abroad of his cock-and-bull story, and the true history of the loss of his teeth, he will not be able to show his face in public for some time; but he will be none the less dangerous. Through that notorious ruffian, Captain Copper, he can dispose of half the cutthroats about the town, and I should advise you not to go out after dark until you have put the seas between you and him, and even then you had better be cautious for a time."

Rupert agreed with his friend's advice, and the next day begged his patron to let him embark at once for Holland, in a ship that was to sail with troops from London Bridge. He urged as his reason for desiring to go at once, his wish to learn something at least of his duties before the campaign began.

As the earl had already heard a rumour of the scene in the fencing school, he made no opposition to the plan, and the next day Rupert, accompanied by Hugh, sailed down the Thames, bound for Rotterdam.

# Chapter 6: The War Of Succession

The war which was about to commence, and which Rupert Holliday sailed for the Hague to take part in, was one of the grandest and most extensive struggles that ever devastated Europe, embracing as it did the whole of the central and western nations of the continent. In fact, with the exception of Russia, still in the depths of barbarism, and Italy, which was then a battlefield rather than a nation, all the states of Europe were ranged on one side or the other.

As Charles the Second of Spain approached his end, the liveliest interest was felt as to his succession. He had no children, and the hopes and fears of all the continental nations were excited by the question of the disposal of the then vast dominions of Spain. The principal powers of Europe, dreading the consequences of this great empire being added to the power of any one monarch, entered into a secret treaty, which was signed at the Hague in 1698, by which it was agreed that Spain itself should be ceded to the Electoral Prince of Bavaria, with Flanders and the Low countries; Naples, Sicily, Tuscany, and Guipuscoa were to fall to France; and the Duchy of Milan to the archduke, son of the Emperor of Germany. Holland was to gain a considerable accession of territory. England, one of the signatories to the treaty, was to gain nothing by the division.

The contents of this treaty leaked out, and the king of Spain, after a consultation with Austria, who was also indignant at the secret treaty, made a will bequeathing all his dominions to the Elector of Bavaria. Had that prince lived, all the complications which ensued would probably have been avoided; but he died, the 9th February, 1699, and the whole question was thereby again opened. Another secret treaty was made, between England, France, and Holland, and signed on the 13th March, 1700, at the Hague. By this treaty it was agreed that France was to receive Naples, Sicily, Guipuscoa, and Lorraine; the Archduke Charles Spain, the Low Countries, and the Indies; and the Spanish colonies were to be divided between Holland and England. As both England and Holland were at the time in alliance with Spain, it must be admitted that their secret arrangement for the partition of her territories was of a very infamous character.

Louis of France, while apparently acting with the other powers, secretly communicated the contents of the treaty to Charles II. The Spanish king was naturally dismayed at the great conspiracy to divide his kingdom at his death, and he convened his council of state and submitted the matter to them. It was apparent that France, by far the most powerful of the other continental states, could alone avert the division, and the states general therefore determined to unite the interests of France and Spain by appointing the Duc d'Anjou, grandson of the King of France, sole heir to the vast empire of Spain.

The news that Spain and France were henceforth to be united caused the greatest consternation to the rest of the States, and all Europe began to arm. Very shortly after signing the bequest, the old King of Spain died, and the Duc d'Anjou ascended the throne. The Spanish Netherlands, governed by the young Elector of Bavaria, as Lieutenant General of Spain, at once gave in their adhesion to the new monarch. The distant colonies all accepted his rule, as did the great Spanish possessions in Italy; while the principal European nations acknowledged him as successor of Charles the Second.

The new empire seemed indeed of preponderating strength. Bavaria united herself in a firm alliance with France and Spain; and these three countries, with Italy and Flanders, appeared capable of giving the law to the world. England, less affected than the continental powers by the dominance of this powerful coalition, might have remained quiet, had not the French King thrown down the gauntlet of defiance. On the 16th September, 1701, James the Second, the exiled King of England, died, and Louis at once acknowledged his son as King of Great Britain and Ireland. This act was nothing short of a public declaration of war, not only against the reigning monarch of England, but against the established religion of our country. The exiled prince was Roman Catholic. Louis was the author of the most terrible persecution of the Protestants that ever occurred in Europe. Thus the

action of the French king rallied round William the Second all the Protestant feeling of the nation. Both Houses of Parliament voted loyal addresses, and the nation prepared for the great struggle before it. The king laboured to establish alliances and a plan for common action, and all was in readiness, when his sudden death left the guidance of affairs in other hands.

These hands were, happily for England, those of the Earl of Marlborough, the finest diplomatist, as well as the greatest soldier, of his time.

The struggle which was approaching was a gigantic one. On one side were France and Spain, open to attack on one side only, and holding moreover Flanders, and almost the whole of Italy, with the rich treasures of the Indies upon which to draw for supplies. The alliance of Bavaria, with a valiant population, extended the offensive power of the coalition into the heart of Austria.

Upon the other hand were the troops of Austria, England, Holland, Hanover, Hesse Cassel, and the lesser states of Germany, with a contingent of troops, from Prussia and Denmark. In point of numbers the nations ranged on either side were about equal; but while France, Spain, and Bavaria formed a compact body under the guidance of Louis, the allies were divided by separate, and often opposing interests and necessities, while Austria was almost neutralized by a dangerous Hungarian insurrection that was going on, and by the danger of a Turkish invasion which the activity of French diplomacy kept continually hanging over it. The coalition was weakened in the field by the jealousies of the commanders of the various nationalities, and still more by the ignorance and timidity of the Dutch deputies, which Holland insisted on keeping at headquarters, with the right of veto on all proceedings.

On the side of the allies the following were the arrangements for the opening of the campaign. A German army under Louis, Margrave of Baden, was to be collected on the upper Rhine to threaten France on the side of Alsace. A second corps, 25,000 strong, composed of Prussian troops and Dutch, under the Prince of Saarbruck, were to undertake the siege of Kaiserwerth, a small but very important fortress on the right bank of the Rhine, two leagues below Dusseldorf. The main army, 35,000 strong, under the Earl of Athlone, was destined to cover the frontier of Holland, from the Rhine to the Vecun, and also to cover the siege of Kaiserwerth; while a fourth body, of 10,000 men, under General Cohorn, were collected near the mouth of the Scheldt, and threatened the district of Bruges.

Upon the other side the French had been equally active. On the Lower Rhine a force was stationed to keep that of Cohorn in check. Marshal Tallard, with 15,000 men, came down from the Upper Rhine to interrupt the siege of Kaiserwerth, while the main army, 45,000 strong, under the Duke of Burgundy and Marshal Boufflers, was posted in the Bishopric of Liege, resting on the tremendous chain of fortresses of Flanders, all of which were in French possession, and strongly garrisoned by French and Spanish soldiers.

At the time, however, when the vessel containing Rupert Holliday and Hugh Parsons sailed up the Scheldt, early in the month of May, these arrangements were not completed, but both armies were waiting for the conflict.

The lads had little time for the examination of the Hague, now the dullest and most quiet of European capitals, but then a bustling city, full of life and energy; for, with the troops who had arrived with them, they received orders to march at once to join the camp formed at Breda. Accustomed to a quiet English country life, the activity and bustle of camp life were at once astonishing and delightful. The journey from the Hague had been a pleasant one. Rupert rode one of the two horses with which the Earl of Marlborough had presented him, Hugh the other; and as a portion of the soldiers with them were infantry, the marches were short and easy; while the stoppages at quaint Dutch villages, the solemn ways of whose inhabitants, their huge breeches, and disgust at the disturbance of their usual habits when the troops were quartered upon them, were a source of great amusement to them.

Upon reaching the camp they soon found their way to their regiment. Here Rupert presented to Colonel Forbes the letter of recommendation with which the Earl of Marlborough had provided him, and was at once introduced by him to his brother officers, most of them young men, but all

some years older than himself. His frank, pleasant, boyish manner at once won for him a cordial acceptance, and the little cornet, as he was called in the regiment, soon became a general favourite.

Hugh, who had formally enlisted in the regiment before leaving England, was on arrival handed over to a sergeant; and the two lads were, with other recruits, incessantly drilled from morning till night, to render them efficient soldiers before the day of trial arrived.

Rupert shared a tent with the other two officers of his troop, Captain Lauriston, a quiet Scotchman, and Lieutenant Dillon, a young Irishman, full of fun and life.

There were in camp three regiments of British cavalry and six of infantry, and as they were far from the seat of war, there was for the present nothing to do but to drill, and prepare for the coming campaign. Rupert was delighted with the life, for although the work for the recruits was hard, the weather was splendid, supplies abundant–for the Dutch farm wives and their daughters brought ducks, and geese, and eggs into the camp–and all were in high spirits at the thought of the approaching campaign. Every night there were gatherings round the fire, when songs were sung and stories told. Most of the officers had before campaigned in Holland, under King William, and many had fought in Ireland, and had stirring tales of the Boyne, of the siege of Athlone, and of fierce encounters with the brave but undisciplined Irish.

At the end of a month's hard work, Rupert began to understand his duties, for in those days the amount of drill deemed necessary for a trooper was small indeed in proportion to that which he has now to master. Rupert was already a good rider, and soon learnt where was his proper place as cornet in each evolution, and the orders that it behoved him to give. The foot drill was longer and more difficult, for in those days dragoons fought far more on foot than is now the case, although at this epoch they had already ceased to be considered as mounted infantry, and had taken their true place as cavalry. Rupert's broadsword drill lasted but a very short time; upon the drill sergeant asking him if he knew anything of that weapon, he said that he could play at singlestick, but had never practised with the broadsword. His instructor, however, found that a very few lessons were sufficient to enable him to perform the required cuts and guard with sufficient proficiency, and very speedily claimed the crown which Rupert promised him on his dismissal from the class.

Week after week passed in inactivity, and the troops chafed mightily thereat, the more so that stirring events were proceeding elsewhere. The siege of Kaiserwerth, by a body of 15,000 German troops, had begun on the 18th of April, and the attack and defence were alike obstinate and bloody. The Earl of Athlone with his covering forces lay at Cleves, and a sharp cavalry fight between 1000 of the allied cavalry and 700 French horse took place on the 27th of April. The French were defeated, with the loss of 400 men; but as the victors lost 300, it is clear that both sides fought with extreme determination and bravery, such a loss–700 men out of 1700 combatants–being extraordinarily large. The spirit shown by both sides in this the first fight of the war, was a portent of the obstinate manner in which all the battles of this great war were contested. For two months Kaiserwerth nobly defended itself. Seventy-eight guns and mortars thundered against it night and day. On the 9th of June the besiegers made a desperate assault and gained possession of a covered way, but at a cost of 2000 killed and wounded. A week later the place capitulated after a siege which had cost the allies 5000 men.

General Boufflers, with his army of 37,000 men, finding himself unable to raise the siege, determined to make a dash against Nimeguen, an important frontier fortress of Holland, but which the supineness of the Dutch Government had allowed to fall into disrepair. Not only was there no garrison there, but not a gun was mounted on its walls. The expedition seemed certain of success, and on the evening of the 9th of June Boufflers moved out from Xanten, and marched all night. Next day Athlone obtained news of the movement and started in the evening, his march being parallel with the French, the hostile armies moving abreast, and at no great distance from each other.

The cavalry covered the British march, and these were in the morning attacked by the French horse under the Duke of Burgundy. The British were outnumbered, but fought with great obstinacy, and before they fell back, with a loss of 720 men and a convoy of 300 waggons, the infantry had

pushed forward, and when the French army reached Nimeguen its ramparts bristled with British bayonets. Boufflers, disappointed in his aim, fell back upon the rich district of Cleves, now open to him, and plundered and ravaged that fertile country.

Although Kaiserwerth had been taken and Nimeguen saved, the danger which they had run, and the backward movement of the allied army, filled the Dutch with consternation.

The time, however, had come when Marlborough himself was to assume the command, and by his genius, dash, and strategy to alter the whole complexion of things, and to roll back the tide of war from the borders of Holland. He had crossed from England early in May, a few days only after Rupert had sailed; but hitherto he had been engaged in smoothing obstacles, appeasing jealousies, healing differences, and getting the whole arrangement of the campaign into something like working order. At last, everything being fairly in trim, he set out on the 2nd of July from the Hague, with full power as commander-in-chief of the allied armies, for Nimeguen. There he ordered the British troops from Breda, 8000 Germans from Kaiserwerth, and the contingents of Hesse and Luneburg, 6000 strong, under the Prince of Zell, to join him.

As these reinforcements brought his army up to a strength superior to that of the French, although Marshal Boufflers had hastily drawn to him some of the garrisons of the fortresses, the Earl of Marlborough prepared to strike a great blow. The Dutch deputies who accompanied the army–and whose timidity and obstinacy a score of times during the course of the war thwarted all Marlborough's best-laid plans, and saved the enemy from destruction–interfered to forbid an attack upon two occasions when an engagement would, as admitted by French historians, have been fatal to their whole army. Marlborough therefore was obliged to content himself by outflanking the French, compelling them to abandon Cleves, to cross the Meuse, and to fall back into Flanders, with some loss, and great haste and disorder.

In vain the French marshal endeavoured to take post so as to save the Meuse fortresses, which stood at the gates of Flanders, and by their command of the river prevented the allies from using the chain of water communications to bring up supplies. Marlborough crossed the line by which his siege train was coming up, and then pounced upon Venloo, a very strong fortress standing across the Meuse–that is to say, the town was on one side, the fort of Saint Michael on the other.

After this chapter, devoted to the necessary task of explaining the cause and commencement of the great War of Succession, we can return to the individual fortunes of our hero.

# Chapter 7: Venloo

Upon the 5th dragoons being, with the others lying with it in camp at Breda, ordered up to join the main army at Nimeguen, Rupert was, to his great delight, declared to be sufficiently advanced in his knowledge of drill to take his place regularly in the ranks; and Hugh and the other recruits also fell into their places in the various troops among which they were divided, Hugh being, at Rupert's request, told off to Captain Lauriston's troop. With drums beating and colours flying, the column from Breda marched into the allied camp at Duckenberg in front of Nimeguen, where the troops crowded out to greet this valuable addition of eight infantry regiments and three of cavalry.

Scarcely were the tents pitched than Rupert heard himself heartily saluted, and looking round, saw his friends Lord Fairholm and Sir John Loveday, who being already in camp had at once sought him out.

"By my faith, Master Holliday, the three months have done wonders for you; you look every inch a soldier," Lord Fairholm said.

"His very moustache is beginning to show," Sir John Loveday said, laughing.

Rupert joined in the laugh, for in truth he had that very morning looked anxiously in a glass, and had tried in vain to persuade himself that the down on his upper lip showed any signs of thickening or growing.

"Well, and how many unfortunate English, Dutch, and Germans have you dispatched since we saw you?"

"Oh, please hush," Rupert said anxiously. "No one knows that I have any idea of fencing, or that I have ever drawn a sword before I went through my course of the broadsword here. I would not on any account that any one thought I was a quarrelsome swordster. You know I really am not, and it has been purely my misfortune that I have been thrust into these things."

"And you have never told any of your comrades that you have killed your man? Or that Dalboy proclaimed you in his salle to be one of the finest blades in Europe?"

"No, indeed," Rupert said. "Why should I, Sir John?"

"Well, all I can say is, Rupert, I admire your modesty as much as your skill. There are few fellows of your age, or of mine either, but would hector a little on the strength of such a reputation. I think that I myself should cock my hat, and point my moustache a little more fiercely, if I knew that I was the cock of the whole walk."

Rupert smiled. "I don't think you would, Sir John, especially if you were as young as I am. I know I have heard my tutor say that the fellow who is really cock of a school, is generally one of the quietest and best-tempered fellows going. Not that I mean," he added hastily, as his companions both laughed, "that I am cock, or that I am a quiet or very good-tempered fellow. I only meant that I was not quarrelsome, and have indeed put up more than once with practical jokings which I might have resented had I not known how skillful with the sword I am, and that in this campaign I shall have plenty of opportunities of showing that I am no coward."

"Well spoken, Rupert," Sir John said. "Now we have kept you talking in the sun an unconscionable time; come over to our tent, and have something to wash the dust away. We have some fairly good Burgundy, of which we bought a barrel the other day from a vintner in Nimeguen, and it must be drunk before we march.

"Are these the officers of your troop? Pray present me."

Rupert introduced his friends to Captain Lauriston and Lieutenant Dillon, and the invitation was extended to them. For the time, however, it was necessary to see to the wants of the men, but later on the three officers went across to the tents of the king's dragoons, to which regiment Lord Fairholm and Sir John Loveday both belonged, and spent a merry evening.

Upon the following day the Earl of Marlborough sent for Rupert and inquired of him how he liked the life, and how he was getting on; and begged of him to come to him at any time should he have need of money, or be in any way so placed as to need his aid. Rupert thanked him warmly, but replied that he lacked nothing.

The following day the march began, and Rupert shared in the general indignation felt by the British officers and men at seeing the splendid opportunities of crushing the enemy–opportunities gained by the skill and science of their general, and by their own rapid and fatiguing marches–thrown away by the feebleness and timidity of the Dutch deputies. When the siege of Venloo began the main body of the army was again condemned to inactivity, and the cavalry had of course nothing to do with the siege.

The place was exceedingly strong, but the garrison was weak, consisting only of six battalions of infantry and 300 horse. Cohorn, the celebrated engineer, directed the siege operations, for which thirty-two battalions of infantry and thirty-six squadrons of horse were told off, the Prince of Nassau Saarbruch being in command.

Two squadrons of the 5th dragoons, including the troop to which Rupert belonged, formed part of the force. The work was by no means popular with the cavalry, as they had little to do, and lost their chance of taking part in any great action that Boufflers might fight with Marlborough to relieve the town. The investment began on the 4th? of September, the efforts of the besiegers being directed against Fort Saint Michael at the opposite side of the river, but connected by a bridge of boats to the town.

On the 17th the breaches were increasing rapidly in size, and it was whispered that the assault would be made on the evening of the 18th, soon after dusk.

"It will be a difficult and bloody business," Captain Lauriston said, as they sat in their tent that evening. "The garrison of Fort Saint Michael is only 800, but reinforcements will of course pour in from the town directly the attack begins, and it may be more than our men can do to win the place. You remember how heavily the Germans suffered in their attack on the covered way of Kaiserwerth."

"I should think the best thing to do would be to break down the bridge of boats before beginning the attack," Lieutenant Dillon remarked.

"Yes, that would be an excellent plan if it could be carried out, but none of our guns command it."

"We might launch a boat with straw or combustibles from above," Rupert said, "and burn it."

"You may be very sure that they have got chains across the river above the bridge, to prevent any attempt of that kind," Captain Lauriston said.

Presently the captain, who was on duty, went out for his rounds, and Rupert, who had been sitting thoughtfully, said, "Look here, Dillon, I am a good swimmer, and it seems to me that it would be easy enough to put two or three petards on a plank–I noticed some wood on the bank above the town yesterday–and to float down to the bridge, to fasten them to two or three of the boats, and so to break the bridge; your cousin in the engineers could manage to get us the petards. What do you say?"

The young Irishman looked at the lad in astonishment.

"Are you talking seriously?" he asked.

"Certainly; why not?"

"They'd laugh in your face if you were to volunteer," Dillon said.

"But I shouldn't volunteer; I should just go and do it."

"Yes, but after it was done, instead of getting praise–that is, if you weren't killed–you'd be simply told you had no right to undertake such an affair."

"But I should never say anything about it," Rupert said. "I should just do it because it would be a good thing to do, and would save the lives of some of our grenadiers, who will, likely enough, lead the assault. Besides, it would be an adventure, like any other."

Dillon looked at him for some time.

"You are a curious fellow, Holliday. I would agree to join you in the matter, but I cannot swim a stroke. Pat Dillon cares as little for his life as any man; and after all, there's no more danger in it than in going out in a duel; and I could do that without thinking twice."

"Well, I shall try it," Rupert said quietly. "Hugh can swim as well as I can, and I'll take him. But can you get me the petards?"

"I dare say I could manage that," Dillon said, entering into the scheme with all an Irishman's love of excitement. "But don't you think I could go too, though I can't swim? I could stick tight to the planks, you know."

"No," Rupert said seriously, "that would not do. We may be detected, and may have to dive, and all sorts of things. No, Dillon, it would not do. But if you can get the petards, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have done your share of the work; and then you might, if you could, ride round in the evening with my uniform and Hugh's in your valise. If you go on to the bank half a mile or so below the town, every one will be watching the assault, and we can get ashore, put on our clothes, and get back home without a soul being the wiser."

"And suppose you are killed?"

"Pooh, I shall not be killed!" Rupert said. "But I shall leave a letter, which you can find in the morning if I do not come back, saying I have undertaken this adventure in hope of benefiting her Majesty's arms; that I do it without asking permission; but that I hope that my going beyond my duty will be forgiven, in consideration that I have died in her Majesty's service."

The next day at two o'clock, Lieutenant Dillon, who had been away for an hour, beckoned to Rupert that he wanted to speak to him apart.

"I have seen my cousin Gerald, but he will not let me have the petards unless he knows for what purpose they are to be used. I said as much as I could without betraying your intentions, but I think he guessed them; for he said, 'Look here, Pat, if there is any fun and adventure on hand, I will make free with her gracious Majesty's petards, on condition that I am in it.' He's up to fun of every kind, Gerald is; and can, I know, swim like a fish. What do you say, shall I tell him?"

"Do, by all means," Rupert said. "I have warned Hugh of what I am going to do, and he would never forgive me if I did not take him; but if your cousin will go, all the better, for he will know far better than I how to fix the petards. You can tell him I shall be glad to act under his orders; and if it succeeds, and he likes to let it be known the part which he has played in the matter–which indeed would seem to be within the scope of his proper duties, he being an engineer–I shall be glad for him to do so, it always being understood that he does not mention my name in any way."

Half-an-hour later Dillon entered, to say that his cousin agreed heartily to take a part in the adventure, and that he would shortly come up to arrange the details with Rupert. Rupert had met Gerald Dillon before, and knew him to be as wild, adventurous, and harum-scarum a young officer as his cousin Pat; and in half-an-hour's talk the whole matter was settled.

Gerald would take two petards, which weighed some twenty pounds each, to his tent, one by one. Hugh should fetch them in a basket, one by one, to the river bank, at the spot where a balk of wood had been washed ashore by some recent floods. At seven in the evening Gerald should call upon his cousin, and on leaving, accompany Rupert to the river bank, where Hugh would be already in waiting. When they had left, Pat Dillon should start on horseback with the three uniforms in his valise, the party hiding the clothes in which they left the camp, under the bank at their place of starting.

# Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.